Genre Trouble and Extreme Cinema

A Dissertation Submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

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This dissertation re-evaluates theories of genre and spectatorship in light of a critic-defined tendency in recent art cinema, coined extreme cinema. It argues that the films of Mexican director Carlos Reygadas and French director Catherine Breillat expand our generic classifications and, through the re-organization of the visual presentation of genre-specific clichés and devices, their films transform sense experience and thought. My approach loosely follows Stanley Cavell's various assertions of film as a medium of thought or, simply, that films think. Reygadas and Breillat allow spectators to reflect on the genre-film experience; I contend that their films make it apparent that genre is not established prior to the viewing of a work but is recollected and assembled by spectators in ways that matter for them. In fostering this experience of collection, these two directors propose a kind of ethics of curatorship: spectators are tasked with collecting and recollecting their film experience to generate particular social, cultural, and political critiques. To further accomplish and foster film as thought, the directors appeal to spectators' sense experiences. I therefore deploy contemporary film theories on the senses, both phenomenological and affect theory, and partake in close readings of the films' forms and narratives. The Introduction outlines my intervention in genre theory, discusses the key theoretical texts, develops the phenomenological framework I employ for the chapters to follow, develops my methodology through a description of Cavell's style, and presents the stakes of my argument. Chapter one considers the place of

experimental narrative cinema in Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012). I argue that through his realist style, this film aims at an experience for spectators "as if" in a dream and through this film experience I posit the critique I find internal to the film. The second chapter turns to Catherine Breillat's *oeuvre* and the confrontation her work poses to conceptions of pornography. I bring her 2001 feature *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur!*) to bear on what I claim to be a new style of pornographic work and its challenge to patriarchy. The final chapter brings together Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla en el cielo*, 2005) and Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* (2002) to accomplish an analysis of sexual performances in otherwise dramatic films.

Key words: extreme cinema, art cinema, phenomenology, genre studies, sensation, affect, pornography studies, film theory, spectatorship.

You are advised to consult yourself as to whether a thing you have taken into your mind, have consented for that time to bear upon your life, gives you pleasure, or perhaps otherwise disturbs you, and if not, to demand of yourself the cause, whether the thing that solicits you is not remarkable or whether you are coarsened in what you can remark, allow to matter to you. Why do we put things together as we do? Why do we put ourselves together with just these things to make a world? What choices have we said farewell to? To put things together differently, so that they quicken the heart, would demand their recollecting.

– Stanley Cavell, "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," 1998

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Table of Contents

Abstract...ii

Acknowledgments...v

List of Figures...viii

Introduction: Genre Trouble and Extreme Cinema...1

Body Genres and Extreme Cinema...8

Film Theory after Maurice Merleau-Ponty...14

Trajectory and Research Questions...27

Chapter 1: Carlos Reygadas, the Avant-Garde, and the Senses...32

The Difficult Film...36

"[A]ll the Levels of Perception"...41

Narrative Shock...42

Cinematography and Levels...54

A Slow Dream, "As If" it were Real...65

Documentary, the Profilmic Event, and CGI...72

Performative Documentary...72

Human Animals, Non-Human Animals...86

Fictional Death: "Come play with us cos Dad has died already"...92

Chapter 2: Catherine Breillat's Horrible Pornography...105

Erotic and/or Pornographic...111

Looking-At Breillat's Films...120

Sexual Numbers……………………………………………………………………….132

Fat Girl, Synopsis and Sexual Numbers……………………………………………134

Pornography "Too Late!"……………………………………………………………..138

Pornography Underage……………………………………………………………...147

Problems with the Pornographic…………………………………………………….151

Horror "On Time!"…………………………………………………………………155

Breillat's Horrible *Fat Girl*……………………………………………………………166

Chapter 3: Onscreen and Off-screen Flesh and Blood: Performance, Pornography, Spectatorship……………………………………………………………………..177

Blow Job (2005)………………………………………………………………………184

Mesquida's Tears……………………………………………………………………...194

The Extradiegetic and Profilmic Event in Breillat's *Brief Crossing*………………….204

The Ethics of Breillat's Method……………………………………………………….207

Affective and Possessive Spectatorship……………………………………………….211

Pornography and Psychoanalytic Film Theory………………………………………..214

The Confrontation with the Real of the Film………………………………………….221

The Remembered Film………………………………………………………………..227

Post-Script……………………………………………………………………………..233

Conclusion: Know Genre, No Trouble……………………………………………….235

A Courageous Supplement…………………………………………………………….242

Filmography……………………………………………………………………………251

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………………...254

Appendix……………………………………………………………………………….272

List of Figures

1.1-1.2	*Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)	45
1.3-1.4	*Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)	58
1.5-1.8	*Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)	75-6
1.9-1.10	*Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)	91
1.11-1.12	*Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)	97
2.1	*Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999)	116
2.2	*Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)	116
2.3	*Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)	125
2.4	*Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999)	125
2.5-2.6	*Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)	137
2.7-2.8	*Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)	158
3.1	*Battle in Heaven* (Carlos Reygadas, 2005)	187
3.2-3.3	*Sex is Comedy* (Catherine Breillat, 2002)	197
C.1	*Abuse of Weakness* (Catherine Breillat, 2013)	248

Introduction: Genre Trouble and Extreme Films

... [M]ost genre critics prefer to deal with films that are clearly and ineluctably tied to the genre in question. No romantic mixed genres, no crossbreeds, no anomalies.
- Rick Altman*, Film/Genre,* 1999

Although disparate in their aesthetics and influences, [*extreme films*] *share an aggressive desire to confront their audiences*, *to render the spectator's experience problematic*.
- Richard Falcon, "Reality is Too Shocking," *Sight and Sound*, 1999

A critic-defined tendency in recent art cinema, initially coined New Extremism by James Quandt ([2004] 2011) and now known generally as extreme cinema by scholars working in the Anglo-Saxon context,[1] offers a set of films to be investigated in light of their formal affects as well as their effects on spectators. Indeed, much of the scholarly and critical attention to this production trend has centered upon particular films' or directors' capacity to shock or effect spectators. Less attention has been given to the number of genres invoked by so-called extreme filmmakers. While the trend is not limited to close readings from the theories and histories of the following genres, with varying degrees of emphasis I will argue that the avant-garde, melodrama, pornography, horror, and documentary play significant roles in the *oeuvres* of two filmmakers. My turn to these genres hinges upon the theory that genre is not inherent to a given film but that certain elements are extracted from the work and recollected by a viewer. This reading of genre is inspired by Rick Altman's critique of genre theorists who attempt to "level *all* spectators" (Altman 1999: 151) and Stanley Cavell's philosophy of collecting. For

[1] Most scholars agree with these terms: it is not a genre, a style, or a movement but a recent production trend for extreme representations of sex and violence as well as transgressions of the formal codes of art cinema. Cf. Quandt 2011; Grønstad 2006: 163; Beugnet 2007: 25; Vincendeau 2007: 205; Horeck and Kendall 2011: 3, 5; Frey 2013: 158-160. William Brown 2013: 26-28, incorrectly in my view, contends that extreme cinema "perhaps constitutes" a genre.

Altman a film may attempt to turn its audiences into “a single homogenous block,” but given the diversity of individual experience and individual knowledge of genre(s), “the ability to choose one’s genre pleasures lies at the very heart of generic operations” (1999: 151). My undertaking in this dissertation, in the personal choices of genres to study and films to engage with, represents a critical effort to both understand and practice a theory of genre that puts the spectator into an active engagement with images, sounds, and his or her past associations with those images and sounds – call it a work that combines philosophical reflection and cinephilia. For Cavell, film is less a completed work than an assemblage of frames that matter for an individual ([1978] 2005: 9). Extreme cinema, as a trend that attempts to confound simple readings or interpretations, functions as the best example to demonstrate my thesis. My aim is therefore not to produce a genealogy or cultural history of the aforementioned genres nor an attempt to contemporize and contextualize those genres with the recent production trend known as extreme cinema – such a project is for the film historian. The chapters in this dissertation demonstrate that the films under investigation re-order the generic categories of sense-perception and verification and work against the logic of transforming a body of spectators into a single homogenous block.

A theory of spectatorship that argues for a process-oriented model, i.e., spectatorship as recollection and assemblage, does not simultaneously suggest that a film lacks a style and mode of address. The modes of address in the five genres above can be generally proposed as follows: Stan Brakhage argued for “pure perception” in the cinema, thus experimental filmmakers’ longstanding fascination with both pleasurable and unpleasurable visuals, consistently devoid of narrative pleasure; melodrama, as theory describes, often brings a familial narrative to a bittersweet resolution filled with

spectators' tears; pornography's address is often to arouse viewers sexually, sometimes apart from either a narrative or intellectual pleasure; horror films aim to elicit fear in their audiences, causing jumps in seats, screams, and nausea; and documentary, contentiously, can provide a shock in the form of truth – the shock of a scene or story is in the veracity of its representation(s) or truth claims.[2] Extreme cinema deploys these generic tropes or addresses to an ideal spectator.[3] A filmmaker may aim to elicit disgust, unease, tension, anxiety, and shock while also aiming at perceptual pleasure by certain so-called experimental tactics; certain films also solicit sexual pleasure via pornographic tropes. Martine Beugnet therefore claims (2007: 9) that this "hybrid cinema" is "the most exciting forms of filmmaking… currently offered," although, the notion of hybrid refers to hybrid genres.

The aim of my research is to navigate this so-called hybrid terrain in a manner that does not claim extreme cinema to be at the avant-garde of narrative filmmaking or as a mix of genres. Beugnet's claim about extreme cinema has affinities with postmodern notions: "pastiche" and "schizophrenia," hyperrealism, attacks on modernity (Storey

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[2] Viewing documentary in this way is only one of many definitions and practices. Indeed, the ties between experimental film and documentary film are frequently noted by theorists from the 1930s up to the present. Cf. Dulac [1932] 2011: 656; Grierson [1935] 2011: 662; Minh-ha [1990] 2011; Marks 2000: 10, 177. I will tease out the connections between these two genres in Chapters 1 and 3.

[3] Cf. Elsaesser and Hagener 2010: 4-5: "Each type of cinema (as well as every film theory) imagines an ideal spectator [even those that do away with body-subjects, such as Eugenie Brinkema's recent volume, 2014], which means it postulates a certain relation between the (body of the) spectator and the (properties of the) image on the screen, however much at first sight the highlighted terms are 'understanding' and 'making sense', 'interpretation' and 'comprehension'…. Films furthermore presuppose a cinematic space that is both physical and discursive, one where film and spectator, cinema and body encounter one another…. Likewise, bodies, settings, and objects within the film communicate with each other (and with the spectator) through size, texture, shape, density and surface appeal, as much as they play on scale, distance, proximity, color or other primary optical markers. But there are additional ways the body engages with the film event, besides the senses of vision, tactility and sound: philosophical issues of perception and temporality, of agency and consciousness are also central to the cinema, as they are to the spectator."

Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's (2010: 5) claim that the film is much more than diegesis and form, such as "extra-diegetic material" and the fact that spectators inhabit two (or more) worlds simultaneously – the diegesis and his or her own physical space – is additionally relevant to the study I undertake in the third chapter.

2006: 129ff; Altman 1999: 156-157). Indeed, if extreme cinema offers nothing but a postmodern genre mixing, there is no argument to be made about the novelty of this production trend since the Hollywood genres, according to Altman, have always been mixed together in both advertising and in their semantic and syntactic components so as to appeal to as many spectators as possible (1999: 128-143). I therefore maintain my distance from categorically labelling extreme cinema as a genre or composed of evident, unchanging, and verifiable ones. Instead, without dismissing the genre critic who notes common formal traits and themes alongside spectators' recognition of those traits and themes to thereby compose an understanding or theory or history of (a) genre, I treat genre theory as a theoretical tool to undermine its own methodologies, formulations, and conclusions. In other words, the films discussed in the three chapters of this dissertation are not borrowing formal and narrative elements of identifiable genres; they are reorienting and restructuring the notion of genre(s) and spectatorship, and as I will introduce below, spectators' sensuous experiences of films. Transforming sense experience, following the general theory and methodology of many affect theorists, thereby transforms social, cultural, ethical, and political engagements (Leys 2011). Or, to put this last point in Cavellian terms, Robert Sinnerbrink writes (2014: 61), "It is not that all cinematic images have a profound ontological import. It is rather how particular instances invite the philosophically-inclined viewer to find words adequate to the singular experience they afford; experiences that can have, once 'perspicuously presented' and articulated in thought, a more general philosophical significance."

Genre has been a contentious object of study and there has been no critical consensus on how to study it. Rather than identifying one dominant genre in a given film according to a pre-established generic category, e.g., as William Brown does in labelling

extreme cinema as an offshoot of horror (2013: 26-28), I will argue that the extreme films I have chosen to discuss demonstrate an epistemological instability in five film genres. Thus I do not address the question of what the tendency for new fictional films of dramatized sex and violence categorically or generically *is* as such, in terms of a definitive genre, style, and its history or antecedents. Cavell (1981: 29), in his own attempt to found a genre, notes that it is not what the films share in common that forms its generic home, "but *what they are* in view of one another." I follow his lead. Through theoretical analyses of two directors and a number of their films, and through a careful consideration of these directors' straying from and proximity to one or more of the aforementioned genres, as established by the genre scholarship, I locate each filmmaker's attempt to elicit sensuous responses in their spectators.

Extreme cinema is a challenge on all fronts: the difficult to stomach content, the play with formal and aesthetic codes, and the refusal of many filmmakers to craft films within a pre-established generic category or categories. What this challenge reveals, furthermore, is that the scenes and sequences of films are collected or assembled by spectators in ways that make/have sense to/for them. Altman names this experience the "generic crossroads" of a film; however, while Altman's crossroads is defined as a fork directing spectators to either submit to the generic pleasures or return to cultural norms (e.g., in a gangster film a spectator must take pleasure in illegal and possibly murderous fictional events or oppose generic pleasure to return to a culture in which the rules are mostly followed), my claim is in the films investigated here offer a crossroads between possible competing generic experiences of perceptual, narrative, and formal natures. My collection and recollection of the films thus begins from my bodily and theoretical responses to these works and to my associations and readings of genre. This Cavellian

approach requires that the scholar or critic trust his or her experiences of the film and, by reflecting on those experiences, the film itself should teach the author how to read it. Cavell's method thus "avoid[s] the sort of criticism that attempts to see a film as exemplifying some theory or ideology that the film itself knows nothing about" (Macarthur 2014: 96, quoting Cavell, typo corrected; Sinnerbrink 2014: 60). My approach certainly resists the discourse of the expert; although I make specific claims and argue with sophisticated language and theory, similar to Cavell, my project is one of "a questioning rather than asserting,… a reflecting rather than a concluding" (Sinnerbrink 2014: 58). This will become clearer as I assemble together two vastly different directors who aesthetically, geographically, and politically have nothing to say to each other. I bring them together under the banner of extreme cinema for the sake of my arguments about their *oeuvres* to be sure, but also to argue my larger claims about the porous nature of genre.

My interest in extreme cinema begins with a line of inquiry opened by Linda Williams, and as I introduce below, in extreme cinema's confounding of Williams's theory of genres and sensation. Before my own work on an individual director begins, I must address why her short essay on genre and spectatorship and her more recent work on sex and sensation in the cinema cannot be adequately applied to this recent cinematic trend. I will introduce contemporary extreme cinema in more detail as well. In the section that follows my preliminary exegesis on Williams, I turn to recent developments in phenomenological film theory, the lens I adopt for this study. Of the possible theoretical frameworks in which to approach extreme cinema and genre, the recent turn to phenomenology is the most suited to my project. Alongside my argument of the fluidity of genre, my contention is that this production trend can reorder the categories of sense-

experience (when spectators are confronted with a supposedly generic film) and, according to the aims of the director and the spectators' willingness to approach or adopt the filmmaker's visual critiques of society, culture, and/or politics, make a minor change in the real world. Thus diverse theories in phenomenology, with their respective focuses upon the body, will be useful in the following chapters. When I come into contact with other theories, whether formalist or psychoanalytic, I do so to further my thesis, i.e., the links between sensation and genre in extreme cinema.

Theorists such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks, and Jennifer M. Barker are each informed by the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His position that embodiment is the seat of experience is adopted by these three theorists to consider both aesthetics and spectatorship. Yet this turn to embodiment in film studies is not solely within the scholarship. I hope to show that the phenomenological turn in film theory occurs at a time when filmmaking itself has also turned to "sensory mode[s] of address" (de Luca 2014: 1). In keeping with the phenomenological framework and "sensory mode of address" in contemporary cinemas, I deploy phenomenological descriptions when speaking to and about the films themselves. As the formal qualities of films can reach out to touch viewers viscerally, as much of the scholarship describes, my style of writing aspires to achieve the same. Again, I follow a Cavellian formula here. "Cavell points to the philosophical writing that attempts to steer a course between formal argumentation and sheer poeticism, achieving philosophical conviction by the reflective character of the prose itself… [W]e might call this an argument through perspicuous and evocative redescription or a matter of 'argument through imagery'" (Sinnerbrink 2014: 58). I accomplish this form of argumentation with a writing that gives close attention to detail, original interpretations of narrative, and works with the films to deliver descriptions in

tune with a film's slowness, urgency, or spontaneity. Catherine Wheatley suggests (2011: 178) there is not yet a "coherent approach" to researching and writing on extreme cinema; I bring one torch to brighten this darkness.

Body Genres and Extreme Cinema

> *Despite the value of these various turns to cinematic form, they remain invested in a functional and instrumental notion of it: as outwardly affective, spectatorially bound, and productive to analyze only insofar as it leads us to insight how texts affect, move, displace, jerk, tear at, mimetically instruct or unnervingly unsettle bodies or subjects. Thus, even when form and affect have been considered together, the marked stubbornness of the theoretical interest in how form affects spectators ultimately has made the study of* affects *in the history of film theory into little more than the study of* effects.
>
> - Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 2014

In the 1991 essay, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Williams identifies the content and bodily response to three of the so-called low genres of cinema: melodrama, horror, and pornography. Each in their own way produces bodily sensations of varying degrees and intensities in the spectator (Williams [1991] 2009: 613). With the melodrama, characters are always "too late!" and miss an opportunity for love or happiness, thereby effecting sadness or tears in predominantly (passive) female viewers. The colloquial terms for these films included "weepies" and "soft-core emotional porn for women" (Williams 2009: 603, quoting Douglas).[4] In the experience of horror film, often viewed by teenage boys and young men, characters appear "too early!" in a narrative or scene, i.e., situated in the wrong place at the wrong time to thereby encounter and face off with a murderer/serial killer. The ensuing shock, surprise and violence of the horror film causes shuddering, disgust, fear, anxiety and the like. Finally in pornography, the time of fantasy is always perfect; characters operate in a 'pornotopia' where every time is

[4] The history of the melodrama and woman's film is much more complicated than Williams's hypothesis suggests. For an overview of this history and critics' invention of the woman's film, see Altman 1999: 70-77.

bedtime. At this period in 1991 Williams posits an active male spectator who is aroused by and capable of producing his own pleasures and orgasms during the screening of a (heterosexual feature-length) pornographic film. To bring us to the third term in her essay's title, what is excessive is an addition to the film itself – a corresponding and sometimes implacable sensation. According to Williams, sensation and the low genres go hand-in-hand.

The sensations that result from an extreme film may resemble those identified by Williams in "Film Bodies," but claims to epistemology and sensation are much more complicated than Williams's and others' genre and spectatorship studies of popular or art-house films.[5] The distinction between the pornography of Gerard Damiano and the transgressive art of Bernardo Bertolucci, for example, is maintained in the reviews of the films cited by Williams in *Screening Sex* (2008). Critics appeared equally enthusiastic and equally sure of the perverse arousal of *Deep Throat* (1972) and the formal beauty of *Last Tango in Paris* (1971) (Williams 2008: 119-124). Critics' sensual experience of *Deep Throat* and *Last Tango* are equally intense – one gimmicky yet providing maximum visibility and the other comparing the little death to the finale of real death (Williams 1999: 48-49) – yet occur in different levels of the body. A critic of pornography could rate the former feature based on a "Peter-Meter," the extent to which images and sound produce an erection; a critic of art cinema could make claims to a dark and poetic eroticism (Williams 2008: 123, 346n28). Or in more theoretical terms, Barker's (2009) phenomenological account of spectatorship may locate the sensation of *Last Tango* in the viscera, the dark eroticism of the film reaching down and gripping a spectator's core, and

[5] In *Screening Sex*, Williams begins to think through extreme cinema and sensation – she refers to it as "hard-core art," a nod to her field of interest, porn studies. Her chapter is "an initial typography of hard-core art film chosen from a range of possibility" (2008: 261).

Deep Throat might produce tingles of varying degrees on one's skin, therefore resonating with Williams's suggestion that the two films "exist on a continuum of representations, any of which can be sexually stimulating" (2008: 142).[6] The arousing features operate in their separate spheres and theatrical spaces and evoke sensations of quite different types, but never do the films, at least for Williams, at their opposite poles on the continuum, convey any epistemological or affective doubt upon their verification as a graphically explicit product of a particular type (porn or art cinema).

The directors associated with extreme cinema, by contrast, intentionally and unintentionally challenge the relative stability of (critics' assessment of) film genres. This output of festival-circuit fictional films, roughly from 1997 to the present, had been dubbed New Extremism due to its sexual and violent content. The "New" is the more graphic depictions compared to its transgressive cinema predecessors such as Bertolucci, Nagisa Oshima, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and many others. It is also likely that New Extremism emerged from the ashes of 1980s Hollywood's phase of extreme violence against women. At present, similar to the life cycles of various New Waves of cinema, extremism is now a staple at festivals and theaters alike, thus the "New" has been shed. The films under consideration in this dissertation do not consciously label themselves as extreme, nor as part of a specific genre; however, filmmakers identified as extreme neither deny generic influences, nor the accompanying sensations produced by those genres. This leads, of course, to numerous troubles when playing the game of film critic or theorist. Although I do not consider Judith Butler's

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[6] Following Leo Bersani, Williams, 2008: 132-133, provides a distinction between the satisfying *scratch* of *Deep Throat* – "which emphasizes the telos of end pleasure" – and that of the *itch* in *Last Tango*, "which intensifies and increases sexual tension up to the limit case of… self-shattering and death." The binary restates the obvious and general: porn is for masturbation and art cinema for the philosopher or cinephile. I find such a conclusion inapplicable to extreme cinema, the latter cinema having a much richer and complex relationship with representation, sensation, and claims to knowledge/genre categorization.

gender theory in this dissertation, perhaps her notion of gender performativity is analogous to the practices of extreme filmmakers in my study. Butler's contends ([1989] 1999: 43-44) that gender is the "repeated stylizations of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." Similarly, if gender is seen as "natural" when it is rather "naturalized" and "created through sustained social performances" (Butler 1999: 143, 180), some genre critics have also deployed arguments as to genre's ahistoricity without considered its creation through repeated forms and narratives unique to the medium (Altman 1999: 49ff, 77-78). In Butler's study of gender, drag performance demonstrate the constructed quality of gender. Drag performers imitate gender and "implicitly reveal… the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" – and thereby debunk myths of originary genders (Butler 1999: 175-176). According to my reading, extreme filmmakers demonstrate the same for genre.

In this dissertation I have chosen two directors whose style and output offers a cross-section of extreme cinema. The directors are from different nations and come from different filmmaking backgrounds. Carlos Reygadas, from Mexico, operates according to an aesthetics of realism, the avant-garde, and documentary. Catherine Breillat, from France, crafts melodramatic features that contain scenes bordering on pornography and horror; her cinema is largely indebted to the erotic literary tradition in her country.[7] While each director can be situated within the mode or institution of art cinema (Bordwell [1975/2007] 2011), screening their films at the same festivals and receiving some of the same awards, the filmmakers vary in their generic means to elicit spectatorial interest and sensorial engagement. The "queer connection" between the critic-defined label extreme

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[7] Texts on Breillat and literary sources

cinema and my two filmmakers (for it is not enough to point at an object and repeat its name to give it a "real name" [Wittgenstein (1953) 1958: 19-20]) is in their repeated invocations of the commonly held definitions of experimental film, pornography, horror, melodrama, and documentary, and the appropriation of these genres in an effort to aim for the bodies of their spectators. As I progress through the chapters, I will show how this differs from a postmodern conception of pastiche or genre mixing. Provided my claim that the directors have an aim, so as to not fall victim to an intentional fallacy I must state that whether Reygadas and Breillat intentionally want to move spectators bodily is of lesser concern than what I believe their work accomplishes, although, my occasional use of interviews with the filmmakers furthers the arguments I make about their films.

My study will assess each director's use, abuse, subversion, and appropriation of established codes of film genres to challenge expectation, as the epigraph by Richard Falcon suggests. Falcon is echoed by Mattias Frey when he writes (2014: 148), "Specifically, extreme cinema depends on two hermeneutic transformations: (1) the creator's intention and/or pretension to be producing something more sophisticated than simple horror [and other sensational genres]; and (2) the consumer's belief and/or desire to have the capability of rarefied taste to appreciate larger, deeper meanings beyond the obvious horror [and other sensational genres]." In a broader sense, I would suggest that the films discussed in the following chapters find a home in the pornographic. The term pornographic is employed here in a way similar to Siegfried Kracauer's definition ([1960] 2009: 270), i.e., not just as an indicator of onscreen nudity and sexuality but any cinematic subject which "overwhelms consciousness," be it "Elemental catastrophes, the

atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death…."[8] Reygadas's and Breillat's films overwhelm consciousness and engage the body of the spectator through treatments of, and experiments with, film genres. Further, we will see that regardless of the genre invoked by the directors, these filmmakers forego typical distinctions between fiction and reality.

I have suggested that the extreme film spectator does not quite know what she sees. The epistemological confusion of genres and of fiction and reality counters the habitual sensuous responses of Williams's low genres – in most instances the effect desired by the filmmaker (if he or she has one), in terms of cause within the diegesis or particular images and sounds, and the effect produced in the spectator's body, is not so simply definable and locatable. To address the aesthetics of extreme cinema and to be precise and clear about directors' desired affects is a difficult project to undertake and, according to some readings would be either an intentional or "affective fallacy" (Brinkema 2014: 26-46), although I am perhaps less concerned about this fallacy than I am with fully accounting for the film experience.[9] Thus to claim that the directors do nothing would result in a formal exercise within the larger body of work known as film criticism. According to critical and scholarly writings, Reygadas and Breillat craft

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[8] Helen Hester (2014) has published a book-length study about the contemporary shift from pornography as a genre to the use of the term pornographic in discourse. Among other topics, she studies "warporn," "misery porn," and the use of pornographic as a synonym for disgusting. Unlike Hester, I find critical value in thinking of pornography as a genre.

[9] Daniel Yacavone (2015: 14-15) contends that knowledge of the filmmaker, both as the person responsible for a given film as well as the artistic intention behind the film, is part of the experience of attending to it. Further considerations suggest, for Yacavone, that author intention is but one of many experiential and interpretative engagements a spectator has with a work. He writes, "In the appropriate application of… relevant (prior) knowledge, as opposed to its mental bracketing or willed ignorance [such as a suspension of disbelief], viewers may literally experience *more* of the singular, irreducible, presented [film] world… and not (necessarily) less. Such relatively more knowledge informed perception often leads to quite literally *seeing* and *hearing* something more, or different, on the screen than one otherwise might, not to mention to often *feel* more deeply in relation to it." I adopt a similar approach to Yacavone's broad account of spectatorship, particularly in the third chapter.

cinemas of displeasure in an effort to offer some kind of critique of social or cultural relations: of class, race, and gender in Mexico, and the lingering resonance of patriarchy in France, but perhaps the West in general. However, these social and political aims are often misfires as spectators perhaps do not make the connection between the film's reconsiderations of genre and their own desire to have that expectation fulfilled, i.e., what Altman called the generic crossroads. Indeed, a criticism that could be leveled against the production trend is the extent to which these misfires promote violence or refuse to return to cultural norms whereby immoral or illegal behaviour is punished (Altman 1999: 145ff).

Extreme cinema is therefore dangerous across a number of different registers. I contend that this cinema is the most deeply problematic one of the 21st century. The range of interpretations and sensations is expansive, thus when I place the spectator as the subject of my theory or argument, as in any film theory, I am always speaking of the relationship between the spectator and the film(s). First and foremost, as mentioned above, I follow Cavell's "theoretical" and "practical advice" (1981: 10): "I should like to stress that the way to overcome theory correctly, philosophically, is to let the object of the work of your interest teach you how to consider it."

Film Theory after Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Now that we have understood how sensation and genre has been studied by Williams, we can turn to the theory that undergirds the analyses of the following chapters. It will helpful to have a basic understanding of Merleau-Ponty's existential-phenomenology before turning to the contemporary incarnation of phenomenological film theory proper. The central tenet of his writings was to describe the fundamental way humans encounter

the world, i.e., through bodily perception (but not limited to sight). My task in this section is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's claim in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) that perceptual experience is anonymous, taking place *in me* (bodily), rather than in a personal *I* (ego or consciousness as the receptor of sense-data) that perceives the world. The paradox is how my perception can be anonymous, and further, what he calls "pre-personal." To answer this puzzle I will elucidate Merleau-Ponty's writings on the lived body and its relation to perception, as well as his views on sense experience. This brief account of embodiment will then lead us to its applicability to theorizing cinema and its effects on perception.

The lived body is the way in which we inhabit the world – it is the structure of sensuous existence. Gary Brent Madison observes that the body is *present* in the world and we are *aware* of it, a consciousness of one's self, as a body, taking up the demands of the world (1981: 23). This awareness of having sensations makes it possible to discuss the body's pre-cognitive capacities. For Merleau-Ponty, we experience the world through our bodily sensations, and those sensations constitute the world as a thing which exists ([1945] 2004: 93). We know this world through habitual nature, a continuity of experience through a storing or stock-taking of prior encounters with things and persons. According to Merleau-Ponty, I do not wake up each morning and need to readjust my motility to my surroundings, for my body is ready to respond to the imperatives of physical comportment that the world demands. On the other hand, to usher in the new, heretofore unique motor and perceptual imperatives are assimilated into the habit body.

A famous example would be the experiment by clinical psychologist G.M. Stratton. Stratton rigged eyeglasses to reverse the up-down axes of natural perception; everything that was down was up, and vice versa. This upside-down perception was a

hindrance at first, but after a week of experimentation, Stratton was able to normally interact with the world (Lingis 1996: 31-32). This example suggests that the habitualized body "guarantees" or assures the body can act spontaneously; the habit body allows for a consistency and continuity of the world through time, whether perception is normalized or disrupted then normalized in Stratton's experiment (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 93-94). John Russon provides the further example (2003: 29-30) of habituating oneself to walking erect which then allows for more sophisticated behaviours to be enacted, such as running or dancing. There are thus two layers of the lived body: a habit body and a body in the moment.

For Merleau-Ponty, acts do not start with the *cogito* as intentionality, as Edmund Husserl suggests, but are rooted in bodily experience. In shifting focus from *cogito* to lived body, consciousness turns from "I think" to "I can," i.e., the body is a subject-object, "a being of possibility, a being open to the emergence of determinateness from an horizon of indeterminacy" (Russon 2003: 31). *I can* deliberately encounter and engage with things and persons or *I can* react to their coming to greet me. Consciousness retains its status as a mediator between self and world but does not function as the initiator. Rather, the body is a directedness towards something: limbs are put into motion for intentional acts, towards some purpose or goal, or as Alphonso Lingis deems it, to address the bodily imperatives placed on us by the world (1996). Russon similarly observes (2003: 16), "I experience interpretively changed environments, things, and places that carry within them a directive force…. [W]hat I experience are environments that already have meanings embedded in them, and the kinds of meanings they have are essentially directional, that is, they direct my actions toward some end." We therefore do not just inhabit space and time, but operate in expressive space, in an open realm for possibilities

of action as well as responses to the demands of the world. This space is not geometrical but a situation, or what Merleau-Ponty calls a horizon, for us to express and perceive. Actions are given meaning and significance through behaviors which stem from the habitual power for spontaneous perception and the capacity for perceptual expression (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 123-124). Following the phenomenologist, Lingis writes (1996: 38, citing Merleau-Ponty) that "Vision is… an inspired exegesis."

An individual history comes along with the habitualized body. The moment of sensation is a reconstitution of a personal history, part of what has been left behind by prior constitutions. This reconstitution or recreation happens at every moment. Perception, in its constantly renewing and reconstituting character, offers itself as pre-personal to us in the dual sense of pre-cognitive and coming before an existing personality (ego or consciousness) (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 128).

The anonymity of perception and its pre-personal quality become clear in Merleau-Ponty's example of the perception of a lamp (2004: 81). Part of habitual life is in grasping the identities of objects in terms of their respective aspects. "[T]o look at an object is to inhabit it," and inhabiting an object, in perceiving it, one is also opened up to the various angles in which to see that object through the perspective of other objects. The wall, the chimney, the tables and chairs "see" the faces of the lamp that a person cannot. "Thus every object is the mirror of all others," the phenomenologist writes. An individual's gaze, however, is always directed toward one face of the object, and at that same time this gaze opens perception for all other possible vantage points. In my gaze I presume a synthesis of the object when, in fact, it is incomplete (in the sense that I see only one side). I perceive anonymously in this respect, for my perception is "incapable of bringing any precise testimony." An object in its incompleteness "slips away" then is

rekindled, in part, by the "infinite number of different perspectives compressed into a strict co-existence" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 82).[10] Such a process is beyond our immanent experience – Merleau-Ponty names this an *ek-stase* of experience (2004: 83). *Ek-stase* is described as "Active transcendence of the subject in relation to the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 84n1). The body is the medium for these experiences of objects in the world; sensation and perception synthesize the horizon of objects.

The lived body primordially senses against a background or setting. This background is not made of perceived unrelated parts; rather, movement and perception is in relatedness to the whole setting, a gestalt (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 122). Even the outlying and strange bodily experiences, such as "dreams, hallucinations, erotic and psychedelic phantasms," operate in the same "practicable field of perception" (Lingis 1996: 112). When one sees the endless expanse of blue sky, for example, parts of a sky are not see; instead, one is "saturated by a limitless blue" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 129). In answering the call of things and persons in the world, we are therefore not collecting sense-data, sets of empirical facts (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1964: 48-49; Lingis 1996: 114 and elsewhere). Perception transpires against a background of bodily and perceptual givens, thus indicating not a personal identity but an opening for general and anonymous sensation (Madison 1981: 26).

From where does a meaningful encounter occur? The body is "a hollow, a fold, which has been made and which can be unmade" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 129-130), thus opening a "'dialogue' between consciousness and thing, subject and object" (Madison 1981: 28). It is one's gaze or movement of the hand that subtends a color or form, or the

[10] Lingis 1996: 60: "To see a real thing is to sense how to position our forces before it; to see something is to know how to approach it and explore it."

gaze and the color or the hand and the form pair off together.[11] Significance and meaning (of objects, of the world) is not one element imposing itself on the other – the gaze and color, hand and form – but the gaze and its perceived color, or the hand embracing the tactility of a surface, mutually uncover a meaning. The experience of the body in and through perception is a meaningful encounter with the body itself, in that we recognize its capacity for reception (e.g., color) and expression (e.g., vibrant sensation of color on the retinas), and this reversibility is accomplished in a harmonious fashion by the uniting character of the intentional arc (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 129; Lingis 1996: 59). Merleau-Ponty defines the intentional arc as a projection of past and future in terms of our perceptual horizons as well as our ideological and moral situations. The intentional arc is the pre-personal and pre-reflexive unity of the senses, "of intelligence, of sensibility, and motility" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 119-120), the capacity to act in the world.

Perception, then, creates a situation within which sense-experience is anonymous and general – a perceptual field is opened for our gaze, a field we are always already enmeshed. Horizons of possible sensations are laid bare for us as perceptual experience, horizons which we can subtend our gaze. Sensation is therefore a depersonalization (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 127, 130). There is no *I* (ego) in our gaze; we "plunge" into the objects within the perceived horizon and these things think (perceive) themselves in us (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 129). Here Merleau-Ponty writes of "generality" – the origin of the perception is "anterior to myself," and that which is perceived preceded me and will

[11] Lingis 1996: 28-29: "Painters know that colors are not given as opaque points or patches inherently held in their contours; they have an experimental knowledge of what a touch of color does – it bulges out or hollows out a space, thins it or makes it dense, intensifies or fades a constellation of other colors, stabilizes or sends movement across planes and distances. A color is not an instantaneous impact in a dimension of empty time already extended; it presents a present, swells out or contracts a pulse of time, makes it diaphanous or dense; it emerges out of an atmosphere or separates progressively from another color, sends forth a wave which brings other colors into relief and solicits their approach, lays open a field of possibility, and thus materializes a wave of duration."

outlive me, "just as my birth and death belong to a natality and mortality which are anonymous" (2004: 130). The ideas of birth and death are entirely pre-personal; one can know that persons are born and eventually die, but a sense-experience of these concepts is not quite possible.[12] Each sensation is thus its own birth and death. One senses the moment, which is paradoxically made possible only because of the past and the projection of sensation into the future. This is the anonymity of sense-experience.

Perception is a response to a situation, sensitivity to the moment. Barker, whom owes a debt to Merleau-Ponty for her phenomenological film theory, defines the pre-personal nature of perception as follows (2009: 18): it "takes place in the world of phenomena; we are immersed in it as we are immersed in materiality. It does not require a will and desire on our part as subjects to put it into play." We can contrast this primordial or immediate experience with what we might call a personal act. An individual does not plunge into the blue sky in the same way one understands a book or devotes oneself to mathematics. These "personal acts" create a situation from a decision, but perception, fundamentally, is the pre-personal expression of the body in a given situation (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 130). Pre-personal bodily expression is a perceptual *a priori*.

For a philosopher with such an investment in perception and the arts, especially painting, Merleau-Ponty wrote comparatively little about film. In his only extended account of film, "The Film and the New Psychology" (1945), film is contrasted with a "normal vision," a vision in which the figures stand out from the ground so that we may direct ourselves toward them (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 49). A figure or "sector" discloses itself in a landscape, momentarily concealing all others from our gaze (Merleau-Ponty

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[12] See André Bazin's implicit agreement with these claims in his imperative to not bring sex and death to the filmic medium in "Death Every Afternoon" ([1958] 2003) and "Marginal Notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*" ([1957] 2005b).

2004: 80). Perception operates along this horizon. Film, on the other hand, "has no horizons:" "When… the camera is trained on an object and moves nearer to it to give a close-up view, we can *remember* that we are being shown the ash tray or an actor's hand, we do not actually identify it" (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 80). Thus we see that a film, given Merleau-Ponty's argument for embodiment above, is not a collection of sense-data and its sum total, "but a temporal gestalt" (1964: 54). Without the clear figure-ground separation, memory is called upon to revive the prior shots in order to perceptually comprehend the new.

Merleau-Ponty therefore stresses the importance of rhythm in film, which links him closely to montage theorists, while also suggesting that cinematic specificity is in cinematography and the ordering of shots. At the expense of story and plot, a well-written script, an auteur's style and the performance of a star, a properly "cinematographic rhythm" considers "the selection of episodes…, the choice of shots…, the length of time allotted to these elements, the order in which they are presented, the sound or words with which they are or are not to be accompanied" (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2005: 73; cf. 1964: 54-56). The play between shots generates a certain kind of fluidity for perception; a slight alteration of shots or edits could change the meaning of a scene or film as a whole. A comparison can be made between film and music – a change in the notes or interrelationships between them would "modify the entire make-up of the melody" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 49). Cinema is therefore entirely for perception, not an amalgamation of facts, ideas, or thoughts (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 58, 2005: 74).[13] Nowhere

[13] A more precise account of this kind of theory was developed by Bazin. Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes (1964: 57-58) cinema's "basic realism," its capacity for deciphering the world, which means, for the philosopher, a capacity to evoke a humanism. Bazin follows this sort of cinematic specificity. For an

is this clearer than in Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), the film discussed in this dissertation's first chapter. And in the later chapters we will see that Breillat, in her respective considerations of cinematic perception – of real bodies, sexualized or allowed a freedom of performance onscreen – begins with pure perception and transform that perception into critical thinking.

Despite his affinity for realist aesthetics which touch upon humanist issues, the play of movement onscreen for perceptual pleasure seemed to resonate deeply with Merleau-Ponty (1964: 57-58). In his only essay on film, prior to his attempt to posit some kind of cinematic specificity with realist aesthetics, the aspect in film that is of most interest is its potentials for perceptual experimentation. Similar to the artist and experimental filmmaker Fernand Léger who came before Merleau-Ponty and film theorist Tom Gunning who followed, we could suggest that for the phenomenologist, the unique possibility of cinema was simple: its ability to harness the power of "*making images seen*" (Gunning [1989] 2011: 70, 71, quoting Léger). Since the images in cinema are moving, we must conclude that it is capturing and projecting images of movement that largely affects Léger. Thus cinema as a perceptual experience allows filmmakers, theorists, and spectators to play with the varying expressions – visual, aural, and tactile – of moving-images.

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of a moving train (which has an affinity with the early Lumière pictures – whether trains arriving or landscapes shot from trains) and the perceiver's relation to that movement should serve as an example of what I have called cinema's potential for perceptual play. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty's following

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extended account of Bazin's realism and its link to phenomenology (without direct reference to Merleau-Ponty), see Keathley 2005: 54-81.

statement was clearly influential on the ideas of contemporary film theorists. The frame of a window and the two modes of viewing the contents of the frame – in movement or stationary – suggest the cinematic experience.

> Even the perception of movement, which at first seems to depend directly on the point of reference chosen by the intellect is in turn only one element in the global organization of the field. For, although it is true that, when either my train or the one next to it starts, first one, then the other may appear to be moving, one should note that the illusion is not arbitrary and that I cannot willfully induce it by the completely intellectual choice of a point of reference. If I am playing cards in my compartment, the other train will start moving; if, on the other hand, I am looking for someone in the adjacent train, then mine will begin to roll. In each instance the one which seems stationary is the one we have chosen as our abode and which, for the time being, is our environment. Movement and rest distribute themselves in our surroundings not according to the hypotheses which our intelligence is pleased to construct but according to the way we settle ourselves in the world and the position our bodies assume in it. (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 51-52)[14]

This is the power cinema can harness. The camera itself can track, zoom, pan, and the like, and in doing so, will shortly thereafter project the movement of whatever was captured. It is not our cognitive abilities that grant these perceptual pleasures, but our body, anchored as it is to the seat in a cinema. Merleau-Ponty would say we instantly recognize the projection as part of our field and in turn express our perceptual capacities in the reception of the projection. On the one hand, the movements and colors may dazzle our eyes, and on the other, more recent narrative films may nauseate audiences with a shaky camera, sometimes known as queasy-cam. Merleau-Ponty sets the foundation for thinking about the embodied spectator at the cinema but his phenomenology is insufficient by itself to fully discuss the film experience. A dogmatically Merleau-Pontian film theory could not venture much farther than I have here.

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[14] Lingis 1996: 34: "The particular movements we make toward things that move or stabilize are made possible by the movement our sensory-motor powers make to maintain themselves on the levels that extend and maintain a field. If, seated in the compartment of a train waiting for the departure, we get absorbed in what someone is doing over the in the adjacent train, then when one of the trains starts to pull out, it will be ours we experience as pulling us away from the scene or person we are holding on to with multiples interests. But if, when we entered our compartment, we settled into our seat, are now arranging our papers or starting a conversation with our fellow-passengers, then it is the adjacent train we see backing out across the side window. Later, engrossed in our reading or in conversation, it is the trees that lean over and file across the window of the train and not the car that pitches as the train mounts the hills."

How do contemporary film theorists work with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, and more importantly, fill in the gaps and extend his work? Perhaps the most significant concepts developed thus far are by Sobchack. In "The Active Eye: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Vision" (1990), Sobchack initially conceptualizes the spectator's encounter with cinema as a "viewing view." While at the cinema, what is viewed by a spectator is the camera in the act of its viewing, and we see the importance of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy for her to describe and assess the film experience. The kind of reversible exchange between the spectator's perception and their expression is likewise appropriate in accounting for the camera's viewing. Sobchack summarizes this relation (1990: 25):

> [Merleau-Ponty argues that] [w]e can *see* the visible and objective body of another who is *looking* at the world or ourselves, and *understand* that objective body is also a body-subject – whose sight is as intentional and meaningful as my own. What is so unique about the cinema's 'viewing view,' however, is that it presents and represents the activity of vision not merely as it is *objectively seen* by us, but also as it is *introceptively lived* by another. Thus, the cinema's 'viewing view' is a model of vision as it is lived as 'my own' by a body-subject, and its uniqueness is that this 'viewing view' is objectively visible for us in the *same form* as it is subjectively visual for itself.

The way to understand cinema, then, is similar to the manner in which human perception operates. When an object calls to us, demands our attention, we alter our heretofore indeterminate horizon and re-evaluate our figure/ground relationship to bring the object into contact with our perception. The zoom-in of the camera functions similarly, intensifying the object, "making it more vivid than it was before, centering it – first, immediately, in the film's consciousness, and second, mediately, in ours as spectators" (Sobchack 1990: 28). The zoom-out functions as the reverse, shrinking or drawing our perception away to re-align ourselves with an expanded horizon. This theory helps me account for Reygadas's contribution to cinema, particularly in tracking shots and mounted camera shots. Similarly, the performance of bodies in the cinemas of Reygadas and Breillat test us with one effect of viewing – e.g., the bodies may arouse, horrify, or cause

disgust and shock – and then unhinge that initial sensation by aesthetically, narratively, or thematically producing the opposite. This is demonstrated in several ways within the chapters of my dissertation: the inclusion of surrealism, dreams, and hallucinations shot in the realist style; a pretty young girl's nudity in a sequence of coercion and rape; oral sex at the outset of a narrative film; and an intratextual reading demanded by form and narrative.

Sobchack renames the "viewing view" shortly after the publication of her foundational essay – her 1992 book includes a lengthy discussion of what is now called the "film's body." This concept receives full treatment in *The Address of the Eye*, in terms of the film operating as a mediator of filmmaker's and spectator's perception, and more directly, as the film itself expressing the world through its technological means (1992: 168). Similar to our own bodies, the film's body is both an object and subject of perception. But it is not reducible either to an anthropomorphic account or to its functioning simply as an apparatus. Akin to our own being-in-the-world, which is irreducible to materiality alone, following my above account of Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment, the film's body "is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied 'eye' that has a discrete – if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous – existence" (Sobchack 2004: 66n49).

Barker's more recent application of phenomenology in *The Tactile Eye* (2009) begins with the film's body as the foundation of a sensuous film experience. Through various case studies which function as exemplary instances indicating the expressive potential of the film's body, Barker traces three dynamic and sensuous locales of the spectator's body that are affected: the skin, the musculature, and the viscera. From the touch that lingers too long on a character's skin in a horror film, to the speedy editing and

jittery camera which presents a non-human percept of a chase sequence, and in the palpitations of experimental film, she describes the film experience in terms of cinematography, editing, sounds, lighting, and animation and assesses how these varying functions of the apparatus elicit a bodily reaction that is, in Merleau-Pontian terms, also a bodily expression (Barker 2009: 7-10). In other words, the sense that we get from absorption at the cinema is a sense of our bodies as such. We see, then, as I said above about the possibilities in cinema for the perceptual play of movement, that this play of perception is dual in that both film's body and spectator's body are perceptive in the reception of something (the profilmic event on the one hand, the dancing light of the screen on the other) and expressive in that reception of something (via the zoom, edits, and so on, and the goose bumps, heart palpitations, and tingling of the skin). Both Sobchack's and Barker's film theories will become clearer as I move through the chapters.[15]

Barker's phenomenological method is not solely about the subjective film experience, something I think Tiago de Luca overemphasizes (2014: 8) about the kinds of film theory she, Marks, and Sobchack attempt (although, there is a considerable subjective element). Barker concisely attests to the mutual exchange between film and subject in her analysis when she writes (2009: 12-13):

> Watching a film, we are certainly not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* of it, either. We exist and move and feel in that space of contact where our surfaces mingle and our musculatures entangle…. This sense of fleshy, muscular, visceral contact seriously undermines the rigidity of the opposition between viewer and film, inviting us to think of them as intimately related but not identical, caught up in a relationship of intersubjectivity and co-constitution, rather than as subject and object positioned on opposite sides of the screen.

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[15] The influence of Gestalt psychology on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows for a productive comparison between his writings on film and those of Rudolf Arnheim. Arnheim was also influenced by Gestalt psychology. Indeed, his 1933 volume *Film as Art*, understands the sensory perception of films in similar terms as Laura U. Marks and Jennifer Barker. Cf. Arnheim [1933] 2011: 281-282, 287-289.

In different words, subjectivity is already there when discussing the sensuous elements in a given film. The cinemas that comprise the body of this dissertation pre-exist the hypothesized response of the ideal spectator, or in de Luca's words (2014: 9), the "films themselves *aim* to produce and convey sensory experience." Yet, if the films aim to produce and convey a sensory experience, the films and subsequent theorizing therefore demands an embodied spectator. De Luca's study of contemporary directors (Reygadas, Tsai Ming-liang, and Gus Van Sant) updates classical realist theories and thereby modernizes realist aesthetics. While he and I certainly share similar views and theoretical foundations, I intervene in recent debates about sensation and spectatorship in contemporary cinema, and develop ideas about how contemporary cinemas work and work over genres. I also attempt to show that the turn to the body in film theory and the turn to the body in contemporary art cinema have collided in recent decades. Whether one follows from the other is impossible to say with certainty; perhaps it is best to suggest that the theory and the practice are mutually reinforcing.

Trajectory and Research Questions

Victoria Best and Martin Crowley ask (2007: 14), "What could be more 'material' [perhaps ontologically pornographic], more intense, more vividly present and resistant to cerebral causality than the graphically depicted sex act? What better, then, both to enact and, paradoxically, to signify [a] rupture in the field of signification?" Provided the brief account of Williams on the body genres, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and recent theorists' appropriation of phenomenology, I can state my argument for the following chapters concisely: If the experience of film is constituted by an embodied spectator who

sensuously interacts with the object in a pre-personal and anonymous way, and if the repeated interactions with genre films has produced habituated bodily responses in the spectator, then the cinemas of Reygadas and Breillat re-order or re-organize sense experience by troubling familiar and generic styles and narratives (in the films previously encountered by the spectator). In this film experience, I contend, a genre is established after the fact of viewing. The viewer *collects and assembles* the images and sounds, at first, in a way familiar to the habituated patterns of film *re*collection according to genre. However, a new experience is configured in this attempt at recollection, for the cinemas of Reygadas and Breillat do not easily conform to pre-established tropes of given genres. Their *oeuvres* serve as exemplary instances of "filmic multivalency." One such strategy to assure multivalency is a "*fertile juxtaposition*" of "multiple characters, plots, and themes," a device that seems to be about the organization of form and narrative as well as a description of spectatorship:

> Every screen moment is caught up in a multidimensional loom, in which several elements – foreground and background, shot scale and lighting, *mise en scène* and editing, dialogue and music – are woven together into a multidimensionally reversible fabric. With each new juxtaposition new connections are made, and concepts are reinforced or relegated to storage, potentially leading to that magic moment of conceptual reframing when the spectator-weaver presses on the pedal, raising some threads while lowering others and this initiating a new series of juxtapositions and reframings. (Altman 1999: 136)

In my phenomenological reading of the film experience, I contend that the spectator creates a film that is unique and original in itself, an artwork that is understood by the habit body first, followed by what I claim to be an experience of genre trouble, and then posited as something that has meaning and significance for the individual (even if that meaning is to label a film trash or incomprehensible). Indeed, this movement through a film is what I would call a cinephilia of displeasure.

In the pages to follow, both the formal excesses and the bodily excesses of particular films are examined. The first chapter focuses upon Reygadas's experimentation with fictional narrative film in *Post Tenebras Lux*. Of the two directors studied, Reygadas perhaps more fully explores the possibilities the camera has for altered forms of perception. I trace his aesthetics in this film through the aforementioned theorists, namely Sobchack and Barker. Breillat's *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur*, 2001) is investigated in the second chapter. I turn to Williams's numerous studies of pornography to reveal the genre fluctuations in Breillat's film, and through the directors' aesthetic plays with pornography, present her critiques of contemporary heterosexual relationships. In the third chapter I consider the affective and intratextual dimension of Breillat's *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy* (2002). The latter is an autofiction (a fictional making-of) of the former feature. I argue that the performances of lead actress Roxane Mesquida offers itself as a site for the shock of what was assumed to be a fictional performance in the former film. I combine the two roles as one consistent site for practical and theoretical interests. I contend that this combination results in an affective experience for spectators (or effective, in the sense of using performance as one formal means of critiquing patriarchy) across not merely one isolated diegesis, but two narrative worlds and the extra-diegetic materials. On this latter node, I will also address issues surrounding possible exploitation of performers by directors, a point which emerges in each of the films studied due to the presence of reality forcing its way into a fictional narrative. Following de Luca, this is the "profilmic event" that perhaps constitutes the key difference between contemporary art cinemas and those of the past. I develop the fundamental concepts for my reading of *Sex is Comedy* by first examining the sexual scenes in Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla*

en el cielo, 2005). Thus the similarities between the two directors are not their politics or style, but my readings of their form, modes of address, and shooting sexual performances.

The important similarity between my work and Best and Crowley's analyses of French authors and filmmakers is in the collision of "the real and the image;" spectators experience their basic motility in Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* and arousal, shock, and critical thought in Breillat's films. Further, Best and Crowley coincide with my work in our respective analyses of pornographic images without reducing them "to the categories of highbrow erotica" (2007: 16, 21). Where our writings differ is in my exclusive study of extreme cinema and expansion of the range of genres under investigation. (The authors focus their attentions upon pornography in contemporary French literature and cinema.) I also go farther than Best and Crowley in my link to recent phenomenological film theories such as Barker's on the tactile film experience, Marks's on haptic visuality, and Sobchack's on cinematic death.

This distinction between our respective studies aside, a discussion of pornographic and realist codes arise with each of the directors studied, as well as the possible effects these codes have on spectators. As Best and Crowley note, the interplay between the "real presence of the performer" and "audience participation" is crucial in the creation of meaning in a given text or film (2007: 16). Meaning is dependent on the viewer; it can be in the form of outrage, or for the cinephile, a pleasure in the discomfort of disturbing images. Therefore extreme cinema is not affective on its own or has affects without the mediation of spectator (in fact, reading for affect in the form of a film is not so far removed from theorizing the affected or effected spectator – the form of the film, in Brinkema's study, does not fall far from the conclusions made by spectatorship theorists describing and assessing films' effects [2014]). Cinema requires an audience habituated

in classical narratives and representations to appreciate or dismiss it. Spectators collide with a work and together consumer and product produce the meaning, although, as in the production of cycles and genres, the meaning(s) may shift over time. One of Cavell's favorite passages from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) makes this point as well (Cavell [1971] 1979: 158; 1981: 43; [1985] 2005: 142): "What dawns here lasts only as long as I am occupied with the object in a particular way." This consideration applies to my study as well. I am intrigued by the films discussed in the proceeding chapters and I approach them with a closeness, rigor, and hopefully, theoretical insight. For the moment, then, reading Reygadas and Breillat through genre, and assessing their generic instability through form and narrative, is my way of attending to the work of film theory. My dissertation attempts to implement a Cavellian meditation, a "kind of metaphilosophical debate [that] that does not rule out combining theoretical reflection (philosophy of film) with aesthetic meditation (film criticism);… both can and should work together… in felicitous dialogue… to make film-philosophy more plausible and persuasive, even for its critics and detractors" (Sinnerbrink 2014: 60).

I have repeated that film and viewer co-constitute a finished product and its meaning; whether rigorous or opinionated, with praise or with outrage, meaning is generated by the situated and embodied spectator with a history of cinematic (and moral) assumptions. Extreme cinema generates, even for scholars, extreme difficulties in stating, with certainty, the exact representations seen onscreen and a film's worth or worthlessness. I will attempt it nevertheless and this attempt requires a new mode of viewing, a new mode nevertheless not inconsistent with previous ones.

Chapter 1: Carlos Reygadas, the Avant-Garde, and the Senses

We go back and forth in our own heads, we imagine a future that never comes, and then you see the past, and we go back and forth [in the film Post Tenebras Lux*] as we do in our own heads all the time.*
I'm doing that in the film without a code or conventional limits in storytelling.... The viewer nowadays is highly developed, and can go very far, and doesn't need to be taken by the hand.
- Carlos Reygadas, Interview with Robert Koehler, 2013

Carlos Reygadas was born in Mexico in 1971 and studied international law before turning to the cinema. During his studies in Brussels, he frequented the Museum of Cinema, sometimes viewing as many as three films a day. The future director discovered the films of Roberto Rossellini, Robert Bresson, Carl Theodore Dreyer, and Andrey Tarkovsky (Wood 2006: 116-118), and each director clearly informs his four films to date: Tarkovsky in *Japón* (2002) and *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), Bresson in *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla en el cielo*, 2005), and Dreyer in *Silent Light* (*Stellet Licht*, 2007). Tracing Reygadas's influences are productive for certain historiographical analyses, but an obvious comparison between the masters of art cinema and Reygadas neglects the impact of experimental filmmaking on the director's *oeuvre*. While the relationship between the avant-garde and Reygadas's films is unarguably indirect as his stated influences were, in fact, the above named directors, I nonetheless contend that the aims of experimental filmmakers is likewise Reygadas's goal, i.e., to grant viewers heightened perceptual and sensuous engagement with the medium.

Stan Brakhage, perhaps the most renowned experimental filmmaker, criticized the theatricality of "ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths per cent" of the cinema ([1996] 2011: 670). The theatricality of "Motion Pictures" is experiential rather than

aesthetic or stylistic, "an experience akin to watching a stage-play thru a variety of opera-glasses controlled by the director-editor of the movie being passively watched." One gets the sense that this type of movie, then, is crafted by a lazy director-editor who merely stiches together pieces of a play. We can perhaps suggest that the theatricality of cinema follows closely the theatricality Michael Fried has identified in painting ([1967] 1998). While slightly tautological, it perhaps suffices to describe theatricality as "staginess" and "literalist" (Friend [1967] 1998). We can apply this to the cinema. Brakhage notes that the bond between theatre and film is in the French word for cinematographer, *cinématographe*, literally translating as "writer of movement." His preferred definition of "Film" is Bill Wees's "Light Moving in Time," a series of Platonic ideals implied by the capitalization (Brakhage 2011: 671, citing Wees). Reygadas too will condemn theatricality, but not so far as to declare Light (the projector) as the specific aspect that defines Film;[16] however, what Brakhage and Reygadas share is the idea that the specific quality of cinema is first and foremost an apparatus for perception rather than cognition (Brakhage 2011: 671). In light of this claim, this chapter sets out to assess Reygadas's latest feature, the dreamy and hallucinatory *Post Tenebras Lux*.

This 2012 film is a slight departure from the realist style of Reygadas's prior works, although there are numerous parallels to be made between it and the three others. I will argue that *Post Tenebras Lux* is a work of "visionary realism." According to Tiago de Luca, visionary realism suggests that the filmmaker adheres to certain staples of the realist style such as location shooting, long takes, and non-professional actors, but also

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[16] Cf. Deren [1960] 2011. Maya Deren, an experimental filmmaker as well, condemns theatricality for similar reasons as Brakhage. She argues that film must distance itself from "the narrative disciplines" to develop its own language. For Deren, the medium offers an art that can re-order time and reality. This creative treatment of reality further links Reygadas to the avant-garde tradition.

"contradicts [this] focus on the objective real through experimental strategies that evoke mental processes of perception and cognition, that is to say, altered states of mind" (2014: 159-160). De Luca's notion of visionary realism may seem at odds with the common interpretation of André Bazin's praise of realist filmmaking, namely, the indexical relationship between what is photographed and the imprint it leaves on celluloid; however, Adam Lowenstein has recently reinvigorated a debate regarding Bazin's championing of surrealism, thus a surrealist realism is not a contradiction of terms (2015: 13-17). What remains is for me to describe the experience of *Post Tenebras Lux* – in this experience we find Reygadas's ties to the experimental filmmaking tradition. My main claim is that the levels of reality in this film – the present-tense conscious reality of the main characters as well as the dreams and fantasies of those characters – are immanent expressions of the film's formal qualities. Further, amending de Luca's definition slightly, the representation of these differing levels of reality submits a philosophical concept: dreams and fantasies are embodied experiences rather than mental ones. With this concept in hand, my second main claim regards the ethical and political significance of Reygadas's film. Reygadas's concerns about sexual difference manifest in a sex-dream sequence. The director has offered comments about class and race depictions in all of his films, but he has said little about gender, gender roles, sexuality, and sexual difference. My work in this chapter will fill in this blank. *Post Tenebras Lux* presents the ever-increasing incongruity between contemporary life and traditional marriage. I claim that marriage is now an unviable and unhealthy option for many individuals and the couple in the film struggle with "compulsory monogamy" in a sexual epoch much more diverse than heterosexual, monogamous sex permits.

Reygadas has been included in the scholarship on extreme cinema due to the performances of real sex in his first two features. His inclusion within extreme cinema is perhaps questionable with the latter two films, *Silent Light* and *Post Tenebras Lux*, since these works downplay violence and sex rather than shock viewers with graphic or explicit visuals (although Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall include the latter in a footnote listing extreme films outside of Europe [2012: 5n1]). Yet his visionary realism, I claim, assures Reygadas a place amongst other contemporary art cinema directors whose films are experiments with narrativized sex and violence. In this chapter we will see how Reygadas moves his viewers bodily in the manner of the avant-garde and this avant-garde aesthetics generates critical thinking about what is precisely documented and its significance. In the next chapter we will see that Catherine Breillat aims to invoke spectators' senses through the genres of pornography and horror. Thus the two directors can be subsumed under cinemas of sensation and both, in their respective uses and abuses of genre, allow spectators to engage with the films in the manner that best suits them.

In the first section I turn to *Post Tenebras Lux* and come into contact with the film myself. It affected me like one of Brakhage's pieces or a flicker film. I felt a curious mix of perceptual pleasure and cognitive boredom. I will provide some context on the film's release, my theoretical framework for analyzing the film, and a brief synopsis. In the proceeding sections I analyze the film through specific lenses and themes to uncover its means for evoking a sensuous film experience and work towards my larger claims about filmic representations of dreams and Reygadas's investment in representing sexual difference. My discussion of the film will be grounded in Vivian Sobchack's and others' phenomenological film theory. This theoretical foundation helps to account for the mode of viewing that Reygadas's film elicits.

I approach *Post Tenebras Lux* via contemporary phenomenology due to some provocative yet simple claims made by the director during interviews about the film, and the numerous critical reviews emphasizing the sensations felt during its viewing, from uncanny beauty to narrative confusion. Little has been written about the director's films but he has graced us with many interviews. I appropriate many of these in order to substantiate my claim that theory and practice are working in tandem in contemporary film. We may not agree with Reygadas on all accounts, nor do we need to buy the director's post-film reflections (read: filmmaking intentions), but we do need a stable foundation in the world and not solely theories developed apart from the films studied in this dissertation. Reygadas and Breillat are articulate and educated individuals who seem to enjoy discussing their films, agreeing and disagreeing with interviewers, and through these conversations generate some theoretically complex statements on the nature of filmmaking. I therefore treat their words in conjunction with their practice.

The Difficult Film

Post Tenebras Lux, Latin for "After Darkness, Light," has a sense of incompleteness and fragmentariness. The episodes appear to be arranged at random by the director and his wife and editor Natalia Lopez. Jonathan Romney contends that the film is exciting for its sketch-like quality of potentialities, possibilities, and the combinations of images (2013: 74), a comment that resonates with my claim that Reygadas and Breillat offer films that require an effort on the part of the viewer to collect and curate the shots, sounds, and formal elements of a given work in order to generate a full experience of it, including its technical prowess and critiques. Reygadas's 2012 film works with characters' dreams, fantasies, and desires in an achronological fashion. With this film the director is

unquestionably an experimental filmmaker, but not so far into experimentation that narrative has altogether disappeared. "My cinema is tremendously narrative," he states; "There's always a clear line that connects" (Koehler 2013: 13). Yet Reygadas wants viewers to come away with a feeling or sense of the work rather than following or identifying with a story, plot, or character(s). He is frequently dismissive of the deeper meanings directors instill in films, and for that matter, viewers who attempt to read too much into a work. For the film's capacity to generate multiple kinds of viewing, and simultaneously eschewing meaning in favor of producing perceptual and bodily sensations in spectators, *Post Tenebras Lux* is often described as challenging and difficult.

According to Sobchack's typology of the "difficult film," a typology which includes films that are described or experienced as disgusting, boring, bad, complicated, or any combination of, the most difficult works transgress these conventional impediments as well as narrative logic and cinematic specificity and "make sense" to us "sensuously, experientially, in the phenomenological 'now' of seeing, hearing, and touching (if always also at a distance)" (2014: 51).[17] She provides Terrence Malick's *To the Wonder* (2012) and Shane Carruth's *Upstream Color* (2013) as examples. The former asks its viewers to experience its fragmented visual poetry rather than a plot; the latter depicts a sci-fi story more concerned with presenting the bodily experiences of characters

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[17] The full typology is as follows, Sobchack 2014: 50: "There are those that are difficult to watch because of their explicit violence or graphic sex (Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* [*Irréversible*, 2002]), or their extremely disturbing visceral effects (Kirby Dick's documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist* [1997]). There are also those that are pleasurable in their difficulty: cerebral "puzzle" films with intricate plots and/or structures that require some effort to figure out (Christopher Nolan's *Memento* [2000], or Carruth's debut feature *Primer* [2004]). Then there are films that are difficult because they push the limits of representation as far as it will go (Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* [2008] and its mise en abyme of infinite representational regress). There are others that go even further and push the very limits of cinema itself (Derek Jarman's monochromatic *Blue* [1993], or Michael Snow's *La Région central* [1971]). Most commonplace, however, are those films that are difficult to watch because they push nothing: they're unchallenging spectacles devoid of thought, affect, and any reason, other than mercenary, for being at all (certain kinds of mainstream trash like… *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* [2013])."

infected by a mysterious bug than exploring its causes or social, ethical, and political effects. Carruth's characters, attuned to Sobchack's argument, have heightened sensorial experiences and the film attempts to capture such moments. *Post Tenebras Lux*, alongside its aesthetics of visionary realism, is part of this category of difficult film. The stories in Reygadas's features, however, are always very simple so as to grant the spectator a sensuous experience over and beyond (or under and below) narrative pleasures.

I am interested in the contestation the film's narrative poses, as a strenuous and intellectual effort to comprehend, but it is more worthwhile to investigate the test Reygadas proposes: he demands that spectators rid themselves of their desire to put the pieces of the film together and to replace their traditional modes of viewing with a highly sensuous experience. As I introduced, he brings the narrative tradition into contact with traditions and ideas in experimental filmmaking. This sort of spectatorship, however, still requires an engagement with the story as it serves to link the sounds and images with cognitive continuity. With a story and the style used to show and tell it, generic conventions appear and disappear. A study of *Post Tenebras Lux* therefore poses questions about the nature of genre, spectatorship, and fictional film and to study a fictional film requires a careful explanation of the story to bring the experience of the work to language. Thus my explication of the narrative and form of the film presupposes that the reader has not seen it, and my analysis of the film's "sensory mode of address" (de Luca 2014), as elsewhere in this dissertation, posits the first-time viewer as its intended spectator.

Juan (Adolfo Jiménez Castro) and Natalia are a married couple living about 45 miles (70 kilometers) outside of Mexico City in the unstated city of Tepoztlán (the city is Reygadas's current town of residence and the film was shot on his estate). Juan, Natalia,

and their very young children Rut (short for Rutilia, performed by Rut Reygadas) and Eleazar (Eleazar Reygadas) live in a newly built, quite luxurious home in the mountains.[18] Despite his economic and familial success, Juan has an internet pornography addiction. This addiction is briefly mentioned by Juan and resurfaces, perhaps, in his aggression towards his dog Martita and with his sexual frustration regarding his wife. Natalia appears to have her mental health, but Juan's sexual problems likely generate emotional and sexual issues for her. This family is also light-skinned, "Western Mexicans," Reygadas says.[19] The lighter-skinned family is contrasted with a worker for the household, Seven (Willebaldo Torres), who is darker and poorer. In describing the class situation in contemporary Mexico, de Luca notes that "class and ethnicity go hand in hand…, meaning that the darker one is, the poorer one is likely to be" (2014: 85). We can see this in each of Reygadas's features: the Westernized middle-aged painter (Alejandro Ferretis) who visits a rural village in *Japón*; Marcos (Marcos Hernández), as the obese and dark-skinned chauffeur of the young and beautiful Ana in *Battle in Heaven*; and *Silent Light's* narrative focus on the white Mennonites living in Mexico. Although there is initially no observable tension between Juan and Seven in *Post Tenebras Lux*, and they appear to be friends, there nevertheless exist class and ethnic divides that Reygadas is keen to explore.

On a day of national celebration the family is driving towards some unknown destination. Natalia realizes she has forgotten something back at their home. On the return journey, the family stops at a restaurant and sees Jarro, another worker who, at that time,

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[18] The infants are Reygadas's children. They have retained their names so that they may respond to them in the confabulated settings of the film. For the same reasons, the fictional wife is named Natalia after the children's mother.

[19] Reygadas in Koehler, 2013: 12: "Western Mexicans tend to have chronic dissatisfaction and see life from a disconnected point of view. [Juan is] detached, and he's that way since he's wealthy."

was supposed to be guarding the family's house while they were away. Natalia and the children remain with Jarro and Juan goes to retrieve the items. Upon his homecoming Juan surprises Seven and another man in the middle of attempted robbery. At the goading of the other man, Seven shoots Juan and both men flee, leaving him for dead. As a result, Juan loses part of a lung. Seven later decides to visit his wounded friend and in a far from melodramatic shocker, young Eleazar casually informs Seven that his father has died. The murderer then strolls into a field and, without warning, removes his head with his own hands

This surreal scene completes the foundational narrative thread of the film. If we were to take these sequences alone, however, Reygadas would barely have a feature-length product. In fact, the key plot event of the film – Seven shooting Juan and Juan's death – does not transpire until more than half way through the story. The events in what I would call the present-tense narrative were quickly summarized above. Some of the episodes that I have not noted are dreams, fantasies, desires, flash-forwards, even concepts, although, which character the dreams might be emanating from is neither established nor do I think it is relevant.[20] However, as Alphonso Lingis suggests and as I will argue, in the human perceptual field even dreams and phantasms obtain reality. These dream and fantasy sequences are neither supplements nor addendums, nor commonplace dream-sequences that push ahead the plot, nor do they serve to establish a character's psychological state, or operate as a catalyst for action, or even as a reason for an action – each stands as a unique sensuous moment in the whole. Contrasted to altered states of mind, I name these sequences an experience of altered states of embodiment and

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[20] To simplify the writing in this chapter, when I refer generally to the sequences that do not operate in the present, I will use the phrase "dream" or "fantasy sequence(s)." However, it should be stressed, not all the episodes are necessarily dreams or fantasies.

such sequences aim to represent dreams and fantasy "as if" real for the spectating subject. Reygadas fosters this kind of sensuous engagement through his aesthetics and story-telling; the hallucinations and dreams are as real as the diegetic present, i.e., they exist on a plane with an equal degree of intensity as the real or present-tense diegetic events. Alongside Sheldon Penn's Deleuzian discussion of *Silent Light*, it would therefore be appropriate to call the film a "cinema of immanence" or, what Martine Beugnet calls "cinemas of sensation" (2007). According to Penn (2013), Reygadas's immanent cinema offers movement for itself, without meaning or message; cuts that are entirely irrational; objects and spaces that are presented in excess of the narrative; and it sometimes appears as if the actors themselves are acting without direction. I tread this same thematic path but carry a different theoretical walking stick. My preference for a cinema of immanence is also not dismissing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's evaluation of the *ek-stase* of experience, defined as an "Active transcendence of the subject in relation to the world" (2004: 84n1). To fill in the gaps of the frame, of temporarily, of spatiality, the spectator must also transcend the immanent experience of what is onscreen and in frame.

As Reygadas observes of his filmmaking method, and inadvertently in a nod to the objects of study for phenomenological inquiry, let us now turn to "the things themselves" (Lim 2013).

"[A]ll the levels of perception"

In terms of the film's capacity to elicit spectators' sensuous engagement with its images and sounds, it is possible to study six interrelated aspects of Reygadas's method and style: narrative and chronology, cinematography, and dreams and fantasy, as well as the

profilmic event and documentary traditions, dead and living animals, and the representation of death.

Narrative shock

After his first two features, Reygadas became known for shocking viewers with his graphic displays of sexuality between likely and unlikely couples. The most shocking is perhaps *Battle in Heaven*. This film features an obese dark-skinned Mexican man receiving fellatio from a rich, young white girl, followed summarily by their real onscreen sex, and lastly, that same man's sex with an obese and dark-skinned woman. I discuss the fellatio sequences in the third chapter in an effort to reorient theoretical conversations about performance in contemporary art films that depict performers engaging in sex. For now, when *Post Tenebras Lux* turns to sex, the film takes a different approach, depicting it in a rather subdued manner compared to the director's prior features.[21] The controversy and debate around this film was not its display of sexuality; rather, "the film's biggest provocations are its aesthetic and narrative liberties," film critic Dennis Lim wrote in 2013.

I did not explore the "narrative liberties" in my synopsis. Amongst the episodes described above are sequences that are dreams, flashbacks, flash-forwards, concepts and desires that add to the sensuous quality of the feature as a whole. "Instead of progressing from one event to the next," Lim writes, quoting his interview with Reygadas, "[the film] drifts among 'all the levels of perception,'… which include 'dreams, things you long for, memories, an imagined future, the conscious present, a reality that is beyond us'" (Lim

[21] Although, in a screening I held, a mother and her teenage daughter promptly left during the sex sequence. "Trent Film Society Presents: Carlos Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux*," Artspace, Peterborough, ON, May 28th, 2014.

2013).[22] It is possible, given Reygadas's comments and the complexity of the film, to focus on any number of episodes. My choices and emphases on particular sequences and shots to demonstrate my argument is due to the demands placed upon me to write with some linearity and clarity. While the film may not command a strong understanding, theoretical writing certainly does. The concept of cinematic excess serves as a starting point to address the narrative.

Reygadas *oeuvre*, unquestionably, is an experiment in cinematic excess. Kristin Thompson has explained this concept in detail in her 1977 essay on the topic. Her targets are those who find a cinematic device used without narrative motivation disturbing.[23] According to Thompson, to argue for the legitimacy of cinematic excess is to champion the specificity of cinema, i.e., images and sounds for perceptual play ([1977] 1986: 133). There are no rules that govern when a device should be used to motivate the narrative, such as an exceedingly long take (Thompson 1986: 135-136). This is clearly the case in *Post Tenebras Lux* as we are required to restrain ourselves from linking the episodes to some kind of cause-and-effect logic. The arbitrariness of the sequences, the gaps in time and the lack of context and situatedness of the characters in the sequences render them excessive. We will see that Reygadas's film demands a new mode of viewing. He attempts to usher in a new kind of narrative cinema where the images function individually, are themselves expressive of the capacity for the film's and spectator's perceptual play, and can be curated or collected in a manner that suits the spectator's

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[22] Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 11: "The film is about many things, including the perception of reality, of our dreams, fantasies, and in our direct experiences, and in the acknowledgment of the reality beyond what we see and hear…. As for the feelings people have from their experiences, and what these may trigger in our dreams, or subconscious, these are felt more or less powerfully. And if we didn't feel them we wouldn't be alive."

[23] According to Anton Chekhov, these sorts of excessive films would bungle their plots; one does not bring a gun onstage, claims the playwright, unless it is to be fired.

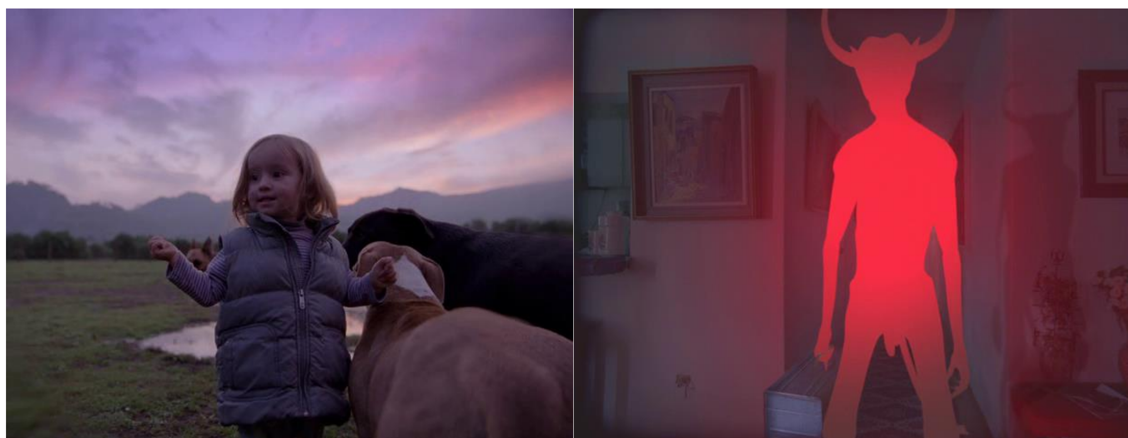
tastes or preferences (even if the spectator dislikes what is seen and heard). In my following analysis of the narrative, I attempt to heed Thompson's advice (1986: 141) on encountering the excessive film:

> Once the narrative [of an excessive film] is recognized as arbitrary rather than logical, the viewer is free to ask why individual events within its structures are as they are. The viewer is no longer constrained by conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as a solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer. Instead, the work becomes a perceptual field of structures which the viewer is free to study at length, going beyond the strictly functional aspects.

Her comment is evocative of Stanley Cavell's statement (1981: 29), made just a few short years later, that a genre is not simply noting the common features of a body of films but is instead a mode of critical engagement whereby the individual spectator asks, for him- or herself, "*what [the films] are* in view of one another." Taking Thompson and Cavell's advice to heart: in absorbing myself in the episodes presented in Reygadas's film, I can both engage with what is there as perceptual play while also studying the individual sequences and their relationship to the whole, and then, in relation to other films, genres, and production trends.

Post Tenebras Lux begins with Rut meandering in a damp soccer field as the sun sets. Above the tree-lined mountains we see the sky in a beautiful shade of light blue; purples and pinks dance on the few visible clouds. She chases the cows, pets the dogs, and watches the dogs chase the cows. Horses and donkeys trot at a distance from her. With her newly acquired language skills, Rut points to the animals and identifies them with their colloquial names. She laughs and giggles, the dogs pant and splash in the puddles. The day slowly fades into night; the brightness of the sunset quickly darkens to a near pitch black. Dark clouds now cover the sky. Rut whispers, "Mommy," "Daddy," "Home," "Rut. Eleazar," and her silhouette, in a medium shot, presences between lighting

strikes on the horizon behind her. Rut disappears and we cut to a shot of the stormy sky. Each word of the title individually appears, like Rut, between lightning flashes. The sequence lasts about 7 minutes.



Figures 1.1-1.2 Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

A sequence featuring a glowing red devil with a toolbox appears next. The devil enters, looks about, encounters a child, and then enters the bedroom of the child's parents (we assume). I discuss the sequence in more detail in the last section of this chapter, but it suffices to say at this juncture of my study, paraphrasing Reygadas, that the devil is a representation of what children will become – not evil, as we commonly associate with devils, but a person capable of creative and destructive acts. Reygadas thus names this long scene a "concept" (2013), and he has also identified it as Eleazar's dream (Solórzano 2013: 53), although the child in the devil sequence is not Eleazar himself and neither does the home belong to the protagonists.

Seven is then introduced to us, but we do not know his status or name yet. The temptation is to link him to the devil of the preceding episode; however, with the lack of definitive claims or arguments in the film as to the strength of such a link, there is no reason to build a bridge between the two sequences. We must not forget Rudolf

Arnheim's ontological claim about the cinema ([1933] 2011: 287): "because the fact that two sequences follow each other on the screen does not indicate in itself that they should be understood as following each other in time." Similar to the opening of a western, Seven casually travels in the forest atop his donkey, two dogs scampering about. Here, in Seven's axe-wielding and tree-chopping sequence, Reygadas intentionally denies spectators the opportunity to engage their cognitive faculties (especially if we are not Mexican) – we have no idea who this man is and why he is important. On this scene in particular, Reygadas informs us that in Mexico logging has become a deeply ecological issue, as the men chop small chunks from the trees for the *anafes* ("rudimentary stoves"), and therefore most of us can only understand this sequence post-film experience with the aid of this interview (Solórzano 2013: 53). In a long panning shot of tree tops, we hear the sound of chopping wood. Seven's relationship to the forest will appear twice more before the end credits roll.

We spend many minutes with Seven, his logging, and his travels, before turning to our main protagonists Juan, Natalia, Rut, and Eleazar. Close-ups of Natalia and Juan sleeping, similar to countless shots we will see in the film, far exceeds the requirements of narrative functionality. She is slowly roused by a crying Rut, and as the latter babbles about animals, Natalia asks if she dreamt of giraffes and cows. In the opening scenes with Rut, with its lack of an event, space for character identification (and camera identification as I explore below), and setting for a story, the sequence attained the status of reality as a lived perception. Only now are we informed that it was a dream. The sequence of Rut skipping across the field initially gripped us in its immanence, in its present-ness. Reygadas denies that the scenes function as a prologue and downplays a rational explanation as a "synthesis of the story;" he mentions, "I love that piece of land [the

setting of the scene] and go there every evening. I love those animals. I wanted to make a film that started by showing those things only because I wanted to share them" (Solórzano 2013: 53). This is the first of many instances where Reygadas will place himself in the film, in this case as a person who loves a particular piece of land. Including oneself in the film without a narrative motivation is an avant-garde strategy. (Alfred Hitchcock's cameos have nothing to do with a personal stamp on the film as much as they operate as a clever display of hide-and-seek and the addition of an extra.) But just as significant as the selfish indulgence of the director are his earlier claims to aestheticize all the levels of perception. I will turn to the levels of dreams and fantasies after I discuss the cinematography and style of the film.

Now the family is awake. All four enjoy each other's drowsy company on Juan and Natalia's bed. A naked Eleazar wrestles his father. After a scene of Juan taking his aggression out on his favorite dog Martita – she had done "it again" – we cut to an AA meeting, where Seven and others deliver speeches regarding their substance abuse. Non-professional actors grace us with their perhaps authentic tales. In a brief talk with Seven following the meeting, we learn of Juan's porn addiction. Juan's addiction is not addressed in depth, thus the film is a far departure from the psychological character study of porn addict Brandon (Michael Fassbender) in Steve McQueen's *Shame* (2011). Instead, addiction will be revealed through Juan's anger towards his dogs and in petty squabbles with his wife. I would further suggest that the very different kinds of addiction plaguing Seven and Juan are representative of their classes.

If viewers are still with the narrative at this point, some thirty minutes into the film, a conceptual, flashback, or symbolic scene punctures whatever narrative pleasure we had left. A group of English teenage boys prepare for a rugby match by stretching,

shouting, and chanting. Tony Rayns writes, "The most disruptive element here is the rugby match…. The two rugby scenes are wild anomalies – visually, linguistically, you name it…." (2013: 101). We can see the episode as yet another expression of Reygadas's selfish indulgence; he loves the sport and as a young man attended and played rugby at that depicted school in Derbyshire, U.K. (Solórzano 2013: 53; O'Hehir 2013; Lim 2012). It is also "technically" a scene from Juan's youth, Reygadas agrees with Robert Koehler, and this flashback is to a time of lessened strife (2013: 14). Conceptually, the director claims these young men are about to enter into adulthood and thereby lose their purity and innocence (Solórzano 2013: 53). The boys are thus linked to the devil sequence. In the second rugby sequence, which also serves as the conclusion of the film, we hear the team's "rallying cry" to shed their individualities, work together as a team, and overcome their opponents who are stronger than them.

In my reading, the effect of this episode is to produce a gaping hole in our desire for narrative logic and to intensify Juan's immediately prior confession regarding his addiction to porn. He had lost his purity and innocence perhaps at this very juncture of his life when sport, a homosocial affair to say the least, was introduced. We will see this enthusiasm for physicality reappear in another episode which is, as expected by now, yet another puncture in our habitually narrative-driven film experience. But what this rugby scene and the following temporally out of joint ones suggest is the interiority of time. I began with an epigraph quoting Reygadas on interiority for this very reason. When the film proceeds backwards into Juan's memories of life in the U.K., or later when a sequence will leap years ahead, I contend that Juan and Natalia's world, a world of sensations and experiences which generate meaning and significance, are constituted by internal temporality. This must be the case if the sequences are altered states of

embodiment as I will argue. Jenny Chamarette, theorizing the cinematic subject in a phenomenological framework, writes (2012: 35),"One might venture to say that temporality is pure subjectivity, given that it rests in no object, is contained by no subject, and is, rather, a condition of possibility for being sensible of, or sensitive to, the world." *Post Tenebras Lux* presents time in this fashion, even when the time that is presented is the immanence of memory, dream, and fantasy.

Now we leap ahead. Rut and Eleazar are around 10 years of age and the family is at a lush and crowded Christmas dinner party. Family and friends are all there and the two children are at that age between curiosity and sociality. They lack a confidence in their social skills, so they wander about the party while the adults engage in idle chatter. The adults should bore us, as they bore each other with their drunkenness and passing remarks about Russian literature. Juan recites one of Leo Tolstoy's character's epiphanies, the moment the character realizes life is not about money, class, status, etc., and this unannounced recital parallels Juan's own epiphany just before his death later in the film.[24] But the party itself, akin to Juan's impressive recital, in its subdued frenzy of food, drink, and gift-giving gives us no point of reference narratively, spatially, or temporally. Similar to real-life Christmas gatherings, we, like the guests, do not know all these people, nor for that matter do we know how our protagonists arrived there or what they have been doing for the approximately seven to eight years since we last saw them. If we take seriously Eleazar's pronouncement at the end of the film, i.e., his father has died, this is the first of the film's fantasy scenes. Its utter lack of an event, merely a banal Christmas gathering,

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[24] Juan recites a passage from *War and Peace* (Война и миръ,1869), but these epiphanies plague Tolstoy's work. Cf. *The Cossacks* (Казаки, 1862), *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (Смерть Ивана Ильича, 1886), and *Master and Man* (Хозяин и работник, 1895). I agree with Juan's interlocutor in this scene that it is not Tolstoy, nor Fyodor Dostoevsky who is the master, but Chekhov.

suggests it is one of the family member's future projections. Had Juan not been shot, and Natalia and the children remained healthy, these mundane and routine parties would exist. However, since we do not yet know that Juan will die while the children are still quite young, again the episode must be taken in its present-ness. Thus the narrative shock when Juan gives up the ghost later in the story.

In each of the temporally out of joint episodes Juan adopts a new haircut and varies his facial hair. In the last he had medium-length hair and was clean shaven. To end the Christmas party sequence, a rapid cut presents a naked woman's torso and is followed by a selection of shots presenting other nude patrons, male and female, in a sauna. Alongside the bored and naked individuals we are gazing upon are the sounds of sex: slaps, groans, and men barking sexual commands. No director has taken Michel Foucault's claim that "sex is boring" so seriously. It is likely, we may speculate, that when Juan and Natalia enter the frame, they desired this orgy precisely because of their stale physicality. The husband is now buzz cut with facial stubble; therefore it is ambiguous whether the scene transpires before or after the previous one or is yet another conceptual scene. I speculate that this is not a real event that happens to the characters, but is the immanent expression of Natalia's desire. I address this sequence fully in two separate sections below. Its significance is immense for what I claim to be Reygadas's critique of contemporary romance.

Another scene of Seven deals with woodcutting – a friend of his wants a tree chopped down to enrage his sister. The episode ends and transitions to a cut of women eating. This is a festive scene at a time when the children are still infants. Rut and Eleazar, in contrast to the Rut and Eleazar of a few years older, identify colors and stamp their feet onto a projected light on the dance floor, looking much like cats who attack

flashlight beams on a wall. A very drunk, dark-skinned man refers to Juan and Natalia as "whitey," and the couple must assure this man that they too are Mexican. The man then invites them to visit his poor home for a beer during the celebration of the Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th.

Cut to a beach. Rut and Eleazar, mentioned by name, are teenagers. Juan has long hair down his back. Close-ups of the children reveal that they are becoming beautiful and handsome, not unlike their attractive parents. Unlike the opening scene with Rut, a pretty sunset closes the episode, and this static shot lasts about a minute until Rut and Eleazar, now back in their infancy, appear in frame and cavort in the sand. We transition to the family's home and watch a domestic scene unfold. The infants are put to bed and Juan whispers to Natalia that he will have sex with her "in the ass" that evening. Natalia seems receptive, but the scene eventually turns into a squabble regarding the color of curtains. In a medium shot of Natalia, the petty badgering leads to anger and frustration as Juan reveals his dissatisfaction with their sex lives. Finally, Natalia threatens to leave him. The husband exits the room and a short episode of the dogs feeding follows.

The film is an hour and fifteen minutes in, and here the narrative event which tied together my synopsis, i.e., the shooting of Juan by Seven, at last unfolds. Once the shooting has taken place, Reygadas provides us another conceptual scene, perhaps, as a man (Natalia's new husband? He refers to Eleazar as son) appears to take Rut and Eleazar, now around age 10 again, out to hunt birds – they paddle along a river and likely shoot a bird. Through the use of symbolic cutting, Rut's gunshot brings us to an episode of some anonymous men discussing life, playing chess, and eventually Juan's condition; we discover that Juan has lost part of a lung.

Reygadas has an eye for aesthetically pleasing locations and shooting conditions. The following episode contains the two infants playing atop some boulders while Natalia and a dog rest on the ground. We should note here that Natalia is without Juan. This scene was cut short by Reygadas after the film's premiere at Cannes and I think it needs to be seen in its original length.[25] From one perspective, Juan is the main protagonist, and therefore Reygadas is correct when he states that the extended scene is without importance; but watching Natalia walk back to the house with the children alone asserts her self-importance. Indeed, her gaze at the house where Juan is recovering also suggests her loneliness without the father of her children. We must not forget, as Reygadas does in interviews, that Juan's passing is significant for the story of Juan to be sure, but is simultaneously a life-changing event for his wife and mother of his children. Natalia's care for the children without Juan might hint at the optimism of the film's title; perhaps, after Juan has died, there will be light.

In the next episode, during Juan's convalescence, Natalia's charming and off-key recital of a Neil Young tune on the piano, "It's a Dream," confirms not only the fantasy of the flash-forward episodes but also the melancholy optimism of a life without her husband.[26] According to Reygadas, evidence of Juan's imminent death concludes the recital. During Natalia's rendition of Young's song, a painting fills the screen. It is entitled *The Iceberg* and is by Frederick Edwin Church; this is Juan's point-of-view and the painting "suggests he's going to die" (Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 15). Juan poetically reflects at length on his life, particularly his childhood, and his seemingly solitary speech – the whole thing is shot in a close-up without a cut – ends with Natalia jumping into

[25] The deleted scenes are available on Strand Releasing's blu-ray of *Post Tenebras Lux*.
[26] Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 13: "When… [Natalia is] playing Neil Young's "It's a Dream," that's like supercondensed narrative."

frame in tears following by Juan in tears. His epiphany is a memory of childhood joys, and now he says, it is Rut and Eleazar's turn to live. In a new sequence, Eleazar then informs Seven of Juan's passing, and Seven commits suicide. Just prior to this death, it is worth mentioning, Seven failed to reunite with his wife and children, suggesting that in addition to murdering Juan he had nothing left to live for. A self-decapitation and then we cut to the British boys' rugby match.

Salon film critic Andrew O'Hehir, among many other critics, grappled with the film in a manner that echoes Thompson's theorization of cinematic excess. He placed himself in the moment of the feature and wrote of it in a past which, now gone, cannot be apprehended or experienced in quite the same way. During the episode of Juan's convalescence, while Natalia is singing, Juan looks over "in a mood of wistful nostalgia, at a photograph of the Spanish golfer Seve Ballesteros at the British Open." For O'Hehir, unable to account for it in his writing, he nevertheless knew that Juan's glance, and to some degree the film as a whole, "*made perfect sense at the time*. I felt, while I was watching the movie, that I understood it well enough…. I… understood that while this movie is deliberately constructed so that almost nobody will 'get it' or like it – and I'm not sure how I feel about that perversity – it's a masterpiece despite that, or because of that or just anyway" (2013).

The narrative is shocking and an immense challenge – if we try too hard to comprehend during our first experience of *Post Tenebras Lux*, we risk losing the aesthetic and political dimensions, an unarguably important aspect of the film that I will discuss at length in a section below. Despite its seemingly arbitrary narrative, I will argue that the political aspect is dependent upon the film's aesthetics and experimentation. In regards to the narrative, as time subjectively operates for the individual spectator, the jarring cuts

and episodes play with our personal and bodily temporality. The film affects us precisely because its narrative provides such limited opportunities for cognitive and intellectual engagement. It is not a puzzle to be solved, but a painting to be absorbed, or a tune to hum along to, without thought or reason. I will revisit this idea of narrative shock in chapter two. For this chapter, the shorter sections that follow address more narrowly defined devices, themes, and scenes.

Cinematography and levels

Lingis, a translator and hyper-translator of Merleau-Ponty, posits his own account of embodiment in *The Imperative*.[27] He names our practicable field *levels*. A practicable field may be defined as our outward bodily engagements and expressions with objects and persons in the world although, for Lingis, the boundaries between practicable and unpracticable fields are blurry; the latter may be defined as bodily expressions directed inward, such as dreams and the like. Levels are the sense organs in their contact with the elements (Lingis 1996: 13-17): we experience the tactility of wood or fur with our hands, light and darkness play on our retinas, we hear a noisy music hall silence when a conductor raises his baton, or we focus on the person's voice across from us and turn a room's chatter into background noise. The levels are neither empirically verifiable, a set of significations that make a thing comprehensible, nor a universal or necessary law for the appearance of things as such (Lingis 1996: 25-27).

[27] Hyper-translation is defined by Kenneth Reinhard as a "sublime… place of new topological proximities, unmappable according to the conventional metrics of history and geography" (Badiou 2012: xi-xii). The work of a hyper-translator, he continues, is to "*de*-familiarize" ideas, make them strange. Alain Badiou accomplishes this with a recent translation of Plato's *Republic*. Lingis unarguably updates and de-familiarizes the work of 19th and 20th century continental philosophers. In Lingis's books, he does not translate or hyper-translate these philosophers as such, but the well-read scholar can see where certain ideas originated. Further, the very well-read scholar can pinpoint which passages had been appropriated and plagiarized to bring new ideas to the contemporary imagination.

> A level is neither a purely intelligible order, nor a positive form given to a pure a priori intuition; it is a sensory phenomenon. A level is neither a content grasped in a perception nor a form imposed on an amorphous matter of sensation; it is that with which or according to which we perceive. It is not an object formed nor an organization elaborated among objects but an ordinance taken up and followed through.
>
> The levels of our practicable field, but also those of the unpracticable domains, the landscapes, the visions, the spheres of musicality, the oneiric and the erotic fields, the vistas through which our nomadic vitality wanders, are not suspended in void nor in the empty immanence in which our representational faculty a priori would extend the pure form of exteriority. They take form in a vital medium, in light, in the air, in warmth, in the tangible density of exteriority, on the ground, in the night, and in the night beyond night. (Lingis 1996: 27)

Similar to Lingis's phenomenology, Laura U. Marks suggests that with haptic visuality, a touching with one's eyes, the levels of sense perception can be extended. A haptic visuality closes the distance between observer and image; spectators graze the surface of the image with their sight to be sure, but other senses may be engaged depending upon the formal properties of the film as well as the film stock, for instance. Additionally, the content of the images can sometimes effect the intensity of hapticity, yet for Marks, a cinematographic style is the more elaborate and sensually convincing means for a haptic cinema. Multisensory filmmakers refuse "to make their images accessible to vision, so that the viewer must resort to other senses, such as touch, in order to perceive the images" (Marks 2000: 159). For example, Roula Haj-Ismail's *I Wet My Hands Etched and Surveyed Vessels Approaching Marks Eyed Inside* (1992) and Ming-Yuen S. Ma's *Sniff* (1996) use extreme close-ups of bodies such that verification by sight gives way to verification by our sense of the tactility of skin or scalp (2000: 156-158, 172-173) . Indeed, this applies to some shots in popular cinema as well. In Sobchack's experience of Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), she contends that the blurry images that begin the film were recognized – sensed – by her fingers prior to having sense of them visually. She writes, "we do not experience a movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend

and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium" (2004: 63).

Post Tenebras Lux offers the spectator an engagement with levels; the film aims to make the spectator aware of his capacity to experience sensory phenomena. While viewing Reygadas's film we do not make contact with the forest's smells and tactility directly with our senses of smell and touch, nor do we feel or get a scent of the many dogs gallivanting or resting. Through its cinematography, *Post Tenebras Lux* intends to rouse not just one sense at a time through perception, but the basic motility and spatial organization of the spectator's body. The film's capacity to elicit sensuous engagements is noted in many critical reviews. Dan Sullivan, among others, contends that "Reygadas aims to evoke pure sensation[,]… make the viewer truly *feel* the audible and visible" (2013: 67). This evocation of sensation further ties the director to the avant-garde as defined by its early practitioner Germaine Dulac. The avant-garde "envelop[s] the viewer in a network… of sensations to experience and to feel" (Dulac [1932] 2011: 656). Reygadas's director of photography, Alexis Zabé, accidentally discovered the merits of a lens which, in part, made this sensuous engagement possible. For most of the exterior shots, and a few interiors, Reygadas and his DP employed a bevelled or refracted lens. This lens is polished flat so that (the camera's and spectator's) perception is drawn towards an inner circle, creating a "halo-like effect" and a "ghostly doubling" of whatever appears in the fringes of the frame (Lim 2012).[28] For the director, this produced "an amazing effect" (Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 15); for film critic Peter Bradshaw it was "annoying and absurd" (2013). Contrary to Bradshaw's dismissive remark, this effect

[28] Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 15: "What happens is the outside of the lens is polished and shaved so it becomes flat, and then it creates a refraction. It was a 25mm lens, and it reacts differently depending on the light and atmosphere, as well as the camera movement."

creates a number of stylistic and philosophical conclusions, particularly when it is deployed for Steadicam and handheld shots. At the stylistic level, it blurs the motion of the figure onscreen at their peripheries, thereby dissecting the perfect figure-ground dichotomy of HD quality cameras and images. These sorts of high-def "horrible images," says Reygadas (Lim 2013), "go further than the actual eye can see" and are therefore far from real perception as such. The intention with *Post Tenebras Lux* was to revisit and reinterpret the aesthetics of reality (Reygadas in Lim 2012) and the lens is a stylistic means that helped the director accomplish his aims.

Philosophically, a more accurate cinematographic perception of reality would also be more attuned to the levels of perception which exclude the human as visual object. In some films, the narrative motivation calls for such shots but Reygadas would prefer to focus on landscapes, non-human animals, or pieces of nature that serve no other purpose than to be eye-pleasing. This tendency is consistently employed in Reygadas's other features as well. It is this lack of a human character in the frame that again commands a sensuous engagement with *Post Tenebras Lux*. Indeed, this is how de Luca describes Gus Van Sant's visionary realism in *Gerry* (2002), citing the film's "disdain for anthropomorphic dimensions" (2014: 175). The prologue of *Post Tenebras Lux* serves as an example of such a distain.

Figures 1.3-1.4 Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

In the opening scene the refracted lens of the Steadicam occasionally seems to take Rut's point-of-view. The shot is low, at the perceptual level that the infant can encounter the playful dogs firsthand. The shakiness of the camera accentuates this POV-shot, particularly when there are reverse-shots between Rut's POV and that of a cow or dog, or when the dogs run around and avoid bumping into Rut/the camera-operator. After some minutes of exchange between what we think to be POV shots and shots featuring Rut in frame as the central object, a long shot of the animals has Rut enter the right of the frame unannounced, disrupting our assumption that we were viewing Rut's POV and our certainties about camera position(s). In Craig Epplin's observations (2012: 299), in Reygadas's films the camera often appears to line up with a character's gaze only to then deny us their POV as it drifts back to reveal them or, as I observe here, has the character enter the frame to our surprise. Writing on *Japón*, but similarly applicable here, Epplin argues that Reygadas's camera erases the human subject and questions the human subject's centrality in narrative film. We see this in the opening of *Post Tenebras Lux* and in many other scenes as well: e.g., our introduction to Seven, the many shots of dogs and trees, a (CGI) devil, the frequent use of post-action lag, and the long take of waves

gliding up to the sand in the beach episode. Reygadas's semi- or quasi-documentary aesthetic transcends the boundaries of the camera as factual observer of the (human) world, as well as transcends the perceptual treatment of the point-of-view shots, which are more often used to establish a direct relationship between character and spectator.

To further this effect Reygadas consistently employs hand-held cameras or a Steadicam. Moreover, instances in which a shot would normally cut and bring us to a new camera setup to thereby coincide with narrative momentum, Reygadas's shots frequently work against the logic of narrative or character identification and challenge our spatial awareness of where the characters are going and what they are getting into. In *Battle in Heaven*, the camera follows Marcos's trek as he pushes through persons in a crowded subway station; the camera tracks right through a subway turnstile and eventually loses track of him altogether. In the 2012 feature, we travel alongside Juan and Natalia in the sauna as they search the hallways for the Duchamp room. As they enter the Hegel room, the camera pursuing them continues directly inside. The camera moves forward at waist-height, inches from one patron's flaccid penis, then breaks the threshold of the room and to a medium shot of a young girl who gazes at what we can only guess to be the new guests, Juan and Natalia. Behind her is yet another bored older couple. But with this tracking motion our attention is shifted as Juan and Natalia disappear from the frame, sidestepping to the left. The protagonists' and spectators' spatial awareness of the room is not established before we lose contact with them. Reygadas does not grant us this ordinariness in our cinematic experience.

This constantly shifting dynamic of spatial, temporal, and perspectival co-ordinates intertwines "the levels of actor, character, and audience," writes William Rowlandson (2006: 1033) on *Japón*, and we should add to these three levels that of the

relationship between spectator's body and Sobchack's non-anthropomorphic concept of the "film's body." The film's body, as I wrote in the Introduction, is the spectator's phenomenological experience of the cinematic apparatus. Unlike the apparatus of psychoanalytic film theory, the film's body participates in a relationship with the human spectator; the film's body expresses itself – with zooms, edits, etc. – and we perceive its expression. Meaning is drawn by the spectator from this exchange. Consider a wandering camera theorized as an aspect of the film's body and that of a humanly-enabled camera that exists not as cinematic expression but for narrative economy. The latter should retain its interest in the film's protagonists, aid spectators in their comprehension and engagement with a human-centered story, and represent something. Reygadas has called these aesthetics "filmed theatre" (Higgins 2005). His images instead express themselves with obvious curiosity and with little regard for bridging the gap between spectators' desire for narrative momentum and character identification. Cinema returns to its fundamental capacity, as argued by Fernand Léger and Tom Gunning, and as I understood Merleau-Ponty also to be arguing.

For Jennifer M. Barker, the spectator's body and film's body both orient themselves in space with musculature, a given set of physical co-ordinates that come near to and are spatially separate from other persons and things. She writes, "[w]e comport ourselves by means of arms, legs, muscles, and tendons whereas the film does so with dollies, camera tracks, zoom lenses, aspect ratios, and editing patterns…. We mark our position in relation to space by such things as shoulders and hips, whereas the film's frame is marked off by the edges of the celluloid strip, viewfinder, screen, and theatre" (Barker 2009: 77). She invokes Merleau-Ponty's concept of *ek-stase*, defined again as a transcendence whereby one can consciously activate the body to function in the world

and carry out projects (2009: 76). With Reygadas's wandering camera we will see how activating the body for particular goals serves both film's body and spectator's body.

Barker argues that long tracking shots allow spectators to empathize with the film's body's musculature. During the sauna sequence in *Post Tenebras Lux*, with the lens nearly brushing the flaccid penis and then crossing the threshold of the Hegel room, we watch and feel as the camera comports itself in the world and finds what interests it, i.e., the young girl. As the Steadicam traipses through the soccer field with Rut, in the bobbing close-up of Seven atop his donkey near the beginning of the film, or when we move alongside Juan and Natalia in the sauna, "we feel those movements in our muscles because our bodies have made similar movements: we have whipped our heads from side to side, moved slowly and stealthily, and stretched out our bodies in ways that are distinctly human but inspired by attitudes like those that inspire the film's movements" (Barker 2009: 75). These are but a few examples of the ways in which *Post Tenebras Lux* is attuned to multiple levels of perception, in filmmaking and its processes of expression and projection, and in spectators' empathetic experience of the audio-visual displays. The cinematography functions like the camera of an avant-garde filmmaker, rather than of strictly narrative cinemas.

We can also consider the levels of perception with reference to aspect ratios. *Silent Light* was shot in the now standard widescreen aspect ratio. The open plains of the Chihuahua province in Mexico called for such a presentation. Reygadas's camera would pan across these landscapes, taking its time to return us to a human character, and the narrative at hand. *Post Tenebras Lux* adopts the 4:3 ratio. The mountainous landscapes surrounding the city of Tepoztlán necessitated the return to the Academy ratio, as it was important to feel the heights of the mountains, and be overwhelmed by the grandeur of

the trees (Reygadas in Lim 2012). And when the Academy ratio is employed, we cannot but think of Yasujirō Ozu's films which employ this aspect ratio alongside low camera placements so as to come as close to possible to human perception.

The film's body comports itself with aspect ratios, cranes, dollies, and tracks – what Barker called the musculature. But while humans are rooted to the ground and limited in our movements to tilts of the head up and down, or a walk forward which requires a gaze straight ahead, the camera has a freer range of mobility, reminding "us that we're not as competent, fast, graceful, and powerful as the film's body" (Barker 2009: 110). When Reygadas shoots the tallness of the trees with his refracted lens from what I suspect to be a dollied crane, while the dolly tracks forward the camera's gaze is to the right. Such a look in motion is a difficult bodily movement for humans; it would mean sidestepping left and looking straight-ahead (while not running into anything on our left), or walking straight while looking right (while not running into any oncoming persons or objects). Provided the aspect ratio and movement, I suggest we come to the fore ourselves and discover our bodies in this shot. Since the art's inception, the wind in the trees has been a standard trope for acknowledging the power of the filmic medium to present reality. Van Sant (de Luca 2014: 170) and Reygadas are no exception, but the latter does so in order to heighten spectators' awareness of their own bodies. Lingis writes of his favorite trees (1996: 62):

> When we look at the sequoias, our eyes follow the upward thrust of their towering trunks touching the sky and their sparse branches fingering the mist. We comprehend this uprightness of their life not with a concept-generating faculty of our mind but with the uprighting aspiration in our vertebrate organism which they awaken. Our postural axis turned up before them emanates about itself a body image which is shaped not as the visual form our body would turn to a fellow-human standing at normal human viewing-distance but as our body looks to the sequoias.

Our gaze in the 4:3 format, combined with the humanly impossible view from the dollied crane, turns us back on ourselves. The trees stand erect and the film engages our perception and up-down axis. This coming to the fore of ourselves is how Marks describes her preferred mode of film experience. With the reversible exchange between film and viewer, the deployment of haptic visuality for haptic images, "I come to the surface of myself…, losing myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be possessed" (Marks 2002: 184). Indeed, haptic images are akin to a new discovery, coming across a thing for the very first time (Marks 2002: 178).

I would describe Reygadas's cinema as a discovery. We know not what awaits us as every shot and sequence generates a different experience of both the film's body, and by extension, our own. This is unlike the recent cinema of Malick, a director whose work critics tend to liken to *Post Tenebras Lux*. In *The New World* (2005), a film set in the 17th century about the colonization of the territory now known as Virginia, Malick required the actors to generate a haptic experience for the audience. Reaching the shores of new land, characters were compelled to bring their eyes skyward or gaze about in wonder; some would run their hands across the trees and elements, and this effort was employed to set in motion, by association, the senses of spectators. This façade of discovery was unnecessary, however, given Marks's theory.[29] Reygadas does not resort to projecting the tactile cinematic experience empathetically through character's limbs; the film's body that makes up this work called *Post Tenebras Lux* solicits haptic visuality through purely cinematic means, not theatrical ones.

One more cinematographic example will advance my argument about the film's body and the spectator's body. Consider another perceptually impossible view for human

[29] Cf. Koehler 2013, an excellent article dealing with the numerous problems in Malick's recent output.

bodies – the camera mounted on the front of Juan and Natalia's speeding vehicle. In our first viewing of this episode, the one I named "a day of national celebration" in the synopsis, we do not know from whose vehicle we are looking and who we are looking at. The prior sequence ends then rapidly cuts to a mounted camera which follows a motorcyclist for a minute, winding down a hilly road (we never learn who the motorcyclist is). Then, Reygadas cuts to the inside of the vehicle and shoots briefly from behind the windshield, and eventually we see our protagonists. Similar to the dollied crane, with a mounted camera "The film throws us out and gives us nothing to hang onto." Barker continues, "In these moments [of mounted camera shots], we go where even fearless drivers and pilots would not dare go; we are riding without seat belts, without windshields, without any protection at all" (2009: 113). There is a kind of action here, more akin to an amusement park ride than a contemplative art film. My point is that both crane and mounted camera shots operate according to a certain logic, namely, to present what is not available to ordinary perception but nevertheless solicits an engagement with spectators' own bodies.[30] Whether we see the trees in the flesh or mediated through Reygadas's dreamy lens, or experience speed from the front of a moving-vehicle firsthand or on a screen, "[p]erception is ordered by the ordinances things realize, and we as perceivers realize what we are through the styles of postural integration they induce in us and in the images they project back on us of the way we look, hear, and

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[30] Rudolf Arnheim shared this description of the cinematic experience ([1933] 2011: 287): "Our eyes are not a mechanism functioning independently of the rest of our body. They work in constant cooperation with the other sense organs. Hence surprising phenomena result if the eyes are asked to convey ideas unaided by other senses. Thus, for example, it is well known that a feeling of giddiness is produced by watching a film that has been taken with the camera traveling very rapidly. This giddiness is caused by the eyes participating in a different world from that indicated by the kinesthetic reactions of the body, which is at rest. The eyes act as if the body as a whole were moving; whereas the other senses, including that of equilibrium, report that it is at rest."

feel to them" (Lingis 1996: 63). We encounter the trees or a winding road but according to Lingis, via Merleau-Ponty, we also encounter ourselves.

Cinematography, for Reygadas, plays the same role as editing and story-telling; the seemingly arbitrary selection of shots, persons, and objects works in tandem with the seemingly fragmentary and incomplete selection of episodes described in the prior section. This leads us back to the description of embodiment Merleau-Ponty developed, i.e., its pre-personal and anonymous existence. With a narrative unfolding in the manner befitting itself, its own designs as it were, and a cinematography which attempts to replicate the conditions of human perception on the one hand and bring new perceptions to us on the other, we have evidence for Reygadas's claim that his cinema aims for "all the levels of perception." I now turn to the often unacknowledged levels, dream and fantasy.

A slow dream, "as if" it were real

What grants the dream and fantasy sequences similar immanent, cinematographic properties as the present-tense images? How do we perceptually and sensuously experience them "as if" they are real and as legitimate narrative devices for the characters in the film? Reygadas's film has no time for indications of *mise en abîme*, as a dream-within-a-dream or un-/subconscious processes. Rather, the film is better described via the concept of immanence, or "present-ness" as Sobchack illustrated; the dream episodes are immanent expressions of characters' body, not "out-of-body" or disembodied events. Sobchack's concept of "sensual catachresis" will help to describe the spectator's immanent experience of these altered states of embodiment.

In response to the question as to why the refracted lens was used, Reygadas answered – not getting "too analytical about it" – that it cinematically projects how we might perceive a dream (Koehler 2013: 15). The seven-minute opening sequence of Rut playing in the field with dogs and cows is a dream, but we do not know it is a dream until Natalia asks her child about it in the film's first episode proper. When the mother awakes to the child's cries, the former asks whether her daughter again dreamt again of the animals, thus we know the prologue's status was likely a nighttime reverie. What do we make of the rest of the scenes shot with the refracted lens? Clearly these are not all dreams. And what do we make of the scenes which are projections into the future?

Before Juan is killed, the film presents what appear to be flash-forwards of the family: at a Christmas party and at the beach, for example. We know they are flash-forwards because the children are older and the adults' hairstyles have changed. By the end of the film, it seems probable that these are not exactly dreams but fantasies of Juan, Natalia, Eleazar, or Rut, or all four, or combinations thereof, or simply the projection of what a nuclear family might look like from no one person's perspective in particular. Yet, we only learn of their status as future projections at the end of the film when Juan has died from his gun wound. Whether we engage with the episodes as dreams, fantasies, or projections of a future which could not possibly exist, what we see takes place at the levels of immediate perception and has a tangible and present-ness. Thus film critics have cited Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) as another influence on *Post Tenebras Lux* despite their dissimilar genres. As the scholars in the feature-length video essay *Room 237* (Rodney Ascher, 2012) elaborate, the characters Jack, Wendy, and Danny all live through horrors and hallucinations that are impossible to verify as really existing, and this verification applies to spectators as well. To discuss one spectatorial experience of *Post*

Tenebras Lux, it is necessary to first establish a phenomenological account of sleep and dreams.

According to Lingis, sleep is different from a coma. In our sleep we maintain a contact with the perceptual levels, our tasks, and our projects which need to begin again when we awake. Our dreams, however, are not merely the daily residues hypothesized by Sigmund Freud: the dream-images are strange and fascinating, projecting their own perceptual, tactile, and sexual depths (Lingis 1996: 108-109). The dream is spatially and temporally unstable and episodic, series of blurry images which conceal and reveal the confounding experience of embodiment. A dream could be described as the obstinate state of our body, not a ready-to-hand and practicable field as in ordinary everydayness, but the uncanny experience of the body as present-to-hand. Such an analogy echoes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of the body in the moment and the habit body. When practicing new bodily movements, such as dancing, one becomes aware of the body as a thing that can disagrees with our mental preparations for it; on the other hand, dancing is a real possibility because we have habitualized the movements of walking (Russon 2003: 29-31).

For example, we run and flail in our dreams, sometimes without much success; we are maimed and wounded, sexually excited and emotionally distressed, and each of the physical exchanges or emotional moods of our dream-life can rouse us from our slumber. The dream ties itself to the waking state. Merleau-Ponty writes, "the world obsesses us even during sleep, and it is about the world that we dream" (Lingis 1996: 112, quoting Merleau-Ponty). Every practicable field (bodily expression directed outward) and unpracticable field (bodily and conscious states directed inward) of perceptual expression and projection exists in the same world, thus for the dreamer, his or her nighttime reveries

or daytime fantasies exist as one level among the many. For Lingis and Merleau-Ponty, this "one-world hypothesis" means that there is not "one universal set of geometrical dimensions upon which the spaces opened in dreams and erotic obsessions can be measured. These spaces are absorbed into the geography of the practicable world, 'as the double images merge into one thing, when my finger stops pressing upon my eyeball'" (Lingis 1996: 112, quoting Merleau-Ponty).

The dream sequences that populate the cinemas offer something different than Merleau-Ponty's one-world hypothesis. Most films indicate a dream from its diegetic present. The standard trope is to fade into a dream as a character slowly shuts their eyelids, or to sharply cut from a dreamy event to a character's startled awakening, punctuated by close-ups of the eyes opening or a gasp for breath. In films such as Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), the dream is signified by the shift to soft focus and slow motion. The clear separation between waking and dreaming is relinquished in *Post Tenebras Lux*. As part of its efforts to evoke sensuous experiences in its spectators, this film presents the immanence of the dream as both an embodied experience and an uninterrupted practicable field of perceptual awareness. Indeed, if we accept the director's claim – the lens perceives "as if" in a dream – this dreaminess (or fantasy of a projected future) works alongside other aspects of the film's body, including the cinematography, the slow pace of the episodes, the events therein, and the consistent use of the "hyperbolic long take" (de Luca 2014).

The sequences of *Post Tenebras Lux* seem to extend indefinitely and the shots therein withstand the command to cut, thereby providing the time required for spectators to explore objects, persons, and landscapes before altering the camera setup. We see an attempt by the filmmaker to explore cinematic perception attuned to human perception (in

our continuous and uninterrupted stream of sensuous perception of the world). Reygadas, alongside many other internationally renowned art cinema directors such as Tsai Ming-liang, Abbas Kiarostami, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, and Hou Hsiao-hsien, is part of a recent production trend embarking upon aesthetics of slowness. The turn to digital filmmaking has contributed to this proliferation of slow cinema. What is the value of this new brand of cinema? Matthew Flanagan (2008) hints at some of the activities involved in watching such a feature: contemplation, relaxation, "panoramic perception."[31] Romney contends that slow cinema helps to establish mood rather than plot, and intensifies our reception of temporality (James 2010, quoting Romney). Yvette Bíró argues (2006) for the fullness of this minimalist cinema, which has the appeal of a more "universal vision" on the level of sensation. To sum up critics' and theorists' praise, despite the uneventfulness of story and plot there is nevertheless more taking place in these films than in other trends, Hollywood, independent, or otherwise.

Slow cinema aims at a sensuous experience for spectators, its long takes perceptively illustrating real time passing in both the diegesis and at the level of the viewer's body. De Luca writes about *Gerry* (2014: 183), similarly applicable to *Post Tenebras Lux*, "Onscreen for minutes in overstretched shots, these images resist signification, being conveyed as heightened sensible presences. Here, the long take provides the view with plenty of time to study the phenomenal, textural, tactile, in short, the sensory-material qualities these landscapes radiate." The long takes and slow episodes of *Post Tenebras Lux* may not have a strong narrative motivation, but the extended experience of the film's temporality, equalized as it is across the film's episodes, suggests that these sequences all exist on the same plane of reality. Further, by not clearly

[31] Cf. Keathley 2006: 41-49, on panoramic perception.

demarcating the dream or fantasy of the episode, the (non-)event depicted in a given episode presents the literalness of the viewed. The consistent style employed throughout suggests Merleau-Ponty's one-world hypothesis. Although varying in intensities, the events and episodes form a description of the phenomenological subject whose bodily and mental organization does not differentiate, in a Cartesian mode, between mental and physical experiences – dream, fantasy, and desire are part of embodied existence. If we agree with Barker's argument that we empathize with the film's body, my provocative claim is that Reygadas allows us *to feel* dream and fantasy and desire, or at least feel "as if" we perceive them.

The immanence of these dream or fantasy episodes resonates with Sobchack's argument that critics and theorists resort to the phrase "the film [shot, scene, or sequence] felt 'as if' it were real" because language lacks a better one. In her phenomenology of film experience, it is no longer necessary to posit a hierarchy of the senses. Thus being "touched" by the film – when not "actually" being touched – is not metaphorical. Sobchack demonstrates how all the senses are ignited in the film experience, or in Barker's terms, we feel the reversible exchange of empathy between film's body and our body – the immanent although diegetically unreal episodes of *Post Tenebras Lux* work in the same way.

Sobchack develops the concept of sensual catachresis for examining our relationship to cinema. Catachresis is a "false or improper metaphor;" "'it mediates and conflates the metaphoric and the literal' and is used 'when no proper, or literal, term is available'" (Sobchack 2004: 81, quoting Shiff). Sobchack's examples include the "head" of a pin or the "arm" of a chair. Thus when a film critic contends that a shot felt "as if" it were real, that critic is reflecting upon himself and his body to find the appropriate

relationship between his sensuous experience and that which cannot be sufficiently literalized. With sensual catachresis, in "trying to describe this complex reciprocity of body and representation, our phrases turn back on themselves to convey the figural sense of that experience as literally physicalized" (Sobchack 2004: 82).

Post Tenebras Lux, through its formal and narrative qualities, legitimizes the often unexplored realities of being-in-the-world, such as dreams and hallucinations and we can better understand the film and three sequences in particular via the concept of sensual catachresis. Reygadas attempts to bring the figuratively real of a desire into the literally, although imagined, real for Natalia. The sex sequence does not operate as metaphor or symbolism, but immanently exists for her "as if" real, i.e., the embodied reality of fantasizing and desiring. Her sexual problems with Juan, revealed in a later sequence, suggest the prior orgy apart from her husband is an impossible yet desired event. The focus on the tactile elements in this sequence, such as the varying textures of flesh, further demonstrates the haptic visuality the screen demands. The continuous stream of embodied experience is also addressed in the shift from Rut's dream to conscious state. When she awakens in tears and tries to bring her dream to language, we see and hear her struggle with phrases to describe the lingering resonance of the immanent experience. Rut's playful dream turned thunderstorm continues to live itself in her consciousness. And finally, the collective but imaginary flash-forward episodes of the family at a Christmas party and at the beach are not symbolic representations of what a nuclear family could be – these are fantasized futures of ordinary everydayness, or as Stanley Cavell calls it, the film medium's power to show what is otherwise unseen to our everyday lives, i.e., the ordinary (Macarthur 2014: 92-95). These banal futures are latent in Juan, Natalia, Eleazar, and Rut, and were awaiting realization. However, in a kind of

reverse melodrama similar to Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (*Irréversible*, 2002) or François Ozon's *5x2* (2004), Juan is murdered and therefore these episodes will only ever exist as latent potentialities of an ordinary everydayness the family should have had the privilege to partake in. If we follow de Luca's claim that the long take effects spectators sensually, that the cinema is a haptic and tactile experience, and the analysis of the cinematic apparatus and embodied spectatorship is best described as a reversible exchange between film and viewer's body, what we are sensing in *Post Tenebras Lux* is the sensation of a dream "as if" it were real. Sobchack aptly concludes, "In the film experience the nonverbal mediation of catachresis is achieved literally by the spectator's lived body in *sensual* relation to the film's *sensible* figuration" (Sobchack 2004: 83).

Documentary, the Profilmic Event, and CGI

With the analyses of cinematography and the levels of reality depicted in the film, we can turn to its cultural critiques. Reygadas has much to express regarding class and race, sexual difference, human relationship with animals, and death.

Performative documentary

Class and race figure into the narrative of *Post Tenebras Lux*. Besides the narrativized class and race conflicts in my brief synopsis, they are simultaneously articulated in the style of the film. In Reygadas's *oeuvre*, as well as in Breillat's films, I find the exploration of the profilmic event to be one of the most intriguing aspects. Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell (2012: 333) define the profilmic event as that which is set before the camera, including but not limited to sets, lighting, and the actors. This is contrasted with what appears in frame or what appears to the spectator for the purposes of narrative

economy. The directors under investigation in this dissertation, similar to those of documentary filmmakers, try "to preserve the integrity of real-space and time of the profilmic event." For some film critics this is a cause for concern.

Paul Julian Smiths claims (2003, italics mine) that in *Japón*, "Reygadas is not documenting the real… he is *intruding* on it," a phrase that echoes Slavoj Žižek's claim regarding the experience of watching pornography, a discussion I take up in the third chapter: the form and the performers breach the fantasy space of the viewer. Smith is suspicious of whether the octogenarian woman was informed enough about her sexual performance. And similarly in *Battle in Heaven*, Smith doubts (2005) if the non-professional actors really knew what they were getting into when they signed on to sexually perform. De Luca deconstructs Smith's concern, stating that "by insinuating that these are people unable to take responsibility for their decisions, the critic has taken up, through his words, the condemned superiority he attributed to the film director in the first place. The power relations that the critic aims to dismantle are, conversely, reinforced" (2014: 90). Additionally, the numerous interviews with Reygadas and his actors address the problems raised by critics such as Smith.[32] Ethics should always be on a filmmaker's radar to some degree, and as I explore in my chapter on Breillat's relationship(s) with her actors and actresses, at the same time we cannot treat the performers as victims.[33] More importantly for my purposes, in his viewing of *Battle in Heaven*, Smith observes what I will address in this section: Reygadas's films' "confusion of life and art" (Smith 2005). This intrusion of the real and the confusion of life and art operate on several different

[32] Reygadas in Higgins 2005: "…I don't feel any responsibility towards [Marcos, Ana, and Bertha Ruiz], because I believe in individual responsibility…. Some people say that there is risk of exploitation. I don't think this idea respects the fact that people are intelligent and grown up." See also the interview with Reygadas in Mushkadiz on the Palisades Tartan DVD.

[33] By framing his discussion of the film in ethical terms, Smith also highlights my thesis about the nature of genre and spectatorship, mainly spectatorship as a collection of images that matter for the individual.

registers in *Post Tenebras Lux*. When the real intrudes it does so through the bodies of human persons, often in ecstatic states.

Reygadas firmly believes in casting non-professional actors in his films. He was very outspoken about this in his interviews proceeding *Battle of Heaven*. Reygadas claimed that a "naturalistic" acting or faithful representations of a character are incorrect criteria of judgment; he repeatedly invokes his desire for "the actual human presence," portraying actor-characters as they are in the world. It is like choosing someone for a photographic still or painted portrait, he says (Marlow 2006). He claims more recently, "For the children to be there really powerfully, it had to be my children. Otherwise they would be representations of children" (Lim 2013). By keeping a distance from representation, Reygadas rethinks the relationship between real and fiction as these persons onscreen, in the flesh – in their vulnerability, anxiety, and bursts of courage – perform a particular scene. In the third chapter on *Battle in Heaven* and Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* (2002), I examine the distinction between acting and performing. For now I am occupied with the distinctions amongst avant-garde cinemas, art cinemas, and documentary aesthetics.

In de Luca's terms (2014: 75), "the phenomenological presence of the spontaneous real" emerges with Reygadas's casting choices, particularly with children. *Post Tenebras Lux* continues to work with the profilmic event, a formal trait the director has been editing into his films since beginning his practice. Several examples stand out: Rut's presence resembles that of the children of *Silent Light* who could not help but stare into the camera; the drunk man who hassles Juan and Natalia similarly cannot restrain himself from acknowledging the technology, his look through the fourth wall resembling the (fictional?) workers on display in *Japón* who mention that the men from the film do

not give them anything to drink; and the numerous shots of anonymous persons and animals eating, a document of carnality if there ever was one.[34] Indeed, in an effort to film persons as such, Reygadas recognizes the stock we take in the preparation and consumption of meals. John Russon maintains (2003: 99) that "Our sense of ourselves as human, our sense of cultural identity, and our sense of familial identity are all typically invested in these primitive bodily practices of ingestion." By excessively documenting the food ritual for our visual interests, Reygadas solicits a "concern for the actual human presence" of the person onscreen (Marlow 2006); we see how they exist in their world, with their complex familial and cultural identities on display. De Luca names this the "ethnographic quality" of Reygadas's work. It is here that we may locate the documentary aesthetic in the film. This aesthetic is unlike the documentary aesthetic of contemporary cinema's "shaky cam." The shaky cam cinematography implies a level of authenticity to an otherwise fictional narrative, but Reygadas's foray in the documentary genre has more to do with expression and presentation than it does with camerawork.

[34] Reygadas's short film, *This is My Kingdom* (*Este es mi reino*, 2010), is an earlier attempt to work with food, festival, and documentary aesthetics.

Figures 1.5-1.8 Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

The concern with human presence in *Post Tenebras Lux*, whether in Rut, the drunken man, or the persons eating, exemplifies Reygadas's aesthetic. He has said, "It is absolutely essential that things need to be real and not simulated…. [I]f Marcos [in *Battle in Heaven*] has to get naked, I don't want to simulate his penis. I mean, if he's going to eat a sandwich, I don't want him to pretend…. [I]f I could have simulated [nudity] with an extra, without harming the film, I probably would have simulated it" (Marlow 2006). But a simulation would have harmed the film, similarly any limitation on the spontaneity of the children, or the drunken men. There is another drunk earlier in *Post Tenebras Lux*, at the Christmas party, but this one is a bourgeois. It appears that these men, both the self-proclaimed poor man and the bourgeois man, are not actors and they are very drunk. Fernando Solórzano challenges Reygadas for allowing non-professional actors from lower classes to get drunk. The director asserts that those who feel he has exploited non-actors also "don't know how to treat others like equals," and then challenges Solórzano for not noticing that the bourgeois man was also drunk (2013: 52). I take his statement to be more than a defense of what and who he chose to film – it is an indicator of his investment in a style of documentary filmmaking. The poor man and the bourgeois man

are equally represented as drunks, as expressions of situated Mexicans. Thus for Reygadas there is an urgency of the profilmic event that extends beyond a pursuit of cinematic authenticity, verisimilitude, or a concern for the actual human presence. Presence is significant only if it is an expression of something, of a director's idea.

In this film Reygadas approaches the status of documentary precisely because this confusion of fiction and reality "asserts itself as a purely sensible presence" (de Luca 2014: 60). Although Reygadas does point to the limits of my approach here (Koehler 2013: 13), noting that "everything is fictionalized, but they [the scenes and ideas] come from real sources," I carry forward the clear divide between actual events filmed and those performed for Reygadas's camera. What I am interested in is the sensible presence of persons and things, for the director's aesthetic choices are employed for social, cultural, or political investigation and critique.

Bill Nichols has written prolifically about documentary films. In the early 1990s, he noticed a new kind of documentary mode emerging, which he names "performative." This mode of documentary does not establish a referent; it is often the case for documentary films that some kind of historical event be indexed or a look at a particular reality is undertaken in an effort to glean the truth. The performative documentary straddles the line between fiction and documentary and establishes the viewer as the "primary referent," putting "the referential aspect of the message in brackets, under suspicion" (Nichols [1994] 2011: 675, 677). Nichols continues, "These films address us, not with commands or imperatives necessarily, but with a sense of emphatic engagement that overshadows their reference to the historical world" (2011: 675). Even if the documentary is about a particular historical incident, it does not attempt to present what "really happened" so much as the filmmaker endeavours to poetically express a collective

memory of that incident, intersecting various aspects such as race, class, nation, and so on (Nichols 2011: 678). Thus performative documentaries are less indexical than they are iconic – they are freed from the "discourses of sobriety," able to bring all the powers of cinema to bear on their film (Nichols 2011: 679-680).[35]

Is this not Reygadas's undertaking as well? Although he is clearly working in the realm of fiction, the blurred boundary of documentary cinema unveils itself throughout his *oeuvre*. In *Post Tenebras Lux*, the object of study is less an event, an individual, or a site of struggle than it is class in Mexico as a social reality. It is not the statistically significant income discrepancies or crime rates that are on display; the documentary aesthetic of the film shows class consciousness without external verification (Nichols 2011: 678), what it *feels like* to be an upper or lower class citizen in 21st century Mexico. This is not to naively suggest, as Reygadas does above about "the actual human presence," that the onscreen individuals are appearing as such. Elizabeth Marquis reminds us that documentary performance is always mediated by the apparatus – "technological presence impinges on screen performance" (2013: 50). Nevertheless, in the scene addressed above, when the poor drunk man confronts Juan and Natalia about their status as "real" Mexicans, his expressions and spontaneity shine. The fact that he is really inebriated appears to justify his being on camera, for here we see a document of Mexico

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[35] Nichols defines discourses of sobriety as follows (1991: 3-4): "Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfiction systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, warfare – these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety since it is seldom receptive to 'make-believe' characters, events, or entire worlds (unless they serve as pragmatically useful simulations of the 'real' one). Discourses of sobriety are sobering because they regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, transparent. Through them power exerts itself. Through them things are made to happen. They are vehicles of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, desire and will. Documentary, despite its kinship, has never been accepted as a full equal." Examples can be heard in politicians' speeches, the depersonalization of scientific publications, the formality of the university lecture, and the authorial voice-overs of documentary films.

performed by Reygadas as an artist; in the performative documentary, according to Nichols, “we observe social actors who do not coalesce into characters” (2011: 680). The political dimension of the film is therefore not located in a story so much as documenting the profilmic event. For the class and race divisions to be clearly present, Reygadas invests his work with traces of the real, whether breaking the fourth wall, using long takes, or employing “social actors.”

Seven appears as a “social actor” when we are first introduced to him, an individual who may be playing his societal role as a fictional role for the film. Indeed, for non-Mexicans, his logging is perhaps part of life; but as Reygadas tells us in an interview, cited above, this sort of tree-cutting practice is frequent and thus quite damaging to the country’s ecological system. This sequence is not putting forward an argument but a suggestion – the performative documentaries “do not explain or summarize so much as imply or intimate,” and precisely what is implied or intimated is mostly up to the viewers to decide (Nichols 2011: 680, 683). Regardless of what they decide, there is a clear ethnographic dimension in Nichol’s description of the performative mode and in Reygadas’s cinema.

The ethnographic quality in this mode of documentary filmmaking is expanded to include filmic expressions of the rhythm inherent to differing modes of life: “Performative documentary seeks to evoke not the quality of people’s worldview but the specific qualities that surround particular people, discrete events, social subjectivities, and historically situated encounters between filmmakers and their subjects” (Nichols 2011: 680-681). Seven’s introductory sequence resembles Nichols’s description, and combined with the later scenes between this laborer and the bourgeois family, the film raises themes of classism, nationalism, and racism as questions regarding social subjectivities in

Mexico. Again, this is not an effort to address concrete individuals as such, but the "existential situatedness… of class consciousness" (Nichols 2011: 678).[36] Further, drawing on Nichols's previous quote once more, Reygadas visually asks himself what relationship he has with Mexico's social problems by turning to the art of fictional narrative filmmaking in an experimental mode – the film was shot on his estate and he originally thought himself and his wife suitable for the fictional bourgeois couple (Lim 2013). Thus the director is in dialogue with himself and with his geographical and social situation and each of his films depicts one small portion of Mexican life. His depictions are made all the more personal by casting his own laborers, acquaintances, friends, and family (Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 14).[37] This rescues Reygadas's comments on naively presentational modes of fictional filmmaking; the person is not onscreen as such, but a representation of Reygadas's interaction with social actors, class consciousness, and 21st century Mexico. I continue this examination of performers' presence in the third chapter. Asking actors to perform sexually further complicates my assessment of documentary aesthetics, social actors, and acting/performing modes.

Reygadas's style and recourse to the profilmic event – in casting non-professional actors, allowing his performers to become intoxicated, employing a documentary aesthetic – is infused with social and political concerns. It is not enough to note the content of a sequence and argue for its social or political significance; we must turn to aesthetics additionally to do justice to the director's attempt to navigate class conditions

[36] In a deleted scene early in the film, Seven helps Juan push his vehicle out of the mud. Seven is splashed with mud while Juan drives away clear. The symbolism is not very subtle, although Reygadas does not dramatize the event by having Seven make a big fuss over his dirty clothes. It is these types of class depictions, *Sight & Sound's* Quintin observes (2013: 75), without direct reference to the scene just mentioned, that make Reygadas and *Post Tenebras Lux* appear "ridiculous and condescending."
[37] Using persons close to him as actors is a common tactic for Reygadas. In *Japón* it was a friend of the family (Ferretis), and in *Battle in Heaven*, his father's chauffeur (Hernández).

in contemporary Mexico. When the fiction film imbues itself with a documentary real, the viewer too is charged to ethically implicate themselves into the real presented onscreen. Sobchack names this film experience "the charge of the real." For Sobchack (2004: 275), films which blur the divide of fiction and documentary establish that both fictional and real films are "constituted from the same worldly 'stuff.'" Thus a fictional film can, and often has, as much epistemological, social, cultural, and political truthfulness as a documentary work.

But there is more to the film than its visual depictions of class and race. Critics and scholars of *Post Tenebras Lux*, and Reygadas's *oeuvre* generally, focus too much on class and race and neglect the issue of sexual difference present in the film. Rosi Braidotti, paraphrasing Luce Irigaray's notion of sexual difference, defines the ethicality of the term as "[b]eing able to approach any other in full respect of his/her living singularity; respecting the presence and the boundaries, while moving and being moved by an other toward the recognition of our respective and irreducible differences" (1994: 133). The difficulty of practicing this ethics is presented in a number of scenes in Reygadas's recent film. In narrower terms, perhaps the issues of compulsory monogamy, feminine desire, and latent patriarchy in married couples are at play. Juan suffers from porn addiction, on the one hand placing the blame squarely on the internet and, on the other, blaming Natalia for never being in the mood. When the problem is broached earlier in the story, it is made as a passing remark, and never discussed again. The latter episode – the one in which a disagreement about the color of curtains turns into a heated battle about the possibility of ending the marriage – points to a latent sexism; Natalia must be *for* Juan when he is ready. The intrusion of the profilmic event appears again in the very long take of the husband berating his wife. She sits at a table in medium shot, the camera

stationary at the height of her nearly straightforward gaze. But she looks slightly to her right, at Juan standing by the kitchen counter, venting his sexual frustrations. This shot is the reverse of what we see in Seidl's documentary *Jesus, You Know* (*Jesus, Du Weisst*, 2003). In this film individuals stare almost directly at the camera and recite their prayers to Jesus. With this shot of Natalia, Juan confesses his own problems behind the camera's back, and she silently receives his accusations.

It is difficult to pinpoint what is wrong with their marriage. The verbally aggressive confrontation between the couple registers not in an argumentative, demonstrative, or even rational mode; as Nichols writes of the performative documentary, what is more significant is its intimations. This is a marriage of several years now sliding downward. Yet, the dialogue is fluff; Juan's typical accusations of frigidity are not exceptional. More interesting is Reygadas throwing a formal curve into this couple's scene, namely, the documentation of the evening has gaps in time. Earlier in the scene, while Natalia is washing dishes Juan playfully whispers to his wife that he will screw her tonight "in the ass." The sequence seems to continue uninterrupted, with a few edits and new camera setups, but the ensuing argument has Juan shout down at Natalia that she never wants sex, and that evening he had to insist three times before she agreed to anal intercourse. The film documents only one of those instances, therefore the truth of this claim is either suspect or, according to my reading, irrelevant since Reygadas is expressing a tone. The tone is further emphasized by the use of pathetic fallacy. During the couple's argument, the film cuts to a medium shot of Juan, and a window behind him shows the dark sky brightening with lightning flashes. Adding the pathetic fallacy has little to do with an authenticity or documentary real; Reygadas successfully employs this technique to express or intimate – in this scene between Juan and Natalia, a latent

gendered violence. There is a formal attempt, then, to draw spectators into an expressive version of truth and ethics, about sexual difference and sexism.

In both *Post Tenebras Lux*, and in my chapter on Breillat's *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur*, 2001) and *Sex is Comedy*, I spot a theoretically unexplored part of the film experience. As a selection of episodes which could be almost arranged at random, *Post Tenebras Lux* asks the spectator to visit and re-visit sequences to engage all the others. In the above scene between Juan and Natalia, we may return to the bathhouse sequence with the numerous bored patrons and verify my suspicion that the scene of Natalia's intense sexual pleasures is her desire immanently realized. When I hear Juan's testimony that his and Natalia's intimacy is a failure – that she consistently refuses his advances, that he has turned to internet pornography – I cannot help but think that something more and possibly transgressive is needed in terms of fulfilling Natalia's desire. As I mentioned in the synopsis, Juan's problems suggest that Natalia has problems as well. (Or, a husband's sexual problems are *ipso facto* also the wife's, insofar as sexual intimacy is a desired part of a healthy marriage.) In Natalia's sex scene, the husband first accompanies the wife through the halls and rooms of the bathhouse. The film does not reveal which partner brought the other to this place, but the focus of the sequence implies it was Natalia since she must take control of the situation, and she gains the sexual pleasure. This control is demonstrated by her responses to the other patrons who speak French; Juan, unfortunately, cannot speak the language himself. I claim that this language difference prohibits Juan from participating in the sexual transgressions and reinforces my hypothesis that this sequence, rather than existing as diegetically real, exists as a fantasy from the mind of Natalia and is an indicator of Reygadas's interest in issues of sexual difference.

As described above, the cut to a fragmented body in a sauna is sudden. Bored men and women sit in this steamy room while the sounds of men having intercourse can be heard nearby. An earlier rugby sequence appears in an altered form here. In the temporally out-of-joint rugby scene, young men are shouting and chanting, preparing for their physical sport. In the sauna, a tall man and a very short man confront the bored patrons, and the tall one asks, as if looking for some teammates to join his rugby match, "We need two guys… two men. We need two!", and someone from the action pesters the non-joiners, "Come on, come on!" He paces to and fro, his eyes wandering from patron to patron. It is a request to participate in a game, not in a sexual escapade. For Natalia, this is the world of men. When the couple enters the frame, clearly lacking the enthusiasm of these sporty males, Juan and Natalia resemble the other uninterested guests. Eventually the couple leaves this room of men in search of the more elusive Duchamp parlor.

Upon reaching the room – why this one and not the others is kept from us – Juan removes Natalia's towel and as she is laid on the bench we lose sight of him altogether. Natalia's intercourse is far removed from the boredom encountered in the other rooms. One man has intercourse with her surrounded by the others. An older woman, on whose lap Natalia's head rests, tells her she is made for this pleasure. Two younger women admit their jealousy for the pleasure Natalia is experiencing and one woman desires Natalia for herself. Everyone else in the room is either impotent or non-participatory, much like Juan, who has neither the time nor the stamina for his wife. In the close-up of Natalia's prolonged orgasm, Romney proposes (2013: 75) there is a sense of rapture, and I am reminded of Lingis's mystical description of the erotic encounter (2011: 103):

> In orgasmic pleasure the body loses its posture; its limbs, dismembered, roll about, moved by another, moved by the pleasurable abandon of another; one's fingers probe and penetrate blindingly not knowing what they are looking for. Dissolute, possessed, no

> longer in control of one's thoughts and values, no longer master of one's feelings, invaded by alien feelings, one loses one's skilled and social identity, one's responsibility, one's self-respect…. Yet this abandon is making love, from which come all the care, respect, compassion, mercy, devotion, grace, admiration, adoration, worship that rebound over beings in the world.

The long take of an orgasm in close-up and the quantity of bodies – slim, rotund, young, old, hairy, and trimmed – are further displays of the profilmic event. The camera fragments the bodies, does not turn aside when confronted with flaccid penises, tracks close-up to present "a sense of monstrosity" in any one of the fleshy forms (de Luca 2014: 64). The older woman's breasts press against Natalia's face, this woman's body overflowing the borders of the film's frame, a stylistic device frequently used in Reygadas's *oeuvre* (de Luca 2014: 61-65). The beads of water dripping from the bodies of the patrons and our extended gaze at the varieties of nude forms again exceed any kind of narrative motivation.

Once the scene is accepted as one of Natalia's desire immanently realized via a plot point (Juan berating her) and the film's form, we can begin to ask questions about what is precisely being performed, and why. Desire is so present in this scene, but its time and place are impossible to locate with certainty. My perhaps outlandish reading is that Natalia fantasizes about sexual pleasure unavailable with her husband; yet the husband walks with her to the Duchamp room, though there is no indication of either his enthusiasm or reluctance to give her to another man (or men and women). However, by including Juan in the scene merely as a presence, I claim that in Natalia's fantasy care and compassion for her husband remain. Lingis named this an erotic abandon. I would further claim that Juan's distance from Natalia's orgy stresses the changing status of compulsory monogamy. Juan is powerless against this slow change in contemporary relationships. In Natalia's fantasy, if he is unable to allow himself to join, he will simply disappear from

the scene. I will demonstrate in the following chapter on Breillat that pornographic representations in contemporary art cinema can, and do, make strong critiques of sexual and romantic norms. In both Reygadas and Breillat, then, style informs the political direction of a work.

Human animals, non-human animals

I have articulated the ways in which Reygadas is a director of the profilmic event. In each of his films, he attempts to maintain the integrity of locations, persons, and objects without transforming them into narrative devices. The director's aesthetics are often about presenting persons and things as they function in space and time. In contemporary fictional films, death cannot be part of the profilmic event: humans nor animals are killed in the service of drama, on the one hand, and on the other, even if this was permitted, it is difficult if not impossible to capture the precise moment of passing from existence to non-existence even in a non-fictional context. Unlike hard core pornography, which attempts to "'fix' the exact moment of the sexual act's involuntary convulsion of pleasure" by explicitly documenting the male orgasm (Williams [1989] 1999: 113), death has no such visible instant. Given the limits and challenges of bringing realistic death to narrative cinema, Reygadas has demonstrated a complex and varied relationship to cinematic dying, corpses, and the repercussions of death for the characters in his films. He has experimented with representations of the death of animals, shown the aftermath of a person's death, tried to replicate murder with a high degree of verisimilitude and, in his latest feature, briefly turned to computer-generated imagery to symbolically illustrate a suicide. Each attempt to bring dying to the screen further exemplifies the director's aim to

elicit sensuous responses in spectators, quite apart from emotional empathy (Laine [2011] 2013) or spontaneous eruptions of screams or tears (Williams [1991] 2009).

The death of an animal or animals in fictional cinema stands as a substitute for the impossible to represent human death. Sergei Eisenstein knew this better than any filmmaker of his time. In *Strike* (Стачка, 1924) he cut the execution of workers with the execution of cattle. Of this scene he wrote,

> I did this [finale of *Strike*], on the one hand, to avoid overacting among the extras from the labour exchange 'in the business of dying' but mainly to excise from such a serious scene the falseness that the screen will not tolerate but that is unavoidable in even the most brilliant death scene and, on the other hand, to extract to maximum effect of bloody horror. The shooting is shown only in 'establishing' long and medium shots of 1,800 workers falling over a precipice, the crowd fleeing, gunfire, etc., and all the close-ups are provided by a demonstration of the real horrors of the slaughterhouse where cattle are slaughtered and skinned. ([1924] 1988: 43)

On the one hand, we have "the business of dying," a dramatization that is often too unreal to generate the kind of cognitive engagement Eisenstein aimed to elicit in his spectators. On the other, the slaughter of the cattle served as a bloody replacement of what could not then be shown with verisimilitude in the cinema. This substitution of real death for fictional death posits differing ethical spaces. While the narrative momentum of *Strike* calls for the execution of the laborers, the indexical inscription of the murdered cattle carries no such narrative motivation. In an early essay, Sobchack discusses Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (*Le regle de jeu*, 1939) and observes that killing an animal onscreen, and contrasting that real death with the fictional death of a character, "violently, abruptly, punctuates fictional space with documentary space" (2004: 246-247). She argues that this intrusion of the real results in a greater sense of shock at the death of a rabbit than the fictionalized death of the human character later in the film. Her consciousness, which had theretofore been situated or accustomed to the irreal and fictional events, was abruptly

transformed "into a documentary consciousness charged with a sense of the world, existence, bodily mortification, and mortality, and all the rest of the real that is in excess of the fiction" (2004: 269).[38]

In a later essay, from which the second quotation was taken, Sobchack addresses the fiction/documentary blur in more detail. I began to explore similar terrain in the last section by turning to Nichols's writings on the documentary. Here, with reference to animal death, Sobchack claims that an animal is not of the same fictional order as a human character. Upon the event of the rabbit's death, its status as a "quasi character" quickly transitions to that of a real "once-living creature;" the animal dies in the fictional world while also dying for the production of fiction, "in *excess* and *outside of* the irreal fictional world, in the space of the real, where death counts because it is irreversible" (Sobchack 2004: 269-270). Animal death thus serves as an interruption of the fiction by the profilmic real. Given the inability to "fix" the moment of human dying, Catherine Wheatley writes (2011: 97), "the blow that strikes down the living [non-human] animal is the violent equivalent of the penetration shot, offering 'proof' of an act which shocks by its very reality." However, this functions on different registers for the classical film than the contemporary. Wheatley finds many examples of animal death in contemporary art cinema (2011: 97) and Reygadas's films fall in with this trend.

In Eisenstein's and Renoir's films, the purpose of this factual interruption is to grant the irreal an index which could then elicit similar bodily and cognitive responses from the spectator when they later witness the fictional death of a human character. Reygadas's most recent feature touches upon something different, i.e., a documentary

[38] I follow Sobchack (2004: 258n1) in the use of irreal, as a contrary to the real and not its direct contradiction, as in the "not real" of an impossible or fantastic fiction. In an irreal fiction "the real is 'bracketed' and put off to the side as a noncriterion of the work's meaning, coherence, or plausibility."

quality whereby the animals appear to exist for themselves. To make this point, it is helpful to contrast *Post Tenebras Lux's* animals with those of Reygadas's debut feature. In *Japón*, the unnamed protagonist, on his journey towards a remote village to contemplate and commit suicide, encounters a child with a wounded bird. The child states that he is not strong enough himself to pull the head from the bird's body to end its suffering. The man takes the animal and without hesitation accomplishes the task himself. A close-up of the head tossed to ground, the bird gasping for breath, concludes the scene. The significance of this act is clear.

Two more instances of animal death punctuate the film but function less powerfully as intrusions of the real. Prior to his final descent to the village, the man wakes one morning to the agonizing screeches of a pig, the animal on its way to becoming human food. He then enters a butcher shop and we see close-ups of various parts of animals. Again, both the slaughter of the pig and the remains symbolically illustrate the man's desired death. Further, in the middle of the film, in perhaps the most emotionally-driven sequence, on the threshold of committing suicide the man encounters the corpse of a horse. He raises his gun towards his own head but cannot pull the trigger. He collapses beside the horse while the viewer takes in a helicopter shot of the scene, and the sounds of Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Passion of St. Matthew* fill the non-diegetic air. It is important to note the use of rain in this scene, as pathetic fallacy, which sets the mood for the long shots and baroque music.

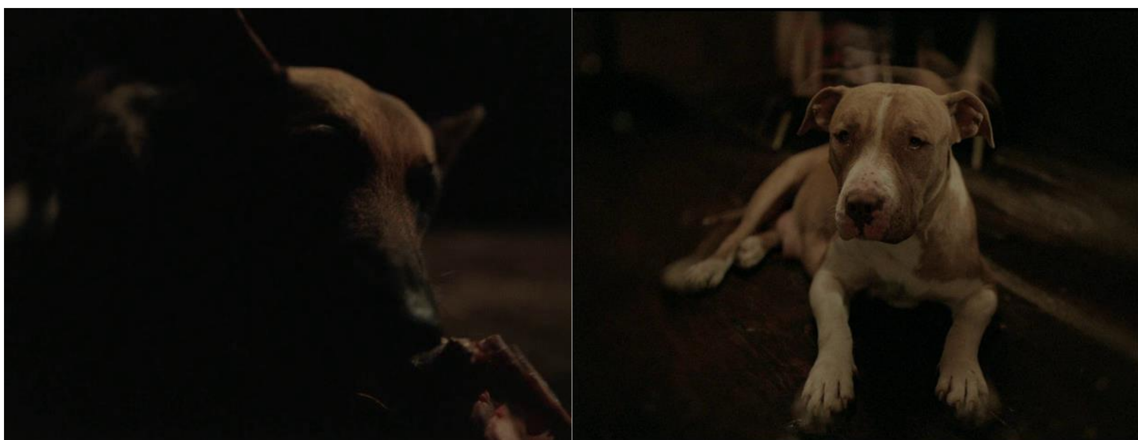
We should be reminded of Eisenstein's *October* (Октябрь, 1928) and the dead horse displayed therein, again as a stand-in for the human body, as well as the beating of the horse in Raskolnikov's dream in *Crime and Punishment* (Преступлéние и наказáние, 1866), symbolically illustrating his madness. For de Luca (2014: 40), the animal deaths in

Japón “underscore the film’s central themes: life, death and rebirth,” and poignantly exhibit the “fragility and finitude of physical life as captured by the film medium.” Thus we have two possible but not exclusive ways of receiving these scenes: we can interpret the animal deaths symbolically or, more productively, as an expression of film’s capacity not simply to represent but to present something real. As we have seen in the preceding sections, Reygadas runs conflicting modes of spectatorial response up against one another, either in the mode of fiction or documentary, and thereby blurs such rigid divides. For Sobchack, and this is what I also claim to be Reygadas’s aim, the shock of the conflict between one consciousness and the other registers at the level of the body. “My goal [in *Japón*] was to make people feel,” Reygadas provocatively stated in an interview from shortly after the film’s release (Gordon 2002). “Maybe not feel well, but not bad particularly either. I wanted to make them just feel something. Being numb is bad. Feeling something is good…. Animals die. We die. But we just don’t think about it. [The film] was for making people think about it for a while.”

Although there are neither animals killed nor any animal carcasses in *Post Tenebras Lux*, horses, cattle, and Reygadas’s dogs gallop, meander, and dart onscreen in a number of sequences. Rut introduces us to all three species in the opening episode, and here we should note that Reygadas devotes as much attention to the non-human animals as he does his daughter. Rut’s sense of wonder and spontaneity at these creatures translates into what the camera sees as well. Of all the animals, the dogs are given the most screen time, and we might want to say Martita is even given a minor role. We saw above how Martita was severely beaten by Juan for some undescribed transgression. Reygadas makes no attempt to shoot for verisimilitude here – a medium close-up of Juan frames only his punches and not the dog herself receiving the blows. We do hear the

painful yelps and whimpers of a dog as Juan inflicts his punishment. Thus while certainly not granting us real death, the scene attempts to convey a sense of the real through Juan's overwhelming brutality and the sounds of the dog being beaten. Sound artists therefore figure into this sense of the real. I link this extended scene of brutality and its audio track to those images and sounds of the slaughtered pig in *Japón*. In both scenes we are physically overwhelmed by the punishment or dying of animals.

Juan's punishment of Martita is significant for two sequences later in the film. After Juan and Natalia have concluded their argument about their deteriorating marriage, Juan goes to feed the dogs. He rests on the ground with them as they eat, a gesture of intimacy, and a close-up of one of the dogs ripping apart its meal may be Juan's POV (or perhaps not). Proceeding Juan's deathbed speech, this gesture of intimacy repeats itself. The protagonist's last words are a request to bring him the dogs. Reygadas then spends some long seconds with several of the animals, a clear expression of the profilmic real; the dogs look at something out of frame, likely Reygadas himself, instructing them to keep still. Each animal is given a ghostly doubling by the camera lens.



Figures 1.9-1.10 Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

In both *Japón* and *Post Tenebras Lux*, then, the animals do not merely serve as substitutes for an impossible to film (ethically and aesthetically) human death. Their status as quasi-characters begs the question of what constitutes the fiction/documentary divide, and in the case of the latter film, the intimacies possible between human and non-animal humans. As if Martita was a human member of the family, Juan stresses after her beating, "I always hurt… the one I love most." For Bazin, writes Jennifer Fay (2008), there is a strong relationship between realist aesthetics and the depiction of animals. One of the things Bazin loved most about cinema was precisely its capacity to place human and non-human animals together in unique, if not dangerous, framings. The tradition of Bazinian realism echoes in yet another way in Reygadas's work; both critic and director have warm places in their hearts for animals.

Fictional death: "Come play with us cos Dad has died already"

In Reygadas's four features, human death is represented in several forms. Ascen's death at the end of *Japón* shows her nephew's tractor overturned, scattering the pieces of her former house across a long stretch of road. The scene is six minutes in length, as the camera tracks forward on a railway line and rotates 360 degrees to the music of Avro Pärt, eventually coming to rest on Ascen's corpse. The impossibility of such an accident is exaggerated by the unconventional camerawork.

Silent Light shows us the moments prior to Esther's death and her funeral. In the former, during a torrential downpour, Esther leaps from her husband's slowly moving-vehicle and rushes into the woods. She props herself against a tree and weeps uncontrollably as rain splashes against the camera lens, yet another indication of Reygadas's investment in the profilmic event. Johan soon goes in search of his wife; he

carries her back to the side of the road and two Mexicans arrive to help. Rather than seeing the death itself, a doctor later informs Johan that his wife has passed away. In a nod to Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955), Esther is resurrected by a kiss from Marianne, her husband's mistress.

Battle in Heaven depicts death with a heightened display of verisimilitude. I would claim this likeness to reality was used because of the gravity of the depicted act. Marcos visits Ana as a last gesture before his willing arrest. She passionately kisses his lips, he does not respond similarly, and she tells him to leave. She then appears satisfied by his departure. The next scene has Marcos in the hall urinating in his pants. This is a revelatory moment for he returns to the apartment, fetches a knife, and makes a preliminary jab at Ana, gashing her arm badly; shocked by the action, she struggles briefly as Marcos plunges the weapon into her. His left arm wraps around her and there is less a stabbing motion than a forced entry. She collapses and blood pools all around the floor. Marcos retrieves his hanging coat, left behind after his first exit, and steps out the door.

The violence displayed in extreme cinema has an intensity that registers viscerally, totally unlike the spectacle of horror films. The gash on Ana's arm at first left me motionless and the attempted struggle to save her own life was an instant of anxiety for me. The tension of the scene, exhibited initially by Marcos's indifference to her kiss and subsequent urination, erupted into an intensely affective moment as the knife entered Ana's body. I received a similar sensation during the final shot of Breillat's *Perfect Love* (*Parfait Amour*, 1996), in which the lead male, in close-up, excessively stabs his lover who repeatedly humiliated him. This excessiveness, and the murder we had anticipated since the beginning of *Perfect Love* (it begins in grainy documentary style with police

asking the man to re-enact the crime), comes out from the screen to haunt us as we enter it to feel the images viscerally.

Marcos, psychologically unstable after the murder of Ana, joins the procession of individuals to church to celebrate the Lady of Guadalupe. He dons a head cover and attempts to trek the sidewalks and steps of the church on his knees. At one point he missteps and smacks his skull on the concrete ground. He does eventually reach the church and finds himself a seat in a pew. Bertha, Marcos's wife, soon finds him kneeling and inert (his head still covered and bloody). She nudges Marcos and he falls over, dead. Thus we again miss the precise moment of a character's passing from existence to non-existence.

Post Tenebras Lux has two deaths: Juan's and Seven's. The one follows the typical pattern of representation in Reygadas's *oeuvre* while the latter is expressed through CGI.

When Juan returns home to retrieve the forgotten stroller and other items, the camera positions itself at a distance from the family's household and maintains that distance for most of the scene. As Juan confronts Seven and his partner in crime, only then do we get a medium shot, used to establish a stronger sense of danger and urgency. Seven aims a gun at Juan, and Juan demands that Seven give him the gun back, i.e., the very weapon which will end Juan's life is his own. However, Seven does not return Juan's gun. The camera repositions itself to the location of the opening long shot. Seven chases Juan up the house's patio stairs and a shot rings out. The two criminals flee. A very odd thing happens next, a shot which is unlike Reygadas's familiar style: we cut to a view from the floor of the patio, tilted, which is likely Juan's perspective. The refracted lens shows us some trees in the distance. This POV shot demonstrates that Juan really

was shot, is immobile, and we hear Jarro's voice in the distance calling out for Don Juan. We have here a subtle critique of gun culture, and thus after Juan is shot and we leap ahead to a routine hunting party, Reygadas suggests that the proliferation of gun violence is due, in part, to the willingness of so many individuals to purchase guns. He mentions to Koehler (2013: 12) that the dominant color of the film is red-orange, the color of blood: "it's the color of Mexico for me, because Mexico is bleeding. More people died in Mexico in the last six years than in Afghanistan. Our land is bleeding."[39] So, with this cut to a hunting party, we await the result of the gunshot in a state of suspense. Juan does survive for one last episode, for one last speech from his deathbed – but the deathbed is a frequently misused place in cinema. Its clichés overwhelm.

Reygadas knows these melodramatic tropes well. Breillat is aware of them too, as I detail in the next chapter. Thus when Juan delivers his final speech, it is not accomplished with a convincing air, for Castro is a non-professional actor. Due to Castro's inability to deliver an authentic speech, a tearful moment for the spectator is denied, and instead Reygadas poses the question of just what we are weeping about when a fictional character dies. It is not a man who dies but his character. To add to the attempt to distance the spectator from heightened emotions based on character identification, Reygadas cuts the scene away from Juan, turning to the bedroom window as a conversation ensues between Juan and Natalia. Juan provocatively says he cannot remember who shot him. Images of the dogs follow next, as I noted above, then we return to an unconvincingly weeping Castro. Jonathan Foltz, writing on Cornelio Wall Fehr's performance in *Silent Light* but similarly applicable here, contends that "Reygadas emphasizes the artificial incapacity of the actor, who performs his sadness but does not

[39] Cf. Appendix One.

convincingly embody it." Foltz calls this an "uncanny pantomime" that creates a "gap between emotion and performance that renders Johan's [and Juan's] tears essentially incomprehensible as anything other than a strangely material and creaturely performance" (2011: 157). In addition to this immanent expression on the face of the actor, here in *Post Tenebras Lux*, as the representation of death is falsified in fictional film, Reygadas, by casting non-professionals and allowing them to test their acting abilities with long takes, points to the unrepresentable state of a real individual's decline into death.

We learn about Juan's passing from Eleazar. The little boy and his sister are not yet of an age to understand death and dying, and so their daily playtime continues on. Seven approaches, looking for Juan. Eleazar mentions his father's passing and it seems secondary – the key thing is that Seven should play with him instead: "Come play with us cos Dad has died already." The scene is presented not with shot-reverse shot technique; when Eleazar delivers the news we stay with him and Rut as they continue to play. What is Seven's reaction? Again, an attempt for a non-professional to display such an emotion would be painfully faked. We cut instead to Seven's empty home – his wife and children have left – then to the murderer walking with purpose through the field in which the film began.

Reygadas cuts to close-ups of various parts of Seven's/Torres's body, shot with the refracted lens: the back of his legs, his hands, his right ear, his thighs and crotch. Martine Beugnet, writing on contemporary French film and sensation, argues that the close-up is a haptic image which frees the figure from their subjectivity. "It is here, at the point where the boundary between subject and object of the gaze appears to dissolve, that cinema most powerfully evokes a sense of loss of self, where the cinematic experience offers itself most strikingly as an exultant combination of pleasure and terror" (Beugnet

2007: 89). Indeed Gilles Deleuze ([1983] 1986: 70) called the close-up the "affection image" *par excellence*. By fragmenting the body, shooting in close-up, and allowing the camera to contemplate Seven's limbs for an excessive number of seconds, Reygadas also participates in the more general tendency of recent art cinema Beugnet has observed (2007: 95) – she describes this common trait as an "opening… the gaze [to] the realm of the 'body-landscape'." The body-landscape is an image or series of images whereby the camera "wanders" or "lingers" on a body, exceeding narrative motivation, and therefore allowing the body to exist for itself. Reygadas's close-ups operate according to this logic.

Figures 1.11-1.12 Post Tenebras Lux (Carlos Reygadas, 2012)

Seven comes to a standstill and gazes out across the landscape. His hands twitch, they are readying themselves. In Reygadas's *oeuvre* we have seen consistent employment of pathetic fallacy and the scene of Seven's suicide follows this pattern. We remember that Seven is a woodcutter. Shots of various trees tumbling down then symbolically prepare the man for his imminent death. Since these trees fall without the visible aid of humans, we can see that even within a diegetically real sequence, Reygadas turns to fantasy. For Seven, this fantasy takes on a literalness: we have no marker that these trees

are diegetically unreal, neither via a sound, edit, or style of cinematography. They simply point to Seven's immanent experience.

In yet another effort to counter narrative cinema's tendency to try to accurately present death, as if it were happening in the profilmic, Reygadas turns to CGI in *Post Tenebras Lux*. This is the first film in which the director has used this technology. We were introduced to a CGI devil in the opening of the film proper, the very antithesis of realist aesthetics. The devil had no resemblance or likeness to a made-up, costumed, or realistically drawn devil. It radiated redness, lit up the dark room, and bounced its color off objects and walls. Bradshaw finds (2013) this scene to be "as bizarre and gripping as any conventional scary movie." But there is nothing menacing about this creature – "I don't see him as a 'mean' devil," Reygadas has said (Solórzano 2013: 53). The devil does carry a real toolbox, however (Reygadas's father's toolbox to be exact [Reygadas in Koehler 2013: 12]), as if going to work, as if part of its regular activity (Dargis 2013).

Critics have similarly noted how the creature seems to situate himself: he "skulks" (Uhlich 2013), "strides in and surveys the abode" (Koehler 2013: 10). The creature and Reygadas take their time. The devil's long stroll down the household's hallway, shot with a static camera, is not unlike Tsai's preference for extended shots of passageways and corridors. This exceedingly slow and contemplative cinematographic gaze at an obviously unreal image seems to go against both the realist imperative and purpose of CGI. Given a realist aesthetic, we are supposed to be presented with things as such, their indexical quality; with CGI we are supposed to experience the sense of something really occurring, usually an image or series of images quickly edited, with reverse shots of characters amazed, shocked, or scared by the CGI, and camera movements with pseudo-documentary authenticity (Allen [2002] 2009). As Michael Allen succinctly puts it, "The

success or failure of any digital image lies in the degree to which it persuades its spectator that it is not digital, but *is* photographic" (2009: 825). Reygadas would seem to know this contemporary use of CGI in cinema and asserts his distance from it in this sequence and later with Seven's suicide.

After we have seen Seven fragmented, and after the trees have fallen, the camera takes one last look at the character, framing him in a medium shot. Reygadas cuts to a long shot from behind. Seven places his hands on his neck and appears to struggle; he groans slightly then suddenly pops off his head. Blood spurts from the wound as Seven lays motionless on the ground. In typical Reygadas style, it begins to pour rain over the corpse.

For Lev Manovich, cinema has historically been about the "art of the index." He claims that contemporary cinema, with its increasing investment in special effects and CGI, is more akin to painting than photography: the realms of photochemical processes which take an impression of reality and computer animation are no longer easily distinguished ([2002] 2011: 1060-1061). The profilmic real is lost once "live action footage is digitized" and subsequently manipulated by computer software, argues Manovich (2011: 1064). While this seems true for much of popular cinema today, most powerfully in Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013),[40] I think Reygadas offers us something different in both the devil episode and Seven's suicide episode. In the latter, with the emphasis on Torres's body, the shot length, and the treatment of reality as I have articulated it in this chapter – i.e., attempting to present the immanent experience of

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[40] A short film made by Cuarón's brother Jonas, *Aningaaq* (2013), accompanies the feature-length film on the Warner Brothers Blu-ray edition. The short film functions as an alternate setting and story for one of the feature film's episodes. Reygadas's director of photography, Zabé, and his editor Lopez, both worked on the short. Reygadas received a thank you in the credits.

The Cuaróns are acquaintances of Reygadas. Alfonso had some very kind words to say about the director's debut. Cf. Wood 2006: 116.

characters even if those experiences take place in dreams, fantasies, and desires – the CGI sequences present the digital "as if" it were filming the raw material of the profilmic event. This is not to pull the wool over our eyes; we have no doubts about the images and their status. Rather, because Reygadas wants us to feel with the images and the events taking place onscreen, in the same way he films the raw materials of the profilmic event to grant spectators sensuous engagements, CGI scenes are aesthetically treated as really existing things. Again, the devil and Seven's irreal suicide exist immanently and are themselves real within the diegesis, real for the experience of the characters. Just as Reygadas wants us to feel dreams, fantasies, and desires, so too can we sense the devil and Seven's bloody end.

Thus Seven's suicide, presented in an irreal style, suggests that it need not be indexical in the fashion described by Manovich, Bazin, and others. His head is torn from his body and shown to us surrealistically. For de Luca and others, "surrealism is predicated on the rejection of rationality and logic, aiming instead for a purely unconscious and free mental functioning" (2014: 221). The experimental use of CGI in a realist film leads us to posit several hypotheses, each an expression of Reygadas's attempt at crafting a cinema of immanence. For Seven, perhaps the act of suicide felt like the represented gruesome death; or, the suicide may have taken on this appearance as if a child were seeing it, Rut for instance, or possibly, given the complex nature of the film, a child remembering it later in life; or, given the shot that immediately follows the act, namely, a cow chewing grass, the suicide is "as if" from that animal's perspective. Reygadas does not provide simple answers. What he demands of us instead is that we view his films with all that human perception allows. Perception is not rooted to a cause-and-effect logic nor does sense perception segregate altered states of mind. Reygadas's

film aims to convey this phenomenological account of embodiment. Moreover, this has implications for spectatorship. Reygadas's viewers are not held by the hand and told the precise meaning or temporality of a given scene. As we have seen, spectators can sensually grasp the content and meaning, and in turn, have an experience of their own motility, spatiality, and the relationship between their body and the film's body.

The impossibility of shooting real death is all the more pronounced by its artifice in *Post Tenebras Lux*. A death by a more cinematically realistic means is moot, for the scene would still offer us the character's mortality either way. Further, an attempt to represent an act of suicide could not do justice to the lived emotional experience of a real person. Seven's suicide turns out to be aesthetically pleasing in spite of its distance from verisimilitude. The film's narrative (almost) concludes where we began, in the damp field, giving the whole feature a definitive finale through symmetry.

In my analysis of the narrative, cinematography and framing, the dream and fantasy sequences, documentary aesthetics, and the theme of death, we see that Reygadas's film is challenging and difficult to be sure, but squarely within an experimental narrative cinema tradition. Yet there is more at stake here than merely my close reading of the film. It has implications for the intersections between film and philosophy, namely, the practice of filmmaking as a philosophical experiment. *Post Tenebras Lux* demonstrates that we do not need verisimilitude in the cinema; our reality, as it is lived through the body, is already attuned to strange modes of perceiving, whether we dream, hallucinate, or fantasize. *Post Tenebras Lux* also demonstrates that cinema has functioned and continues to function according to Cartesian logic, separating dream and fantasy states from embodied and conscious one. Reygadas's film, in my proposed reading, is therefore a

treatise on post-Cartesianism. Yet the rethinking of cinematic dream sequences also provided a visual description of problems typical to married couples. I argued that issues of sexual difference permeate Natalia's sex sequence when we view it as a fantasy. Moreover, while neither in the strict mode of documentary nor pornography, given the non-professional actors in the film are still in fact acting, Reygadas expresses the social subjectivities of contemporary husbands and wives – relationships are still steeped in sexism despite all the progress we claim to have made. Fortunately, lurking behind traditional marriages is a radical feminine desire waiting for the appropriate time to actualize itself. For Natalia, this time still remains a fantasy and it remains a fantasy because, as Angela Willey argues in her convincing paper on the effects of compulsory monogamy on women, "[m]onogamy is assumed normal and natural for 'females' and so the non-monogamous woman – whether in reality or imagination – is pathologised" (Willey 2014: 9). Nevertheless, *Post Tenebras Lux* begins to question the social and cultural demonizing of alternatives to monogamy.

With his narrative and documentary aesthetics, Reygadas also treads a thematic path similar to Braidotti's reading of Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993). Braidotti writes, "Irigaray has been adamant… that the politics of radical heterosexuality as the underlying theme of the thought of sexual difference is a necessary step in order to ensure the emergence of female subjectivity and of an imaginary and symbolic system morphologically suited to female corporeal reality" (1994: 133). This philosophical position develops "the feminism of sexual difference… [as] the active affirmation of women's ontological desire, of our political determination as well as our subjective wish to posit ourselves as female subjects – that is to say, not as disembodied entities but rather as corporal and consequently sexed beings" (Braidotti 1994: 174). Thus Reygadas's film

does not help us further theoretical considerations of female spectatorship: it is neither about the place of women in film, the exchange of looks within in the film, or the spectators' look(s) at the film (de Lauretis [1984] 2011). In treating Natalia's sex scene as desire itself within the context of her failing marriage, i.e., as an embodied fantasy rather than part of the film's diegetic reality, Reygadas surprisingly offers us a filmic treatise on sexual difference in the 21st century (from a man's point-of-view). To complete his treatise, *Post Tenebras Lux* does not simply employ the generic tropes of documentary aesthetics to minimize the apparent illusion of the fictional film; instead, Reygadas utilizes the profilmic event as a style of narrative filmmaking that reveals the illusion of fiction. The film then becomes an expression of the director's social and ethical concerns. The documentary genre's conceit that it presents truths is, in fact, all the more powerful when fashioned as a fiction instead.

Now that we have introduced and assessed how one director blends sensation, aesthetics, and politics to produce what I have called a cinematic work of post-Cartesianism, we can apply these conclusions to a discussion of contemporary art cinema's affinity (or lack thereof) with other film genres. I mentioned several genres in the preceding sections under the larger theme of the avant-garde: western, documentary, pornography, melodrama, and horror. These brief citations and applications in the film with both narrative and aesthetic conventions open up my study to more specific claims about the nature of genre in contemporary art cinema. In the following pages I will demonstrate the ways in which three more genres constitutes themselves as sites for sensation, ethics, and politics in Breillat's films. I will first briefly dive into the narrative aspects of genre filmmaking. Genre theorists have been too hasty to assess and define particular fictional narrative components and tropes. The next chapter will demonstrate

how Breillat challenges these assumptions about the narrative conventions of melodrama through experimentation with semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic qualities that are conventional to pornography and horror.

Chapter 2: Catherine Breillat's Horrible Pornography

As a filmmaker I realize that images are nothing if they are only images…. An image exists only when you give it meaning, and that meaning depends on your vision, the way you look at things…. Cinema never films reality, it films only the director's thoughts, the director's vision, his/her way of looking at things. People don't really understand that.
– Catherine Breillat, Interview with Robert Sklar, 1999

Since James Quandt's seminal[41] essay defining New French Extremity, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema" ([2004] 2011), Catherine Breillat is perhaps the trend's most written about auteur. The overarching thematic at work in her *oeuvre* is sexual difference and problems with that difference under patriarchy, e.g., issues associated with "female curiosity" (Yue 2012: 34), "female sexuality" (Rushton & Russell-Watts, 2010: 1), "women's 'sexual identity[,]' and particularly the way in which patriarchal society makes women feel ashamed of their bodies and their desires" (Keesey, quoting Breillat, 2009: 1). Sex, Breillat observes (2004), is one of the most important experiences in life, an experience she believes that everyone must have. Breillat and her critics subdivide the themes of her features, namely sexuality, curiosity, and female shame, into teenage and adult manifestations.

Breillat's stark and often obtrusive engagements with sexuality at any age had sparked some debate around the pornographic in her work. Yet most debates and studies have insufficiently accounted for the director's proximity to or distance from body

[41] From the Latin *semen*, something James Quandt overemphasizes in his viewings of the then recent French cinema. He writes, (2011, italics mine), "Bava as much as Bataille, *Salò* no less than Sade seem the determinates of a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, *to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm*, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement." This period of cinema Quandt identifies had very little semen in its features. As is my contention in this dissertation, extreme cinema is dangerous precisely because, as demonstrated by Quandt, one can watch a film yet miss it at the same time.

genres. The codes of horror, melodrama, and pornography are appropriated by Breillat and then seemingly misrepresented to produce a particular message or meaning about sexual relations: the shame of feminine sexuality under patriarchy. Breillat, however, is not a genre filmmaker, particularly if we take genre theorists and critics seriously in their definitions. Leo Braudy, for instance, observes that genres are closed off places with "pre-existing motifs, plot turns, actors, and situations… [that are] a respite from the more confusing and complicating worlds outside" ([1976] 2009: 540). Thomas Schatz sums up genre films as "essentially [involving] one dimensional characters acting out a predictable story pattern within a familiar setting" (cited in Wheatley 2009: 80). The semantic and syntactic elements of a genre – a genre's "building blocks" and the "structures into which they are arranged" – are mutually agreed upon to greater and lesser degrees by a "generic community" made of up producers, critics, and spectators (Altman 1999: 219, 156ff),[42] and this approach works both as a marketing strategy and as a lens to study or criticize particular films, trends, or movements. My contention is that this apparent stability of genre is an inaccurate characterization for much of filmmaking and also for spectators' experience of non-genre specific films, the exemplary instances of which comprise the chapters in this dissertation. Spectators' assembly of images and sounds often do not conform to the identifiable genres with which theorists and critics maintain. As Stanley Cavell put it ([1978] 2005: 9), what we see in the film, the objects and persons, are those things which "matter to us."

[42] Altman 1999: 219: "While there is anything but general agreement on the exact frontier separating semantic from syntactic views, we can as a whole distinguish between generic definitions that depend on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like – thus stressing the semantic elements that make up the genre – and definitions that play up instead certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable place-holders – relationships that might be called the genre's syntax. The semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged."

The following chapter further highlights the porous quality of genre and the insufficiency of generalized or universal accounts of film genres which suppose a predetermined relationship for spectators to the images and sounds. Rick Altman identifies this predetermined relationship as genre films' attempt to turn spectators into a "single homogenous block" (1999: 151). Film critics and theorists have differently noted that extreme cinema is without generic codes, although, the directors associated with the trend appropriate these codes for their own artistic ends (Beugnet 2007; Horeck and Kendall 2011; Horeck and Kendall 2012). While many theorists of extreme cinema are content to note the associated filmmakers' ties to pornography and horror, and Linda Williams goes as far as establishing extreme cinema as a subgenre of pornography, naming it "*hard core art*" (2008: 259) – a term that never quite "caught on" (2014: 15) – few wish to study the production trend from the perspective of these genres.

If extreme cinema is simultaneously pornographic and horrific while also displaying a disregard for these genres, extreme cinema has much to offer genre theory. I will argue that Breillat's films play with the semantic and syntactic components of pornography.[43] My semantic and syntactic analysis would then make possible a study of extreme cinema from a pragmatic approach, the next stage of analysis in Altman's proposed reading of genres (semantic/syntactic/pragmatic). A pragmatic study of genre would consider one user group and place them alongside competing user groups to thereby accomplish "a broader process-oriented and interactive analysis" (Altman 1999: 211). Indeed, my approach has less to do with the adult entertainment industry as it currently stands than it does with developing "broader conceptualizations of

[43] Butler (2012) reads Breillat against the genre of pornography. Despite our disagreements about Breillat's status as a pornographer, Butler and I generate similar conclusions.

porn[ography]," an undertaking similar to that of Helen Hester in *Beyond Explicit* (2014: 13-14). Unlike Hester, who demonstrates that the term pornographic no longer only applies to sexually explicit displays and therefore we should do away with the notion of porn as a genre (2014: 121-124), I demonstrate the genre's shifting terrain and the merits of including Breillat within it.

I maintain the use of genre because most spectators know what pornography is today and because of this seemingly ubiquitous knowledge, according to Williams, they are quick to confuse sexually explicit displays with hard core porn. Williams thus considers an analysis of sexually explicit art cinema in light of the pornography genre a valuable endeavour (2014: 9). When one user group attends to the sex scenes in Breillat's films, her works are in direct competition with their preconceived ideas and habitual responses to pornography. A definition of pornography, similar to other genres, is arrived at via individual spectators' processes of interpretation and prior knowledge of it (and of course that knowledge is derived from film production, distribution, exhibition, consumption, criticism, and theory), but this does not mean that the films viewed by the critical spectator are not without form and style. Breillat's films, by aiming to elicit spectators' processes of interpretation in regards to pornography and the pornographic, opens a path for viewers to grasp her message regarding the status of women's desire and sexuality in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Spectatorship is a process of collecting and assembling images into a coherent whole. This practice of spectatorship was easily identifiable in Carlos Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012) and my chapter on this film sought to replicate this experience. I brought my own narrative to bear on an experimental narrative film. As I introduced at the beginning of this dissertation, my approach of Cavellian meditation bridges

theoretical considerations and experiential ones. Cavell writes ([1998] 2005: 253), "the idea that what holds a collection together, specifically perhaps in the aspect of its exhibition, is a narrative of some kind." Following Cavell and turning to genre identification, I contend that the spectator's theoretical, critical, or opinionated categorization of a film into a pre-established genre or mode is often after the film event because the narrative must come to a close. Altman contends that films are multivalent in their appropriation of genres. My task is to make sense of this in Breillat's features but not insofar as there is an appropriation or mixing of genres to thereby increase the appeal of the work. I consider the effect her films can have on spectators' sense-experience and genre classification.

First it is necessary to see how her work breaks from genre conventions, i.e., the common practice of assembling images which are easily slotted into a stable genre. What ties her films together, besides the thematic cited above, is the misappropriation of the pornography genre and the place of the real, i.e., the extradiegetic materials (that which the spectator observes or gains knowledge about outside of the diegesis, information gathered from director or actor interviews, for example) and profilmic forms (that which is set in front of the camera before it starts shooting). Beyond this formal analysis of Breillat's films and the place of the real, I engage a discussion of the Lacanian Real, that part of our psychically-mediated experience that is indefinable and allows the Symbolic and Imaginary orders to function. The latter is often discussed by film theorists with notions of character/camera identification. I will oppose this identification theory with contemporary developments in film philosophy alongside Breillat's *oeuvre*. I argue that in her ability to move beyond genre clichés and tropes, the real/Real is established as the primary object of spectators' interest, i.e., as part of their assemblage of images and

sounds during the film experience, and further, inscribes it in their memories to be recollected, reconsidered, critically evaluated. The role of memory for spectatorship will be considered at length in the next chapter – the film experience includes not just the phenomenological present but sensorial memory, a recollecting of images which, depending on their organization, determine the images and sounds that matter.

Breillat's most recognized film is *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur!*, 2001), starring non-professional actress Anaïs Reboux, and budding performers Roxane Mesquida and Libero de Rienzo. In the first few sections of this chapter I map out Breillat's theory of pornography. I then set it into practice in regards to *Fat Girl*. I next turn to horror and theorize why this genre has significance for this film. Breillat is not a director of horror, but is a director of the horrible. With the work on horror I stress the link between psychoanalytic interpretations of film and spectatorship and the haptic cinematic experience, a theoretical bridging I significantly build upon in the next chapter as well. If genre is clarified, verified, or more appropriately as I will argue, obscured after the experience of the film, the address of the images, i.e., the immediate experience of them, is to spectators' senses. A haptic approach to cinema begins when psychoanalytic approaches are pushed to their theoretical and experiential limits. Following my conclusions in the previous chapter, my accounts and descriptions are more attuned to the multivalent modes of perception possible in the film experience.

Breillat founds a non-pornographic pornography and unconventionally uses horror. Obscene and horrible as the pornography and horror is, I am nevertheless enthralled by the unpleasant cinematic experience.

Erotic and/or Pornographic

When pornography abandons its quality of existential solitude and moves out of the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy…, [i]t begins to comment on real relations in the real world. Therefore, the more pornographic writing acquires the techniques of real literature, of real art, the more deeply subversive it is likely to be in that the more likely it is to affect the reader's perceptions of the world. The text that had heretofore opened up creamily to him, in a dream, will gather itself together and harshly expel him into the anguish of actuality.

- Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, 1979

Before we can unravel Breillat's use of pornography a few preliminary remarks on the hard core genre are appropriate. First, I will assess Breillat's distance from erotica and pornography traditionally associated with and for a male viewer, and then argue that she overturns the laws of that genre and its pre-established film experience. Breillat's films, according to my reading, are exemplary objects to trace just how a filmmaker can work against positing pornography as a stable and universally agreed upon genre. Indeed, there are a number of moving-image pornographies and many theorists have made the case that pornography does constitute a genre, beginning of course with Williams's canonical volume *Hard Core* ([1989] 1999). Breillat's pornography is one type among many, thus my intervention in genre studies is to expand the horizon of possibility for inclusion within the generic community of pornography cinephiles and scholars. Second, I will lay out the problem of the imaginary (identification) and its relation to the exchange of looks I locate in Breillat's films. Since Breillat places the burden of sense-making and organization on spectators, however, there is a chance that the transmission of her message may misfire or be blocked by spectatorial aversion to pornography or their heightened arousal to the profilmic event (the real bodies of the performers). At the same time her message can be transmitted only by taking this risk.

To think through Breillat's films, we must make a distinction between erotica and pornography first, then follow with definitions of two versions of pornography, call them

classical or common sense and non-pornographic. I use non-pornographic as a descriptor of Breillat's work to retain her films' status as explicit displays of bodies while also marking a clear separation between her version of fictionalized sexual acts and those found in classic and contemporary pornography. Williams also argues we should maintain this distinction in our studies of cinematic sex. In films such as *Blue is the Warmest Color* (*La Vie d'Adèle, Chapitres 1 et 2*, Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013), *Stranger by the Lake* (*L'inconnu du lac*, Alain Guiraudie, 2013), and *Nymph()maniac* (Lars Von Trier, 2014), she names the sexual scenes "*relatively explicit sex*" (2014: 15). In the following pages we shall see how this dichotomy operates.

Erotic art, defined as either soft-core or the display of female nudes, has been traditionally associated with an embodied male viewer. John Berger (Williams [1989] 1999: 59-60, quoting Berger), writing on the history of European painting of nudes, locates "the real subject" of the canvas outside the object of art: "He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man…. It is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity." Angela Carter also observes that pornography, up to the time of her writing, has been produced by men and correspondingly aim at the sexual fantasies of men ([1979] 2000: 533-536). Breillat echoes this position on erotic art, stating the erotic "is a mysterious woman in suspenders, spreading her legs, turning men on" (Crowley 2007: 59, quoting Breillat, trans. Crowley). I suggest that eroticism contains an idea of a composed viewer's aesthetic appreciation additionally, a kind of admiration or awe at the sight of the nude woman. We can find this in extreme cinema from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975) to Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* (2011). Similar to Justice William Brennan, who in 1957 said hard core pornography only has one "idea," namely that "there is pleasure in sexual gratification" (Williams 1999: 88, quoting Brennan), erotic art in my

definition here has only one idea – the pleasures of viewing the unclothed woman. Contemporary erotic literature by contrast, according to Susanna Paasonen's research on the website *Literotica* (2010: 151), establishes that "character motivation, desire, and sexual buildup are central, and characters may have insecurities and traumas." Indeed, erotica can be judged and assessed based on the criteria of plot and character development, style, "complexity, and nonexplicit elements" (Paasonen 2010: 144).

Cinematic pornography is something quite different from erotica, although, as Justice Potter Stewart would have it, we all know it when we see it. Williams's rudimentary definition of pornography, in her inaugural study *Hard Core*, is what most of us would expect to find in a pornographic film: "the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing viewers" (1999: 30). However, there is more to pornography than this semantic dimension. Williams also writes that in pornography, from Eadweard Muybridge to contemporary DVDs ([1981] 1986; 2008), there is an attempt to find the truth of female bodies, pleasures, and sex generally – a kind of science through plot, "maximum visibility," and the money shot.[44] Furthermore, aligning pornography with the musical, she contends that "in cinematic hard core we encounter a profoundly 'escapist' genre that distracts audiences from the deeper social or political causes of the disturbed relations between the sexes" (1999: 154). Pornography, then, has at least two functions as opposed to erotic art's singular aim: to really move the viewer, arousal or otherwise as I will argue, and to develop and posit some form of escape but

[44] Williams 2008: 363n96: "*Maximum visibility* is the term I have used to describe the imperative of all pornography to prove that real sex takes place. It includes the privileging of close-ups of body parts over other shots, the overlighting of otherwise easily obscured genitals and, of course, with the rise of feature-length porno in the early seventies, the money shot…. John Waters has noted that such shots are what make porn look to him like 'open-heart surgery.'"

also, paradoxically, some versions of truth. In Breillat's case, more paradoxical still, she attempts to undermine popular conceptions about what a pornographic film is while also attempting to transmit a particular vision of contemporary heterosexual romance.

The line between eroticism and pornography is "leaky" – the boundaries are blurry at best (Paasonen 2010: 153-54). Paasonen contends that rather than semantic or syntactic elements distinguishing the two, the affective dimension highlights the individual's definition (and experience) of the genre. She neatly summarizes this difference as follows (2010: 151), clearly at odds with Breillat's distinction between pornography and the erotic: "The affective power of pornography depends on the detailed yet hyperbolic depictions of sexual arousal, scenarios, acts, and sensations aiming to turn the reader on, whereas the affective power of erotica revolves around desire and emotional realism." The director suggests the reverse is true for her art. Given such a reversal of our generic terminology, Martin Crowley contends that it is appropriate to state that Breillat's directorial brilliance is that she treads a path that is pornographic yet not erotic (Crowley 2007: 60), but it is perhaps more appropriate to work with Paasonen's above definition: Breillat blends the affective power of pornographic depictions with an emotional realism to produce multiple and perhaps conflicting effects for the spectator. In fact, such an experience is how some women use porn. Clarissa Smith's (2012) qualitative research suggests that the interplay between a viewer's sexual arousal and her emotional and critical reception of a film, such as critiquing plot, performance, cinematography, and violent sexualities, is common. I therefore situate Breillat within a style of pornography that recuperates the term from otherwise hostile or dismissive definitions; I contend that she must be pornographic, and explicit, if some element of truth in obscenity is to be found.

In my proposed reading of Breillat, her films find a generic home in Williams's critical evaluation of the body genres, films capable of producing intense sensations in the spectator (1999: 284-285).[45] The sensation received from Breillat's films is not the satisfying discharge of the "scratch," identified by Williams in the classic porno chic film *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972); Breillat would perhaps want viewers to feel an "itch… that 'seeks nothing better than its own prolongation, even its own intensification,'" similar to Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) (2008: 46-48, quoting Bersani, 112-143). We can additionally state the Breillat's films produce a cinematic displeasure, oftentimes a shock to moral sentiments, and it is this method of moving spectators which allows her to articulate her message regarding women's shame, desire, and sexuality. Unlike the pornographic features Williams outlines in her book-length study, sexuality as shot and enacted in Breillat's films "is no longer any fun" for the fictional characters (Best & Crowley 2007: 10); encounters are rife with dissatisfaction, distaste, and misery (Best 2007: 24), and therefore a radical departure from the arousing quality of erotic images or mainstream porn designed to titillate a specifically male viewer. "Pornography is ugly," the director states, "and I prefer ugly" (Crowley 2007: 60, quoting Breillat, trans. Crowley).[46]

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[45] Pornography, defined as producing sensation in the spectators, seems to be the only universally agreed upon definition. Cf. Ellis [1980] 2006: 29, citing Lord Clark; 30, citing Angela Carter; 32, citing The Williams Report.

[46] Breillat, in attendance at my panel at Cine-Excess VII: The International Conference and Festival on Global Cult Film Traditions (hosted by the University of Birmingham and the University of Brighton, November 16th, 2013, at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham, U.K.), restated this preference after my presentation.

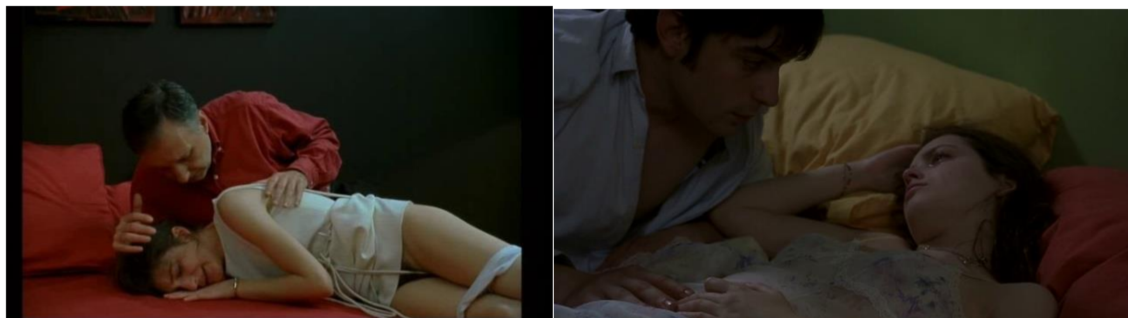

Figure 2.1 Romance (Catherine Breillat, 1999); *Figure 2.2 Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)

In *Romance* (1999), Marie (Caroline Ducey) appears indifferent to performing and receiving oral sex, cries during bondage, and thinks more about sex and the relations between the sexes than she enjoys the act. Elena (Mesquida), in *Fat Girl*, is immobile and in tears while nude; she moans in agony rather than sexual ecstasy when the male finally conquers her. The woman (Amira Cesar) in *Anatomy of Hell* (*Anatomie de l'enfer*, 2004) bleeds from her wrists, menstruates, and is depressive. The sex in Breillat's films, although resembling the acts we would see in porn, i.e., nude men and women engaging in sexual intercourse, is as dissatisfying for the characters as it is for viewers. It would greatly miss the point of Breillat's pornographic work if we were to suggest she is creating a piece of erotic art, e.g., feminists who want eroticism as a product of and for women's sexuality and as an opposition to male-centered pornography. "To be honest, I don't think there is such a thing as erotic art. Art compromises you," the director mentions in an interview. "It's subversive. So it can't be erotic" (Crowley 2007: 59, quoting Breillat, trans. Crowley). Neither would it be helpful to assimilate Breillat into established definitions of porn: "I'm opposed to the porn industry's confiscation of the representation of sex. For me, the X-rated film industry … signifies the indignity of the female sex" (Keesey 2009: 135, quoting Breillat, trans. Keesey). However, she also states that pornography can retain respect, integrity, and dignity if the performer's sexual acts

are indeed what the woman wants to do (Crowley 2007: 59; Breillat in Sklar 1999). Given these preliminary analyses and remarks from the director, and following Eugenie Brinkema in her essay on the director, I name the dominant genre at work in Breillat's *oeuvre* non-pornographic pornography. A non-pornographic pornography would be a sexually graphic film crafted in such a manner to convey not just arousal – or better, no arousal at all – but to operate as a challenge to existing sexual relations and the power dynamics therein, both onscreen and off. This is a reconceptualising of the genre's syntax.

At a cursory glance, the common sense use of the term pornography can be applied to Breillat's narratives about feminine sexuality and patriarchy in contemporary times. But without the rhythm of the sexual numbers and narrative, maximum visibility, the money shot, etc., those semantic elements of the genre so well identified by Williams and others, Breillat displaces or puts sex somewhere else, outside of eroticism and sexual arousal, and into critical thought. She uses long takes, close-ups of faces instead of genitals, no moans or groans except during the male orgasm as a counterpoint to the silence of the woman, and highlights the frequent inactivity of the female character, always immobile and often in tears while the man has his pleasure. Breillat's female characters are at first glance intentionally passive in the sense described by Laura Mulvey in her famous essay ([1975] 2009), but what is active in the film experience is not the male spectator or his scopophilia; it is his critical engagement with the message through style, content, and narrative. Thus the director's tactics work together to show that "the teleology of sex is clearly meant to 'lead to' something nonsexual – … contemplation, thought, a gesture of aesthetic or political engagement that is not located solely in the lower enclaves of the body" (Brinkema 2006c: 101). Brinkema suggests the affected spectator is split between her arousal which is present because of the sexualized bodies

onscreen, and the ideas Breillat is trying to convey through these bodies (Brinkema 2006c: 101-102).

Like the women separated by the partition in the brothel scene of *Romance*, this partition which symbolizes the irreconcilability of mind and body or love and desire for women who still unfortunately live under the oppressiveness of male desire and fantasy, viewers too should be split. Spectators are split between, first, their call to arousal, the s/m images onscreen in this instance habitually linked to porn they have seen before or have seen in their imaginations when one says "Imagine s/m porn," and second, the viewer's forced entry into the realm of critical judgment. By the end of the scene, concluding with a rapidly cut money shot onto the abdomen of an unidentified woman, a number of filmic, cinematic, and social and political ideas call our attention: our visual, aural, and cognitive engagement is ignited due to the out-of-place-ness of this fantasy within an otherwise realist narrative, the strangeness of the setting, the length of the shot, no cuts to maximum visibility, and the dismal lighting. To do justice to this sequence of the film spectators must examine and assess why it finds its way into the feature: what is its power, its fascination, and why, if we saw it under different circumstances, say without the view of the upper halves, would it be pleasurable.

My preliminary assessment is that the money shot does not "'fix' the exact moment of the sexual act's involuntary convulsion of pleasure" as Williams suggests (1999: 113). In *Romance* it transmits a message, namely, the orgasm is on the side of the man while the woman's mind is occupied elsewhere. Breillat's other films provide additional evidence for my experience of this scene. I find this theme in *36 fillette* (1988), in *Fat Girl*, and in *Brief Crossing* (*Brève traversée*, 2001): Lili's (Delphine Zentout) first sexual intercourse is not about her pleasure but ridding herself of the virgin stigma; Elena

is overly mindful of whether Fernando (de Rienzo) loves her during her first time; and Alice (Sarah Pratt) has sex with her young man (Gilles Guillain), then quickly dismisses him, as payback for the harms done to her by men from her past.

Brinkema observes (2006a: 149) the complexities associated with positing the director within a tradition of pornography whose products are on the one hand easily verifiable to any consumer of media, and on the other, so frequently impossible to convincingly limit, define, and categorize. In Breillat there is something new produced within a field of pornographic work, what Brinkema calls a non-pornographic body, and which Breillat herself has named *pornocracy* (2008). Etymologically the term opposes pornography, the writing about prostitutes, and suggests something new about art and sexuality. Etymologically the term means the strength of the prostitute (Angelo 2010: 50). In my work here we can identify a non-pornographic body as, first, a subject in her conditions or situation, in Breillat's view a situation still quite horrible under the visible and invisible forces of patriarchy. Second, a body can be non-pornographic when feminine interiority is fully explored, a subjectivity on display and narrated, exemplified most powerfully in Marie's voiceovers in *Romance*, Alice's critical reflections on relations between the sexes in *Brief Crossing*, and Elena in *Fat Girl* through the extended use of medium close-ups of her face. In this film we do not need an internal monologue; Elena's tears, stillness, and resistance to sexual advances are enough for us to see beneath the skin. James Hansen writes (Dooley 2014: 116, quoting Hansen), with reference to *Anatomy of Hell* but equally applicable to *Fat Girl*, "the visibility of explicit sex, violence, and characters' varying responses to them 'allows the body to become a symbol of power, pleasure, and weakness, capable of communication, emotion, and psychological depth – three abilities of the body that could not be made evident through dialogue.'" This

argument regarding Elena's stillness will be pursued in more detail below and the third chapter considers Mesquida's performance of the character.

Marie asserts, "Sex is metaphysical," a claim which posits an outside and beyond what is presented onscreen, and not for a moment does Breillat cease to remind us of this in any one of her films. This is also a reminder to be attentive to the manner in which bodies are framed and shots are organized, as well as to give critical consideration to the depicted acts and events within their respective contexts, stories, and prior and succeeding plot elements. For Breillat the concealed reality of woman's shame under patriarchy is revealed in and through the appropriation of and experimentation with the pornographic genre; her films function as alternatives to generic stylistic and plot devices in an effort to generate new ideas about the genre as well the heterosexual romantic situation, both diegetically and in the world as lived by (Western) individuals.

We are now in a position to more carefully assess the film experience itself.

Looking-At Breillat's Films

Hard core pornography is a thoroughly fictional representation, an appearance of what an actual sexual act might look like (thus the concerns and fears that the genre is also a guide to sexuality). This is something porn actors and actresses consistently remind us of.[47] I put forward a rather Platonic account of pornography here (Badiou 2012: 316-322): what the painting is to a real object hard core pornography is to real sex – the former is by as many degrees separated from the latter. In Breillat's films there is instead a fictional act that is also a living inscription of sexuality; there is a reality presented onscreen, re-presented to viewers as the presence of something really occurring, which is quite

[47] Cf. Bryce Wagoner's documentary *After Porn Ends* (2010)

different from a representation of something, i.e., what it could be like or containing an objective correlate outside of the film. André Bazin saw in photography the tracing or mummification of things as such, and furthermore, this mummification in cinema is not the static image but of duration and space. He writes ([1945] 2005a: 13-14), with cinema "we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re*-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space." It is not a direct presentation, but the really existing thing is presented, set before us, as a fact of reality.

In this now naïve view I nevertheless maintain that the depiction of sexual relations in Breillat's films is fictionally re-presented, not as the image or imaginary of sexuality, but the immediate, onscreen presence of sex itself as Breillat defines it, an experience of watching something real – or, if we like, Breillat gives us the fact of her view of sexuality, a fictionalized view of a reality seen through her eyes. I will argue a similar point in the next chapter during my discussion of the sexual performances in Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (Batalla en el cielo, 2005). It is important to note here that through critical engagement with that reality re-presented we should gain valid concepts and ideas about the director's position on contemporary sexual relations. Arguably this is part of the formal and narrative techniques employed as I noted above, but Breillat also works through classical definitions of pornography and spectators' associations with the genre. Her films then challenge us to organize our film experience not as a series of images which titillate or arouse, but through her unappealing and unpleasurable reality of sex in a given film, and through this re-presentation, move us to dissect if not accept her view.

Her films cannot therefore be strictly part of a commonplace genre, as the sex and sexuality would be a representation or reproduction not only of an objective correlate

outside the film – real sex and relations between real bodies – but of what is deemed typical for its generic category: awkward and comedic, arousing yet fake, brutal and horrific, sensual and emotional. As it stands, the indifferent or shocking sex scenes have no generic or genre-specific home in comedy, pornography, horror, or melodrama – thus my deployment of the term non-pornography.

To tease out what this means for the spectator, and how Breillat wills us into an active engagement with her work, we can think of Christian Metz's and Mulvey's theories of the gaze. Breillat seems keenly aware of their brand of universalizing spectatorship theories to then make us aware of the power cinema has to foster multiple kinds of viewing. If cinema is the unobstructed perception of a cinematic reality, the apparatus masked by various stylistic and narrative devices (Metz), and the perception of that reality through those devices consequently produces an objectification of women, or women are taken as a spectacle for an active male viewer (Mulvey), Breillat and other contemporary auteurs of hard core art, according to Williams (2014), create films which point to the limitations of these respective modes of engaging both filmmaking and the film experience.

Metz and Mulvey suggest spectators identify with the camera and/or with character as extension of themselves (Metz [1975] 2009; Mulvey 2009). Spectators perceive an imaginary world into which they are wholly immersed. The film experience is standardized in the Metz/Mulvey account and this attempt to universalize the spectator has brought forth a strong critique. Sarah Cooper states (2013: 104-105) that Metz's position is ultimately "blind to the differences between human beings, their bodies, and their psyches," leading to a homogenizing of the spectator, namely as "the white male of a predominantly heterosexual society." Mulvey, though attempting to reconcile gender

and sexual differences at the cinema, similarly posits a male spectator at the expense of other viewing positions. According to Michele Aaron (2006: 34-35), Mulvey denies the possibility of the man as object of the gaze and further, sought to do away with narrative filmmaking altogether because of its explicit and implicit ties to patriarchal society.

The position I develop, in contrast to Metz's and Mulvey's, resonates with Tom Gunning's critique of the former. According to Gunning, Metz provocatively argued that modern cinema audiences want to believe that early cinema audiences were terrified by the apparent reality of moving-images. These modern spectators are to early spectators as an adult's laughter is to a child's belief in Santa Claus (Gunning [1989] 2009: 737). Yet, Metz claims, the modern audience is subject to the same psychic responses as the prior one: "No longer a historical spectator in the Grand Café in 1895, the naïve spectator 'is still seated *beneath* the incredulous one, or in his heart'" (Gunning 2009: 738, quoting Metz). We see Metz trying to bridge the historical gap between the misinterpreted early film experiences – as terror in the aisles – and the illusion of reality presented in classical narrative cinema; regardless of historical situatedness the spectator remains constant. Contrary to Metz, Gunning's insight (2009: 748, italics mine) that cinema does not operate as a medium of "illusionistic absorption" parallels my own project, namely, Breillat's films "continually remind… the spectator of the act of watching by *a succession of sensual assaults*." The key to the critique of Metz and Mulvey is that the cinema does, in fact, open up a multiplicity of viewing positions. My aim is not to dismiss these theorists but to place them alongside Breillat's cinema: I assess which aspects of their theories reveal important traits about her films in relation to spectatorship as well as critique those which foreclose unique viewings and interpretations.

Thus neither Metz's nor Mulvey's angle will be sufficient to account for the actual film experience, as I noted with Cavell, an experience which is determined by the spectator for him or herself. Breillat's cinema offers numerous vantage points from which to be affected. Her camera does not lead us to the truth of the sexual situation, such as the fact of the sexual act through maximum visibility, but rather to a technologically-mediated presence of the scene of sexual relations, i.e., the power dynamics, desires, and feelings of shame. If a spectator is prone to identify with a male protagonist, take up his perception of a passive female object, for example, this is not the case for Breillat's most discussed film. There is not a clear-cut identification with the body of Rocco Siffredi in *Romance*, whose presence next to Ducey is nearly absent as the camera focuses instead on the actress's face, and the sounds are of voiceover rather than the sex act. Efforts are made on Breillat's part to *not* "reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception" (Mulvey 2009: 717), e.g., a look which resituates itself to get the best point of view. What I do not have difficulty with, as Metz says, is encountering myself, not in the film (producing ego ideals through the star system [Mulvey 2009: 714]) or as the all-perceiving subject (Metz), but as body and social body. Unlike the mirror, Metz writes, the cinema does not return (an image of) our body (2009: 697), but I argue Breillat does return the spectator to his or her body.

Conscious memory (contra unconscious structures, or repressed moments of infancy and childhood) provides spectators a source for finding themselves in and with the characters and events onscreen, or in other words, identification that fosters the production of thought and ideas. John Phillips sees (2001: 133) this in *Romance*, Marie's voiceover lending men and women alike a sense of identification through psychological interiority, and Martin Barker's audience research on *Fat Girl* drives this argument home

(2011: 113-114). Women find themselves in Elena and, against Breillat's claims that men cannot identify with the male characters, surveyed respondents successfully identified Fernando's seduction and coercion tactics in their own romantic and sexual pasts. Breillat's men are not ideals but types we recognize.

Figure 2.3 Fat Girl (Catherine Breillat, 2001); *Figure 2.4 Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999)

This identification is possible not because, as Bazin simply claimed, reality is exhibited as such through the passive lens of the camera. At this juncture it is more accurate to say with Cavell (1979: 26) that we see neither humans nor imaginary signifiers onscreen but "human somethings." We see a thing that is both there – we know it is a real person – but also absent – he is not there in our presence. In our knowledge that there exists a real person who becomes a star for the camera, we watch his performance of a role through "his physical and temperamental endowment." He is therefore not the character authored by the screen or story-writer – the star is the kind of character "real people are: a type" (Cavell 1979: 28, 29; cf. 36-37). These somethings onscreen are human precisely because we know ourselves and others as a certain type. I can speculate that the same identification experienced in *Romance* and *Fat Girl* holds true for *Anatomy of Hell*'s male viewers; as Asbjørn Grønstad puts it (2006: 166) about the unnamed man in the film, men abhor "the truths of the female body." The unnamed man is of a certain type – the intellectual misogynist. Breillat thus counters Mulvey's claims then as the male

protagonist, with whom we should identify as ideal ego, does not have the kind of freedom of the stage exhibited in other narrative features. The unnamed woman is in control of his movements, his look, his sex. In this way he does not become a "screen surrogate" for the male spectator's "ideal ego" (Mulvey 2009: 716). In *Romance* and *Anatomy* Siffredi is not "more perfect, more complete, more powerful" than the man in the audience because, in the former, the actor/character is barely present onscreen (in frame, through dialogue, or narrative importance), and neither does he appear omnipotent in either feature as his sexuality, strength, composure and "manliness" is at best questionable.

We can distance ourselves from the look of Metz's and Mulvey's voyeur if we return to Breillat's female characters who exhibit heightened indifference, passiveness, and lack of enthusiasm. Paul Willemen ([1980] 2006: 50-51, 54) and Slavoj Žižek (1991: 110-111, 180n6) note the power of the fourth look in porn,[48] the seductive look back at the spectator by the performer, which both situates the performer onscreen as "to-be-looked-at" and throws the experience of film off-kilter as the absent performer seems to be made aware of the spectator who, in seeing the fourth look, now experiences the "to-be-looked-at-ness" himself. But the actresses and characters in Breillat's films are not there to be looked at by other characters, nor there for spectators' scopophilia or narcissistic ego (Mulvey 2009: 714, 721), and neither do they make us aware of their absent presence by the fourth look. No one part of the body is emphasized in *Romance*, Phillips argues (2001: 135), and efforts are made in *Fat Girl* to conceal rather than reveal

[48] Cf. Heath [1977] 1981, 119-121, ellipses in text. "Classically, cinema turns on a series of 'looks' which join, cross through and relay one another. Thus: 1) the camera looks (a metaphor assumed by the camera) … at someone, something: the profilmic; 2) the spectator looks … at – or on – the film; 3) each of the characters in the film looks … at other characters, things: the intradiegetic."

both Elena's and Anaïs's bodies.[49] Moreover, through the twist at the end of this latter film, Breillat unveils the story's revelatory power by concealing her message. This message requires viewers to decode it, i.e., use their cognitive faculties to make sense of it. I turn to this revealing and concealing in this film in later sections of this chapter as well.

Further countering the position Metz and Mulvey outline as unique to cinema, i.e., the to-be-looked-at-ness of women characters/actresses, Phillips notes (2001: 134) that Marie is a "searcher" in that she "looks for" men in the narrative. Similarly Elena and Anaïs (Reboux) in *Fat Girl* are searching for their seducers, and in the two very different forms of rape that take place in the film, Breillat may force us to look away from the screen rather than receive pleasure from it. We see how Breillat again opposes the kind of gaze posited by Mulvey (2009: 715, italics mine), namely, the woman is there onscreen "to freeze the flow of action in moments of *erotic contemplation* [for the male character/viewer]." The women of her films push ahead the action or drama and do not remain static for us to contemplate. The thesis of *Anatomy of Hell*, for instance, is evinced by a series of looks: in order to feel adequate, whole, or whatever psychological interpretation we want to provide, an unnamed woman asks a strange and unnamed man to watch her where she is unwatchable (or "unlookable" as translated by Paul Buck and Catherine Petit [Breillat 2008: 29]), i.e., a gaze without patriarchal oppression. Ultimately this request is left unfulfilled as the pair spends four nights together dissecting patriarchy, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality with no real progress or purpose. Adrienne Angelo has suggested (2010: 51) of *Anatomy* additionally that the look as producer of knowledge

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[49] Alice Haylett Bryan (2013), in her conference presentation at Cine-Excess VII, thoroughly disagrees with claims such as Phillips's – she noted the power of the mirror in Breillat's films to fragment women's bodies in an effort to critique patriarchy

is halted by the impossible to "reciprocate gaze" of the unnamed man on the one hand, and on the other, the impossibility of him to fully see the woman where she is "unwatchable." Thus the film ends much like real life – in aporia.

Provided these examples, it seems that the spectator Metz and Mulvey posit is affirmed by Breillat to then present to us cinema's power to control the four looks, and in this process of being made aware of the cinematic looks, her films are therefore aesthetically and politically charged. Mulvey succinctly summarizes her essay (2009: 721, italics mine), "It is the place of the look that defines cinema, *the possibility of varying it and exposing it*…. It is... cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged." Cinema presents a spectacle to be sure (Mulvey 2009: 721), but it can also present ideas; bodies and narrative can be shot and organized, by director and spectator, to foster critical thinking about a particular subject.

The formalizing of the content of a film therefore provokes spectators to order and organize the images appropriately and not, as so many critics and internet message board participants have done, reduce the film to a series of images and sounds representing sex (for the individual viewer's ego) and thereby dismissing the sexual act's far-reaching consequences. As the epigraph of this chapter attests, what takes precedence in frame, however, is up to the filmmaker, thus my emphasis on the director as auteur: "An image exists only when you give it meaning, and that meaning depends on your vision, the way you look at things…. Cinema never films reality, it films only the director's thoughts, the director's vision, his/her way of looking at things." The way Breillat materializes sexual images is without representation, as in a painting which represents or stands in for the really existing thing, but a re-presentation of the body even if it is a powerful and

intentional illusion, evinced by the aforementioned films and most poignantly in the preface and relevant scenes of *Anatomy of Hell*.[50] The re-presentation then, in Grønstad's viewing of this 2004 film (2006: 166), is confronting the real and abject body with the "stock complacencies" of sexual images. While what goes into the frame is left to the whim of the director, collection and recollection of the images, scenes, and sequences is part of spectators' active participation in the meaning-generating quality of the cinema. Grønstad's claim clearly has to do with the collecting of images, some of which are pleasing to the senses, and replacing commonplace pornography with Breillat's images which is, to say the least, unpleasant.

If *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell* depict re-presentations of the body, sexual acts are not reducible to representations which are satisfying or arousing for viewers for they have been replaced with feminine interiority and Breillat's account of feminine desire under patriarchy. She accomplishes this by subjectivizing rather than an objectifying the character's/actor's body, i.e., turning the body onscreen into a subject with her own desires as opposed to an object of (male) scopophilia. Both Brinkema and Grønstad agree, as do Martine Beugnet (2007:47-49) and Emma Wilson (2001: 154), and the above-mentioned Crowley (2007: 81-82), that Breillat is "interested in the more tactile, haptic, warring encounter between text and reader. She wants our blood to run too" (Brinkema 2006a: 158; cf. Grønstad 2006: 167-168). Brinkema, and by reference to the haptic, Grønstad and others, explicitly makes herself and her affectations (that which is her personal and immediate experience of the images and sounds of the film) part of the

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[50] Preface to Breillat's *Anatomy of Hell*: "Cinema is an illusion and is based not on 'true stories' or some kind of happening, but on the reality of the work. In this film, in the most intimate shots of the girl's body, she is played by a body-double. In these scenes, there is no question of seeing the actress, but rather a fictional construct of the girl's body."

essay.[51] If a real in/of the film is undeniable, quite apart from the imaginary signifier that I know to be absent from my real experience of the darkened cinema and the socially constructed activity of going to the cinema – e.g., the real of Alice's/Charlotte Alexandra's urination in *A Real Young Girl* (*Une vraie jeune fille*, 1976);[52] with *Romance*, Marie's/Ducey's vaginal secretions,[53] Marie's/Ducey's masturbation, and the s/m scene;[54] the tactility of menstruation in *Anatomy of Hell*[55] – there is inevitably a charge produced in Vivian Sobchack's sense (2004), discussed in the prior chapter, when the image reaches out *to touch us*. When the imaginary and symbolic orders fail to make sense of our filmic and cinematic experience, we are provoked by the Real, which contacts or reaches out to our senses. We are required to then think what it is onscreen that has produced the sensation, thus compelling us to assess image and narrative in aesthetic and ethical terms.

Breillat therefore takes an immense risk. Ultimately the subversive quality of art – namely, that the aim of art is to provoke a reaction from its spectators into some kind of

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[51] This is my one-line critique of Brinkema's *The Forms of the Affects* (2014). She contends that affect study, in regards to film, must do without the spectator altogether. Instead, I would claim that a study of a film's affects also includes the theorist's affectations (in response to a film). I discuss Brinkema's criticism of the current state of affect studies in the next chapter.

[52] Crowley 2007: 81: "… Charlotte Alexandra urinates into the sand: the reality of the act itself is beyond qualification, whatever this scene might also be taken to mean. Just as the pornographic use of any image persists to haunt its symbolic ascent, so does the bare flesh we watch – a meaningless index, the irreducible, resistant, literal body – here remains mutely, pulsatingly present, even with its filmic elevation."

[53] Brinkema 2006a: 152: "The truth of [Breillat's] films is nothing less than the materialization of sex, a verification of the ontological realism of the image that is *indistinguishable* from the sticky fluid that calls out to our gaze."

[54] Emma Wilson notes (2001: 154) the scene of Marie's untying after having been bound and gagged to the point of physical anguish. It becomes troublesome because this untying is staged to be sure but also appears as the untying of actress Ducey; her tears and anguish seem "genuine", observes Wilson, and this is the pushing of performance to its limit which renders the experience of it haptic. "Breillat manages to convince her audience that, as in various scenes of intercourse, and in the scene where Marie masturbates, we are witnessing 'real', unstaged physical responses and reactions. This lack of mediation is shocking for the viewer... and promotes the film's immediacy, its tactile presence."

[55] Grønstad 2006: 167: "What can possibly be more remote from the pristine, impenetrable non-tactility of the film image than the hideous, all-too-tangible fluids of the human body? Breillat's emphasis on 'forbidden' liquids such as menstrual blood, vaginal secretion and semen upsets the gratifying exteriority of the film."

thought about the conditions in which they live – is on the shoulders of the viewers. If some assemble the sex scenes in *Romance*, *Fat Girl*, and *Anatomy of Hell* into a collage of nudity, or forcefully demand to know whether the actress "really had sex," we may have the experience of eroticism and/or arousal in viewing the actresses' bodies. Others spectators, e.g., critics who declare a film teen-porn or see features as a work to showcase underage actresses naked, also miss their mark. If we collect the images and sounds as in a manner befitting the critic or engaged spectator, through our attentiveness the images and sounds begin to matter to us on their own merits, and not through their proximity to habituated viewing positions and definable genres. It is the task of the spectator-critic to remember, to re-collect, and to assemble the images of a film to thereby "account for the frames of the film being what they are, in the order that they are in" (Cavell, 2005: 6). No more is this a necessary precondition for viewing than Breillat's *oeuvre*. As Barker discovered, her films should turn us back on ourselves and our interpersonal, social, and cultural situation. We should see the difference, then, between the spectator of Breillat's cinema and the universalized spectator of Metz and Mulvey: the former is granted the opportunity to reflect and engage critical ideas. Perhaps, with careful study, we can locate other directors who accomplish similar feats with their own specific methods and means.

A pornographic film can therefore be non-pornographic if it proceeds towards the unveiling of the director's version of (likely subversive or radical) truth – social, cultural, psychoanalytic, depending on what matters to us – and real insofar as spectator, critic, or theorist is touched by the images and assembles them not into a sequence likened to traditionally pornographic features in which arousal is a given, but into what they accomplish for other bodily sensations and, through the mediation of the body, produce in us thoughts and ideas about the oftentimes oppressive quality of heterosexual romance.

Sexual Numbers

I will now work through Breillat's *Fat Girl* in the manner of Williams's most elaborate categorization of the pornographic feature film. The 1970s-1980s generic feature-length pornographic films find formal resonances with the musical genre, for both have "numbers" – song and dance or sex acts – which break narratives or dissolve into narratives to varying degrees.[56] A spectrum of numbers can be identified: from an alternate fantasy space outside the diegetic reality to a complete dissolution of the number into the everyday life of characters.

What is a sexual number composed of? First, there must be a money shot, evidence of male satisfaction spurted onto the face or body of the female performer. Second, formal conventions must be met, i.e., showcase differing sexual acts, "offered to satisfy a diverse, but not all-inclusive, range of sexual tastes" (Williams 1999: 126). These sexual numbers include, but are not limited to, masturbation, straight sex, lesbian sex, oral sex, ménage à trois, orgies, anal sex, s/m.[57] Despite the decades between this list and my current writing, I do not think more numbers need to be added for the mainstream porn genre. Third, whatever the sexual number, it must emerge from an established narrative. Stephen Ziplow asserts in *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography* (1977) that narrative should occupy at least 40 percent of the feature – he does not, however, state exactly why this must be so. Williams hypothesizes that, like the musical, pornographic numbers are not frivolous or merely spectacle; a narrative is required in both genres to establish a number (in the case of straight romance or sex) "as a sublimated expression of

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[56] Cf. Willemen [1980] 2006: 58-59 for an earlier and much too brief account of the similarities between musicals and pornography.

[57] Cf. Williams 1999: 126-128 for the details on this list of sexual numbers.

heterosexual desire and satisfaction" (1999: 132). Characters want to sing and/or have sex with each other based on preceding events and conversation and, at the moment of "discovery" of mutual love or that event of sexual "union," writes Willemen ([1980] 2006: 58-59): "It cannot be mere coincidence that [these moments]… tend to be the obvious points where the rhythmical interactions are… inserted." There is thus an attempt at equilibrium in turning to a sexual number then returning to narrative; in this manner the director can build upon the numbers and show characters developing newer and more adventurous sexualities (Williams 1999: 130). We will see in the next chapter how Žižek has no understanding of the significance of the porn narrative. As an example of porn narrative equilibrium, we can look to a personal favorite, Gerard Damiano's *The Story of Joanna* (1975). The film follows a basic premise, giving the sexual numbers significance and meaning internal to the film and outside the film for viewers to follow with some degree of continuity: Joanna is trained (pseudo-scientifically) in sexual pleasures and sadomasochism to eventually assist with the suicide of her slowly dying master. Joanna accomplishes the homicide and subsequently, having completed her education in depravity, assumes the sadistic role of the master she had just dispensed with. Despite the entire backlash against the supposedly trite narratives and dialogue in pornographic features, a story is necessary for the viewing experience to make the feature and its hour or longer projection of images coherent, and comprehensible, as a finished work.

Given these complex concerns with the voyeuristic and pornographic – from Metz and Mulvey to Williams, the preliminary examples from *Romance*, *Fat Girl*, and *Anatomy of Hell*, and the numerous articles already engaged with the first and third films – I ask with detailed reference to *Fat Girl*, working from the conclusions of the sensual, haptic, and tactile film-experience as well as Williams's canonical essay on body genres

([1991] 2009):[58] How do the above analyses of pornography fit with the images and narrative? How do Breillat's narratives and numbers displace a sense of visual and cognitive equilibrium, rupture our expectations of genre? If Breillat does not represent teenage and adolescent sexuality, what is re-presented? What messages and meanings are revealed and what others are concealed? With the two sisters of *Fat Girl* underage – Mesquida was 19 at the time of shooting but portrays a 15-year-old, and Reboux 13-years-old portraying a 12-year-old – do Breillat's pornographic shots and scenes empower the teenage girl against the tyranny of patriarchy or do claims of child pornography hold sway given the recent surge of displays and descriptions of underage sexuality in film and literature (Best 2007: 212-241)? I set out not to answer these questions directly, however, answers should reveal themselves as I relate and discuss *Fat Girl* and the theory of genre and spectatorship that develops from it.

***Fat Girl*, Synopsis and Sexual Numbers**

While on a family vacation in Italy, 15-year-old Elena seduces college-aged Fernando at a picturesque café patio after she and 12-year-old sister Anaïs bet on who can a guy first. The older and more attractive, we should have immediately guessed, will win this contest with ease over the younger and less attractive. We discover, however, that Elena, during the long scene in which the older boy practices his charm and sophistry, is a virgin, and a conflicted one at that; she is falling in love with Fernando and yet a (Catholic) purity has been engrained. We see here how society mediates in private sexual affairs. "[V]irginty belongs to society," Breillat asserts (2004). Anaïs recognizes this and she seals her own

[58] Frances Ferguson had argued (2004) that pornography is evaluated within a particular context. While many interpretations are possible for Breillat's films, the abundance of references to the haptic and tactile give a certain validation to this view and further, to the prominence of phenomenological film theory in the 21st century.

fate by stating in the opening sequence, "Personally, I want my first time to be with a boy I don't love." Elena, on the other hand, wants her body to be given to the man she loves.

We have here all the necessary components for a (teenage) melodrama, a film "addressed to women in their traditional status under patriarchy – as wives, mothers, *abandoned lovers*, or in their traditional status as *bodily hysteria or excess*… (Williams [1991] 2009: 604, italics mine). Shockingly, Breillat will incorporate pornographic numbers to disrupt our expected viewing of melodrama, but it is that melodramatic narrative which intensifies the numbers. At the same time, the sexual numbers are themselves part of the narrative; for Breillat the heterosexual embrace and the form it takes in the story could not develop without depicting the act. Since emphasis is less on dialogue and a causal narrative chain leading the characters from one exact point to the next, the body has magnified significance and itself becomes the essence of a narrative, however sparse that narrative may be.[59] Such an emphasis on the body in cinema is not without cinematic antecedents. Bertolucci's *Last Tango* and the late Nagisa Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (*L'Empire des sens*, 1976) characterize protagonists through their intimate and wordless encounters.[60] Breillat follows the sort of story-telling opened up by Bertolucci and Oshima, magnifies the social concern, and further troubles genre distinctions between pornography and drama.

Late in the night Fernando sneaks into Elena and Anaïs's room. The older sister has told the younger to pretend to sleep. This first sex scene, from seduction to morning after, is an astounding twenty-five minutes in length. The two lovers lay in a single bed –

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[59] Breillat takes a cue from François Ozon who similarly refuses conversational exchanges and replaces them with sexual acts: "for me, these are moments when characters no longer project their discourse, but reveal themselves through their bodies" (Palmer 2011: 62, quoting Ozon). On extreme cinema and the lack of narrative momentum, see Beugnet 2007: 15; Palmer 2011: 60.
[60] Cf. Williams 2008: 188, 214-215 for the similarities between *Last Tango in Paris* and *In the Realm of the Senses*.

the young girl in a sheer nightgown while the older boy is fully dressed and they first swap stories of sex and romance. The pillow talk soon escalates into a battle of wills when Fernando's unsurprising arousal must be quenched. Anaïs had warned her sister of Fernando's ruse, his apparent fondness a facade for sexual desire. Following a macho proclamation – Fernando enjoys humiliating older women who thought they were the seducers – we get a quick cut from the entangled characters to Anaïs, unfortunately bedded on the other side of the room in their family's vacation home. Williams notes the power and intensity of this cut: the close-up of Anaïs in this first instance, leering at first then peeping through her fingers, "punctuates [Fernando's] bad faith, for [Anaïs] perceives the violation [of Elena] despite its apparent lack of violence" (2008: 280-281). The camera returns to frame the lovers and picks up the seduction again. We have moved from a camera on the left of the bed, in medium close-up, to a medium shot from the right. Elena is alone stretched out on the bed, sex exposed, and nightgown covering half her face. Fernando appears from the left of the frame, now with pants removed and a very large erection, and the camera slowly tracks to a close-up. Through many minutes of threats and degradation – this theme of female shame cutting across almost all of Breillat's films – Fernando coerces Elena into anal sex because vaginal is too sacred for her; the "back way" "doesn't count" yet would be a "demonstration" of her love. [61] "It is not uncommon," writes Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 1989: 383), "for the young girl's

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[61] Fernando argues from every angle: sex is not a big deal, all the girls do it, if she does not have sex he will find it elsewhere, he is aroused and should not have to get himself off into the trash-bin, he loves her, and as mentioned, the back way does not count. On children and sexuality, author and artist Kate Millet observes (1984: 221), "There is a predatory energy even in courting, when what is courted is youth – the helplessness, the vulnerability, the innocence, the ignorance. The prey can be tripped, caught, seduced, tricked, talking into it, and beguiled, like a pocket picked by a thief. There is an exercise of power linked with what used to be called gallantry."

first experience to be a real rape and for the man to act in an odiously brutal manner; in the country and where manners are rough, it often happens that – half-consenting, half revolted – the young peasant girl loses her virginity in some ditch, in shame and fear." There is another cut to the younger sister's gaze upon penetration, anxiously flapping her forearm against her face then looking askance, as her sibling is raped.[62] When Fernando finishes with Elena, he casually mentions he might like to marry her.

Figure 2.5-2.6 Fat Girl (Catherine Breillat, 2001)

The morning after, Fernando tries to push Elena's head down to perform oral sex on him. She says she is uncomfortable because her sister is on the other side of the room. Anaïs awakes; the sisters have a heated exchange. Elena walks Fernando to the gate of their house, willingly performs oral sex, and he stops the act partway out of fear of being caught and subsequently jailed for sex with a minor.

Elena's mother (Arsinee Khanjian) purchases her a red dress later on that day, a dress which is short and tight against Elena's skin. This comes after Elena had tried a more proper green dress that Anaïs then decided upon as the outfit for herself. The two sisters argue and this argument, collected with the scene of Elena and Fernando on the beach that follows the dress purchase – the young lovers leaving the sad and lonely Anaïs

[62] There is no question about the rape despite (male) critics' attempts to suggest the ambiguity, for instance Hilderbrand (n.d.), who writes, "[Fernando] essentially rapes Elena."

squatting naked on the shore – is the conflict necessary for the sisters to rekindle their affections for one another before Fernando, at a later point, will sneak into their vacation home to finish what he began. An unidentified evening some days later, Elena will make a gift of her virginity, or better, will exchange it for a promise.

The second number: Anaïs, alone in the bathroom, lifts her shirt to expose her breasts for herself, the mirror, and viewers. She names the person in the mirror *putain* [whore]….

Number three: In the shared bedroom, this time without the endless minutes of badgering and coercion, the camera is again on the right side of Elena's bed and she is fully nude. Kneeling between her legs, Fernando rolls on a condom. Akin to the first sex scene, the camera slowly tracks in to the lovers, medium close-up, and Elena's new engagement ring screams for our attention. "I'm scared," Elena whispers. "Be gentle." Fernando replies, "No. One hard push is best, then it's over." He penetrates. Cut to Anaïs, turned away from the event, sobbing and wiping tears from her eyes. At the far side of the room, slightly out of focus, the camera shoots the calves and feet of Fernando and Elena; the former groans with pleasure and the latter cries out in pain. The camera stays with Anaïs until Fernando lets out that final grunt of satisfaction. Her crying slowly recedes.

Pornography "Too Late!"

Douglas Keesey is incorrect in naming Anaïs's look as a register of "her sister's pain" in the first number (2009: 45). Anaïs's face exhibits and makes pronounced her already established cynical outlook on love, as well as exhibiting the maturity of a parent, expressing both disappointment and an "I told you so" as the cries escape Elena's mouth and reverberate in the room. Breillat notes (2011c) of the relationship between the sisters:

"[Anaïs is] like a judge who shows no mercy. She sees [the real relations between Elena and Fernando] and experiences it. It's unbearable." Anaïs's expression stems from her earlier, and again later, questioning of Elena's foolishness and gullibility. She is "more intelligent about the world" and "She's much more lucid and mature" than her older sister (Breillat 2011c). Here the reality of the situation (the coercion and dupery) "translated into truth" by shifting the frame to Anaïs's perspective (Crowley 2007: 65). The rebellious Anaïs possesses the objective perspective on Elena's conformist behaviour, especially when an object with the most sacred value, i.e., the engagement ring, is offered to Elena by Fernando to more or less purchase her virginity, a deflowering which occurs on the lovers' second late night rendezvous.[63] Trevor H. Maddock and Ivan Krisjansen accurately observe, "The defilement Anaïs must witness is mere confirmation of what she already knows. Hers is the innocent knowledge of a child who is not fooled by the allure of utilitarian existence. She waits [or gazes], all the while knowing the truth of sexual relations" (2003: 176). Anaïs's perspective was also my own during that first viewing; the melodramatic appears in the diegesis in the situatedness of Anaïs who knows what is happening and at the same time with spectators who weep because we too know the truth of Elena's situation.

Maddock and Krisjansen's reflection is reiterated in the scene located temporally between the first and second sexual event, i.e., in the same sequence as the second sexual number, Elena and Anaïs staring into a mirror cheek to cheek. Elena muses on their differences, "No one would think we're sisters.... It's funny, we really have nothing in common." Following these comments they bridge differences and assert sameness,

[63] Beauvoir writes (1989: 393): "Women who were defiant and unbending with a lover have been transformed by a wedding ring – happy, flattered, with clear conscience, all their inhibitions gone." For a more detailed analysis of Elena's engagement ring, see Keesey 2009: 48-49.

developing what Keesey argues (2009: 53) as one soul in two bodies, "one soul split between dreaming and dreading, each sister feeling the other's physical longings and apprehensions because they are also her own."[64] But Anaïs reasserts the dual nature of this singular soul they share, suggesting, "at times I have the feeling you're the exact opposite." This is the apparent truth Anaïs is aware of, and also their marked difference: Elena's illusion of love divides them existentially and she is disturbed at having watched her sister's dignity shattered "as Elena forces herself to believe Fernando's lies in order to license her desire to be sexual with him" (Horeck 2010: 205).

Much has been made of Anaïs's gaze in the two sex scenes that occur in their room late at night. Keesey may be right about Anaïs registering her sister's pain in the second sex scene, Elena's loss of virginity, when the cut to Anaïs takes us to her tears. But the intimate scene, more pronounced as it gets re-envisioned and re-performed in *Sex is Comedy* (2002) by Mesquida and Grégoire Colin, reinforces the recent theories on spectators as embodied and sensuous effected by the film image and sound – I, as a viewer and voyeur, *intrude* upon the otherwise private event of seduction (coercion) and rape.[65] Anaïs's unwanted presence in the room intensifies the unfortunately commonplace act because her presence is simultaneously the viewer's. She does not cry in the first number; Anaïs and the audience are not yet sure about Fernando and Elena's romance, how it will shape up, turn out. Will this couple find love or will their love be torn apart by social and cultural forces as in the many melodramas we have seen before? It is only in the second sexual act that we become emotional, get choked up over Elena's gullibility,

[64] Cf. Breillat 2011d: 12-13; 2011c.

[65] This is how Mulvey ([1975] 2009: 714, italics mine) described the experience of cinema itself: "… [T]he extreme contrast between the darkness of the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screen and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of *looking in on a private world*."

her defloration, because we, alongside Anaïs, have seen her mental and physical rape and have done nothing to stop it – whether the film is a tear jerker or not is answered with certainty by this point.

In *Fat Girl*, with the long duration of shots, we do not see penetration or many of Fernando's thrusts in either scene, but there is nevertheless something pornographic in this melodrama. Visibility has not been maximized and there is no cinematic pleasure or arousal. This is the unique feature of extreme cinema. While we and Anaïs pretend not to notice the acts taking place between Fernando and Elena, Breillat has nevertheless convinced us of the sex act over there on the other side of the room without resorting to close-ups of genitals and the required money shot.[66] While the spectator and Anaïs are pretending to be asleep and not to notice what is taking place between the aggressor and his victim, a pretended sleep that distances us from responsibility, we do hear Fernando grunting.

Williams spends some pages in *Hard Core* noting the importance of sound for pornographic films. The inclusion of sound is additional evidence of the maximum visibility of penetration and eventual ejaculation/pleasure but not to the same end (1999: 121-126). The "oohs" and "aahs" are often dubbed, which gives the sexual acts a surreal rather than real quality, much like the music atop the lip-syncing actors and actresses in musicals. "Although [sex sounds] seem to arise spontaneously," Williams writes (1999: 126), "they are not as involuntary as the 'frenzy of the visible' of the male orgasm." Breillat's sound and mixing, on the other hand, is much more powerful than hard core. Fernando has convinced us in both scenes, with his masculine groan, that he has

[66] In the year 2000, the Adult Film Makers Association stated that a film is only pornography if it contains a money shot (Cornell 2000: 5).

possessed the girl and achieved his goal. Without the frenzy of the visible all we have is Fernando's vocalizations paired with the reaction shots of Anaïs, together assuring us of the reality of the act as well as its emotional and physical damage. It should be noted that the reaction shot without the counter shot of the viewed event (rape) is a common tactic for extreme cinema's films. Contrary to John Belton ([1985] 2009: 333, 334), who suggests sound is lacking in objectivity and authenticity – much like what Williams hears when viewing pornography – Fernando's grunts of pleasure and Elena's cries of pain register as really happening when we perceive the seduction and rape through Anaïs. We receive the sense of "presence" in the midst of an absence of character onscreen (Doane [1980] 2009: 320) – Fernando is wholly present whether in Anaïs's line of sight or not, although not wholly in the frame. Sounds are indicative of pleasure in pornography and in *Fat Girl*, much more so, aurally inducing us to the pleasures and pains of sexuality. We will also see how this links Breillat to the horror genre in a section to follow.

Equally significant for a pornographic feature is the enthusiastic activity of the performers, particularly the enthusiasm of women in heterosexual films. Williams does not address this quite carefully enough. The culmination of pleasure may require the male ejaculation, a sure sign that pleasure did occur, but prior to the dams bursting and bells ringing, women moan, groan, cajole and berate their fuckers. Performances are thoroughly acted and fictional and therefore the industry can, just like Hollywood, award those who do it best. In Breillat's films on the other hand, her female characters lay motionless, and rarely does the sexual act last for longer than a minute or two. The long scene of Fernando's seduction and anal rape, as well as the sequence of Elena's deflowering, has Mesquida *pose* in the sense described by Mulvey in "The Possessive Spectator" (2006: 152). She exhibits a "controlled stillness" that performs the

contradiction of "the fusion of energy" and immobility. The body barely moves alongside Fernando's caresses; it does not writhe or contract, curve with his hand or lead that hand to other parts of the skin. Her posed stillness marks part of the film's affect of trauma and of sorrow; the pose of a performer is surely a formal quality of the scene (Brinkema 2014: 109). In the first sexual number, Elena covers her face to hide her shame and terror, and tears run down her cheeks after the repeated verbal assaults by Fernando who argues like a lawyer, the profession he is training for in college. But Elena cannot resolve or find the language to resist. Jean-François Lyotard called such a situation the *differend*, a dilemma in which the wronged party has difficulty testifying to the wrongs committed against them because, in Elena's case, the feeling that something is wrong cannot quite be expressed in comprehensible and transmittable language (Lyotard 1988: ¶12, 22, 23). The sexual act should not come to fruition, this much Elena knows in the first number. How to defend herself against her assailant becomes the problem, eventually resolved by giving in to his advances.

Mesquida performs this stillness for her second sex scene additionally, a quietness of body but the paradox of love, desire, and fear spinning in her mind. The scene begins with her splayed out completely nude and completely immobile on the bed. Fernando, as in the first scene, appears with a large erection – his transcendence Beauvoir would say. When Fernando finally penetrates her vaginally, although the young man has his orgasm there is nothing active in Elena's participation and the act is without real (and equal) pleasure. Beauvoir (1989: 379) suggests that the young girl requires a separation from her "virgin body" as well as the neuroses of the mind, such as "taboos, prohibitions, [and] prejudices"; only then can there be feeling.

Cinema is the only artistic medium with the ability to re-present contrary emotions simultaneously, Breillat mentions, which is why she moved from literature to film (Breillat 2011d). It is also possible to say of Mesquida in *Fat Girl* that her face, posed as it is, accomplishes much more than spoken language. Such is the use and intrigue of the close-up to make Elena's conflicted desire about performing nudity and sexuality to come to the fore. In the next chapter I argue that this conflicted desire is intense in the film due, in large part, to Mesquida's similar disconcerting feelings about nudity and fictionalized sexuality. For now, I argue that an exhibition of controlled stillness would lose its meaning if shot from afar. The apparent truth pornography discovers through the visualization of pleasure in the money shot is here replaced, i.e., close-ups up of genitals in the pleasurable sexual act for close-ups on the face contorted and in tears. Contrary to what Beugnet finds (2007: 89) about contemporary French cinema, particularly in Philippe Grandrieux's *La Vie nouvelle* (2002) where subject and object dissolve in the blurry outlines of a face close-up, with Breillat this shot has a revelatory function rather than a "desubjectivation." As with Marie in *Romance*, Elena becomes much more subject than (female) object (for male visual consumption). Her integrity is (initially) restored by focusing attention, in close-up, on the troubling desire for sex and love, and the emotional and physical rape.

This stillness and conflicted desire is the melodramatic appearing in the pornographic. We too weep – the melodramatic weep – as Elena realizes it is "too late!" to argue with her rapist. "In these [melodramatic] fantasies the quest for connection is always tinged with the melancholy of loss," Williams observes (2009: 615), which is to say for Elena, the eventual loss of her virginity and integrity. Paraphrasing Franco Moretti, Williams continues (2009: 615), "what triggers our crying is not just the sadness

or suffering of the character in the story but a very precise moment when the characters in the story catch up with and realize what the audience already knows. We cry… not just because the characters do, but at the precise moment when desire is finally recognized as futile." But we must not forget in the moments of loss and sadness that Breillat's pornographic, as introduced via *Romance*, is also the interiority of the female character taken seriously; the close-up of Elena reveals, like Marie's voiceover narration and philosophical musings, a subject utterly devastated by the force of male oppression and violence. The pornographic in *Fat Girl*, then, can be a collapsing of melodrama, depending of course on which images we collect for ourselves and the ones which we reject. Alternatively, what began as a Hollywood teen flick turns out to be "a much darker view of teenage sexuality" – this "is no *American Pie*" (Horeck 2010: 197, quoting Linda Ruth Williams). The opening of the feature, a stroll through some trees and two young girls goading each other about their budding sexual drives, takes a turn for the worse when those sexual urges are co-opted by male aggression and satisfaction. The teen drama or comedy withers away, the melodrama disappears, and we are left with an experience of a pornography that has its apparent truth not in sexual pleasure located onscreen but in the sexual displeasure many young girls and young women experience. A genre film, especially the teen comedy, would not be capable of formalizing this close reading I have accomplished here. The same holds for generic pornographic features; images of sex, for Breillat, as I quoted above, always leads to something more than the lower enclaves of the body – we see in these images the presence of sexuality under patriarchy.

Yet something is at stake in Breillat's work that is not just about this message. In what I have unraveled here, she is implicitly making a strong claim against the

establishment of consistent genres. We see in her films a theory of film – what is common to a genre does not warrant a feature being labelled as a genre film despite its use of those elements. The viewer is left to craft the genre in a way that matters to them; for myself, through pornography, mise-en-scène, tears, and patriarchy.

It is also true that *Fat Girl* does not matter to some individuals. Perhaps because *American Pie* was expected, the film was, according to an audience member at a screening of the film I hosted, quite a bore.[67] I agreed that in the terms used here, *Fat Girl* certainly lacks narrative suspense, an aspect the film shares with the film discussed in the first chapter. It is not that the film is boring, or slow, or any such negative elements. *Fat Girl* operates more along the lines of "tableau oriented… rhythm." In the dismantling of cause and effect narrative, the gestures and significance of performer's pose(s) in stillness, when viewed rhythmically, "turns out to be as carefully choreographed as a ballet" (Mulvey 2006: 155).[68] We can further postulate that the lack of activity in both sex scenes, the sexual act itself taking place behind the camera's back in the first and Anaïs's back in the second, is not just the delay of appearance that Gunning describes ([1989] 2009: 741) in the early film experience to produce the astonishment of film-motion. In *Fat Girl*, and Breillat's other features additionally, the motions are negated or restrained, thus fulfilling the promise and warning in the preface to *Anatomy of Hell* of an extremely effective illusion. Breillat has collected here, through images, scenes and sequences, a thoroughly (non-)pornographic work by not shooting the activity of sex at all.

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[67] "Trent Film Society Presents: Catherine Breillat's *Fat Girl*", Thursday, October 4th, 2012, *Artspace*, Peterborough, ON.

[68] Echoing the position Mulvey outlines, Breillat states (2011b), "You have to combine freedom of movement with enormously precise choreography, and emotion must be present as well."

In Breillat's films, we have a promise of cinematic sex, yet it fails to be represented in images one would expect of cinematic sex; she hunts not for the duplication of the sex act, but the act as it would appear in this situation, in itself. We therefore believe we see a re-presentation of an act that never actually, or really, took place in the profilmic event. I claim this is why I found less literature on *Fat Girl'*s representations of sex and its proximity to the pornographic. When the performers "really have sex" in *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell*, there is immediate and identifiable material to work with; when no one "really" has sex in *Fat Girl*, yet we feel the force and reality of the depicted sexual acts, the linkages to the pornographic and the critical analyses rooted in a study of genre are all the more challenging.

Pornography Underage

On the other hand, we witness the real exhibition of Anaïs Reboux's breasts. Censors had to address this scene directly and in the case of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), they were quite precise in labeling the problem as one of possible "haebophilia," "a category putatively depicting men who are by nature sexually attracted to just-pre-adolescent girls" (Barker 2011: 105).[69] Here in Canada in November 2001, the Ontario Film Review Board decided to ban the film, a decision that was later overruled ("Ontario…" n/d). But their concern was that of the BBFC's, namely, the depiction of nude girls under the age of 18. Ontario has no clause granting allowance to underage nudity, unlike the province of British Columbia whose film review board, within the provincial legislation, can grant an allowance for it if they claim the picture has artistic merit. Like any good cinema of attractions, marketing for the film in B.C. and other

[69] Cf. Barker 2011: 105; Horeck 2010: 205. The BBFC's additional concern was that Fernando's seduction could be used "as a script for seducing underage girls."

provinces used Ontario's decision for censorship to their advantage. The scene with Anaïs in the mirror exhibiting her nudity demands attention at the theoretical level as censorship is a form of spectatorship, a spectatorship which clearly resonates with this idea of collecting images and sounds into a narrative. In the case of censorship then, what is collected is precisely the images and scenes which seem to demand cutting, often at the expense of the images and sounds which would commonly not require it. Keesey, however, who provides the most extensive analyses and synopses of Breillat's films, does not discuss the scene in detail – and neither does most of the literature.

Anaïs briefly reveals her body to us. Unlike Elena, whose nudity is the precursor to Fernando's overpowering of her, Anaïs, at least within the diegesis, willingly exposes her chest but cannot hold back from labelling herself perverse. I named this the second number of the film because it links with Ziplow's advice on pornographic filmmaking, namely to shoot a scene of (female) masturbation and nudity, or what internet pornography has named "solo girls." But what masturbation does for a pornographic film in depicting female pleasure through manual sexual stimulation, Anaïs's nudity does for the revealing of an cultural problem: the shame of female desire, of a young person's desire, and the unfortunate position of being a helpless observer to her sister's seduction and rape (Horeck 2010: 200-201). Her shame is conveyed through her mirrored gaze, a blossoming teenager whose sexual encounters have been mediated by Elena's own encounters. She is at that difficult time in pubescence where her body begins to take the form of an adult, i.e., a body with large breasts but a visage remaining child-like, "a 'forbidden body'" describes Breillat, "a body that is a mixture of a little girl and at the same time an incredible sexual opulence" (Keesey 2009: 44, quoting Breillat, trans. Keesey; cf. Breillat 2011d: 12). Although the actress was underage, it was nevertheless

crucial to Breillat's cinematic reality to include Anaïs's breasts to stress the significance of the character's position – stuck between Elena and Fernando, amongst her youth, burgeoning sexuality, and society.

There is nothing controversial about my conclusion that it was necessary to have Anaïs nude. The underage nudity is as significant to the character development as was the highly contested rape scene in Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh-Thi's *Baise Moi* (2000). While certainly faking a rape, the performers fictionally raped are nevertheless penetrated and shown in close-up, thus warranting, from the BBFC, a cut of the respective shots of maximum visibility (Hickin 2011: 124). The concern with *Baise Moi* was the possibility of inciting arousal in the rape sequence, unlike Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (*Irréversible,* 2002), whose nine-minute rape "contains no explicit sexual images and is not designed to titillate" (Hickin 2011: 126, quoting BBFC). These three cases, *Baise Moi*, *Fat Girl*, and *Irreversible*, point to an experience of film as assembling images without the aid of generic categories – how critics and censors put together what they saw, and further, tried to bring words to the experience of the film, validates my thesis that genre is not so easily applicable to extreme cinema. Neither verifiably pornography nor art, for critics and censors something must nevertheless be said and done with these films in the early 2000s. I claim that the images of Anaïs, although exposing her breasts as sites of sexual arousal, within the context of the narrative and her clearly troubled emotional state, do not titillate. Such would be the erotic for Breillat, as I explored above: an art or image with only one purpose, namely, to turn a man on. On the other hand, via pornography as I have understood it above, *Fat Girl* contains a pointed message about their subject as well as a secondary object apart but nevertheless linked to arousal: an attempt at articulate the complex power relations through Anaïs's display of

shame – sparked by Elena's inauguration into the sexual realm – for viewers of either gender.

Fat Girl, then, is thoroughly pornographic in the manner I have collected it here, but not exactly in the sense of Williams's early (working) definition cited above. There is nothing erotic in Anaïs's display of her body and even Elena, played by the more classically attractive Mesquida, loses that beauty in her inactivity and stillness. It cannot be "teen porn" (Lane n/d.) or shot for the purpose of seeing "underage actresses naked" (Blackwelder n/d.); nor is it an outlet for Breillat's "sick rape fantasies" (Anderson n/d.; Blackwelder n/d.). In reducing Elena to an object for Fernando's pleasure to such an extreme degree, viewers cannot (or at least should not) be thrown into sexual ecstasy. Elena's breasts, pubic hair, and thighs and register sympathy and compassion for the foolish girl who is, after all, like many other girls, according to a British audience member's surveyed response to the film (Barker 2011: 113). Rather than the original intention of the pornographic to sexually excite, Victoria Best writes (2007: 214) of recent pornographic French literature and film, the "images and scenarios… are repeatedly placed in contexts and perspectives that negate the possibility of arousal or else use it to trouble and disquiet the reader or spectator." The initial reaction to one of Breillat's films, *Fat Girl* especially, is that the disquieting features demand a critical response as opposed to a quick dismissal, because the expected resolution and narrative thrust is too confusing, boring, inappropriate, or offensive. I will return to just how confounded genre and spectatorship become in *Fat Girl* when I trace Breillat's appropriation of horror.

It suffices to conclude that pornography was well-used for Breillat's directorial goals. I have argued just how far she is willing to utilize and also dispense with

pornography, turning the genre on its head and evermore producing that effective impression of reality for which cinema has come to be appreciated. Or rather, to be more precise, what one claims of any genre in *Fat Girl* is a result of how that spectator, with his or her pre-conceptions of genre, collects and assembles the images for themselves. The interpretations and classifications of the film can come in several forms, particularly pornography, horror, and melodrama. Prior to an interpretation there is the experience of assembling images into a whole which, as I have argued above, does not accurately cohere into an established and common-sense category. This collection may result in an understanding of Breillat's message but that message may be lost, for instance, with the critics cited above.

Problems with the Pornographic

There is also room for a critique of Breillat's use of the pornographic. It should be argued that she does not go far enough in her depictions of sexuality.[70] Furthermore, few scholars account for the director's heteronormativity and one-dimensional portrayal of female sexuality, a problem that should be more fully explored rather than merely championing the director's insights into ambiguous sexual encounters. Lisa Downing (2004: 270) tries to link Breillat's *Romance* to a critique of heteronormativity but does not strongly develop the argument. The problem with sexuality in Breillat's films remains exclusively heterosexual and thus it does not fully do justice to contemporary sexuality, contra the attempts at ethical theory sparked by her *oeuvre*. Breillat's films, much like generic

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[70] Aurélien Ferenczi (Wilson 2001: 155) observes then asks: "One of the film's motivating forces is undoubtedly provocation. But what if, paradoxically, *Romance* didn't go far enough? … [T]he film is quickly reduced to a series of scenes which we've seen before now and then, such as an attempt at fellatio or a condom being put on, et cetera. A sort of catalogue, exhaustive but hackneyed, of what can be shown on screen without crossing the boundary dividing 'normal' cinema from porn."

pornography, hyper-sexualize girls and women to the point of stereotyping – no girl or woman can say no to sexual encounters in her films, and as a reviewer said of *Fat Girl*, the characters are more "ciphers" for Breillat's philosophical musings than something more substantial (Barker 2011: 114). Additionally problematic are the rapes depicted, often appearing more initiatory than traumatizing. Many of her films replay the same seduction routine, a rape, and then the female character's spiked interest in things sexual, a feature which bears a striking resemblance to 1970s and early 1980s feature length hard core pornography (Williams 1999: 169-170). And although Breillat's films end in aporia, as in hard core porn the solution to sexual problems is always more and better sex (Williams 1999: 170). For example, the most hotly contested scene in *Romance* is whether Marie willed and enjoyed a rape in a stairwell. In this scene we are barely introduced to a man who propositions her to provide cunnilingis. She agrees and in the midst of the act ponders the thought of rape – whether by this very man or at some other point is left unclear. Whatever the time of her fantasy this man in the stairwell turns her over and forces vaginal or anal sex. Marie shouts "Pay me!," the man comes, and the victimized woman who by this point is in tears, confounds our expectations: "I'm not ashamed!" she yells, then in voiceover, reflects on nymphomania. All this seems to be as a result of her boyfriend's lack of interest in sex; perhaps, had they a healthy sexual life, Marie's extra-monogamous encounters would be unnecessary.

The difficultly in assessing the rape scene, Breillat in general, and much of extreme cinema lies in the question of whether the onscreen acts, dialogue, and behaviours are the representations of social and cultural forces or are a director's adoption of sexism and violence in their own terms for social and political critique. This ambiguity in Breillat's work is the reason why film theorists and critics have found it so engaging.

Taken out of its context, a scene appears to be ethically reprehensible or utterly incomprehensible, as the above scene synopsis of *Romance* suggests. If we were to unravel a given film's story, each of the pornographic elements is insufficient to stand on its own. Each number must be collected alongside its narrative. This is the difficulty with the pornographic, its refusal to be pinned down to static images, practices, sounds, etc. Art cinema complicates this more so, Brinkema observes. "…[E]ven images of art cinema might be read as pornographic, and even stills from the basest obscenity might appear to have been formed for sublime contemplation. Such a confusion/anxiety is understandable – the two fields have much in common. After all, both art cinema and pornography are considered 'adult' genres, and for similar reasons…" (Brinkema 2006c: 99). Extreme cinema cannot be easily reducible to, or simply categorized as, as a sub-genre of pornography, both terms laden with complications regarding representations of sex, sexuality, and violence. Pornography has its own expectations, likewise art cinema. The moments these expectations are frustrated are precisely those moments when spectators have found a gap in their collection of images. When this gap appears, I argue, the demand is placed on the spectator to assemble the images until they make sense. This will require the expansion of one genre, as these sections have done with Breillat's relationship to pornography, and inclusion of other genres which are perhaps at first seemingly incompatible with the anticipated or initially experienced category. As the next sections work out, thinking through *Fat Girl* within the parameters of pornography does not account for the entire feature. Nevertheless, as I have argued in this chapter, the inclusion of Breillat within the genre of pornography raises larger questions about representations of sexuality in the cinema as well as feminine sexuality in the 21st century.

Subcategorizing New Extremism from the branch of the art film genre, as Quandt proposed and developed, followed by more rigorous and theoretical treatments from other scholars, is inadequate and insufficient to make sense of the overwhelming shock of/at a particular scene or sequence. The gamut of cinematic transgressions must be included in an analysis of the extreme art film genre, whether cinematographic, or through acting and performance, or because of the disruption of conventional associations of narrative, spatiality, temporality, and as I elucidated above, the common tropes and clichés of a particular genre (cf. Beugnet 2007: 32-41; Hickin 2011: 127; Chamarette 2012: 190-192). The case of Breillat's *Fat Girl* overturns critical accounts of the "shock tactics" (Quandt 2011) of extreme cinema; scenes are not shocking in themselves and oftentimes sequences are not graphic enough to warrant mass outrage. As I have argued about *Fat Girl*'s recourse to the pornographic, it is the entire production which works over the spectator because the film is lackluster compared to even soft-core features. Each and every sequence of Breillat's film contributes to the overall shock and excess of the film experience. What the overall shock means for spectators is something I pursue in the last section.

Such praise of the transgression of genre conventions and the trite shocks of sex and gore is not without further implications. I will argue in the third chapter that there are ethical concerns when asking or demanding underage and non-professional actresses to perform nudity, sexuality, and vulnerability. Barker's audience research on *Fat Girl* revealed that spectators were less concerned about the pornographic and moral implications of underage sexuality than they were about possible exploitation and endangerment of the young actresses (2011: 110). I make the case that these responses are legitimate and were likely expected by Breillat when she let the profilmic event slip in to

viewings, intruding upon our melodramatic, pornographic, and horrific expectations. The third chapter also pursues my analyses of Breillat's films in more theoretical terms when I connect *Fat Girl* with its fictionalized making-of film *Sex is Comedy*. Prior to that analysis, I now turn to Breillat's brief glimpse of the horror genre in the dénouement of *Fat Girl*. In Breillat's appropriation of the genre I show that its use facilitates and intensifies the disparities between genre categorizations which, as I have demonstrated, are the director's means of demanding that viewers assemble the images from her films in a way that conveys a particular message regarding adolescent sexuality.

Horror "On Time!"

I must leap into the finale of the film at the same pace it arrives for viewers. The theoretical underpinnings of this section – from Williams on psychoanalysis and sensation, Lisa Coulthard and others on a haptic cinema, what Brinkema describes as the horrible cinematic image – should follow at the same frantic speed. As we saw in Chapter One, according to Laura U. Marks a haptic film experience is defined as an implacable and imprecise sensorial experience of sounds and images, a kind of touching with one's eyes and ears – in other words, an experience prior to (recognized) cognition. The classic definition of horror and a new definition of it created by recent filmmakers, one within the realm of haptic images, collide in Breillat's conclusion to *Fat Girl*. It should be noted before we begin that there is no equivocation between extreme cinema and gore horror or torture porn. The climactic shock and concern with sensation, not just in brutality but also in the composition of images, framing, and their assemblage or collection through editing, puts the former at odds with the repetitive scenes of disgust and bloody violence in the latter. Extreme films may appeal to the horrific yet rarely could we classify, with

certainty, a film as part of the horror genre as such. I argue in the following that the sensation of seeing (and feeling) real bodies onscreen, instead of the made-up and thoroughly unreal of a gore picture, allows for a productive analysis of extreme cinema (in-)between the pornographic and the horrific.

Fernando’s mother (Laura Betti) appears at the family’s vacation home to reclaim the engagement ring her son had given to Elena. It was not an engagement ring after all, but one of the mother’s accessories. Elena and Anaïs’s mother abruptly and furiously ends their vacation; she shoves the girls into their car and begins the long drive home. Each character is in frame for the ensuing dialogue, making pronounced the effect that the entire event has on each family member. The mother may want Elena to visit a doctor, to see if her hymen is still intact, and the (absent) father may want a report published in the paper, a statement regarding an adult’s fornication with his daughter. Elena’s parents adopt Kate Millet’s observation from a few decades ago (1984: 219-220): “Shame, invented by adults and laid upon children, is still pervasive and continues to color adolescence, particularly that of female children. Their lives are a continual apology for something that they probably haven’t done and do not really understand. But they might…. And the possibility of sexual activity is what adults guard against relentlessly.”

On the highway, large trucks and 18-wheelers swerve around the mother’s Mercedes. Multiple perspectives, from the trucks, truck drivers, the mother, the side-view mirror, of the car itself, feels like an accident is imminent. The mother gasses, brakes, smokes, and argues with her daughters – Elena wishes for her own death, Anaïs desires to live, they both explain. The mother takes two breaks, one for Anaïs to vomit, and another at a gas station to fuel up and get a quick bite. The tension increases as day passes into night. The driving goes on and on. The girls cry and whimper, the mother blasts music to

keep herself company, and Anaïs eats junk food. Carol Munter (1984: 239, italics mine), from her personal experience as a "fat" individual and psychotherapist, could perhaps be speaking of Anaïs here when she writes, "Every time a woman reaches for food when she has no physiological need to do so… [s]he is attempting to deal with some bit of external or internal reality which has made her uncomfortable: *a sexual longing or fantasy*, a feeling of envy or rejection, *the impulse to violate a sexual taboo*…." The driving scene lasts for more than 10 minutes, "We experience another time in this scene, the time of pre-trauma, the time of anticipation" (Brinkema 2006a: 158). The mother eventually needs sleep. She parks the car at a rest stop and quickly falls into a deep slumber. Elena, turning around in her front seat, and Anaïs, leaning forward from the back, share a heart-warming exchange in which the latter tries to comfort the former. Fernando has already forgotten you, she says. Go to sleep… Lock your door. Elena sleeps and Anaïs stuffs her mouth with sugary treats.

The fourth sexual number: Shot from Anaïs's perspective, a man, likely a truck-driver, suddenly smashes the windshield and scrambles atop the hood. His axe bashes Elena's skull, instantly killing her. He and Anaïs then have a long stare at one another, completely outside time, "which is not to say that it occurs out of time – what on earth would that mean? – but that the time of the diegesis is compressed and compressible in relation to *our* time" (Brinkema 2006a: 159). The mother should have awakened, screamed, shouted, but she does not as the murderer and Anaïs hold each other's gaze. Anaïs urinates.[71] The murderer finally strangles the now awake mother and Anaïs escapes through the passenger door. The two exchange another set of intense looks, and Anaïs

[71] Brinkema 2006a: 159: "you are not wrong to think that the clear fluid on her thighs reminds you of another."

seems to be saying with her eyes that nothing this psycho can do is against her will. A quick cut takes the young girl and the murderer to a nearby shadowy wooded area, not unlike the location of the film's opening sequence. The man tackles Anaïs, rips her panties off, and shoves them in her mouth like the junk she had been eating all day. He rapes her amidst the trees and dirt. It is brief; she does not cry and there is very little struggle.

Figure 2.7-2.8 *Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)

The morning after, police officers and a forensic team are on the scene. An officer brings Anaïs out from the shrubs and trees. "She says he took her in the woods, but he didn't rape her," he tells another officer. Anaïs replies, "If you don't want to believe me, then don't." Freeze-frame on her face followed by the soft and pleasant acoustic guitar of Luigi Balducci's "Vene Carnivale" and the end credits.[72]

These final few minutes have been an object of much debate, academically, theoretically, and on message boards. I think it can be explained most accurately, or assembled best, from the texts and interests that are my own, from a study of the horror genre and what I have said above regarding pornography. I have taken Williams as a key theorist for Breillat's use of the pornographic so I again make reference to her work. In

[72] A second ending was shot but it does not have the same intensity. Anaïs is being attended to by a doctor in his office; he has just examined her and he asks why she did not tell the police about the rape. She delivers the same line as in the final cut.

"Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Williams identified the time of fantasy in horror to be "too early!", which for Williams and her appropriation of psychoanalysis, is the discovery of sexual difference before one is ready. The female victims meet the monster/psycho/murderer "unexpectedly" and are killed in their state of unpreparedness. "This surprise encounter, too early, often takes place at a moment of sexual anticipation when the female victim thinks she is about to meet her boyfriend or lover" (Williams 2009: 614-615). Elena's anal rape is initially the fantasy time of melodrama, defined by Williams as a (female) character's search for the ideal familial romance, ultimately unattainable (for various reasons internal to the diegesis), tinted with loss and therefore "too late!". In Elena's case, she loses her virginity and catches up with what the audience already knows, i.e., Fernando's ruse.

It is possible to suggest that Elena is dispensed with, additionally, because of her inability to ward off the rapist Fernando, arriving at sexuality too early. I interpret Breillat here (2011d: 14) as explaining the blending of melodrama and horror, suggesting the melodramatic reappears in the midst of horror: "[Elena] is killed because this desire for illusions that we so badly need in order to live our lives is lost in her." We might also want to say Elena is killed, as in many horror films, due to the generic plot device of "the sexually active 'bad' girls" being punished for their pleasure (Williams 2009: 610). The latter resonates with the idea of shame much pursued in Breillat's *oeuvre*.

Anaïs in comparison, in this last chapter of *Fat Girl* and in a twist of the horror genre, regains the utopian "on time!" of pornography whereby two subjects encounter each other at the precise moment when both are ready and willing for sex (Williams 2009: 614). Thus Anaïs is not the Final Girl of horror genre theory (and correspondingly horror spectatorship), the last remaining (virginal) girl who dons the phallus to confront

and kill the assailant(s), turning from a powerless femininity to a "gendered masculinity."[73] Anaïs's fantasy stated at the beginning of the narrative – getting rid of her virginity in an emotionless embrace – is finally fulfilled; she empowers herself by playing the active role but not in relation to a stronger masculinity. The limited activity that femininity is allowed is affirmed by Anaïs, and this is the real horror Breillat is trying to convey, a girl who has been convinced that she would rather be raped than suffer the illusions of love.

I said above that in her look at the rapist, situated between her exiting of the vehicle and prior to the jump cut to the woods, she is agreeing to whatever transpires next. Brinkema writes, (2006a: 160), "No, you are not mistaken to see that she puts her arms around [her rapist]. You are not wrong to hear the same grunt Fernando issued earlier. You are not morbid to think the encounter looks identical to the one in Elena's bed. You are not guilty to wonder if they are." Similar to Mesquida's close-up in the first sexual number to express her tension between love/sex and shame, in the event of the rape, Anaïs is shot in close-up so we can see her brief struggle followed by indifference as her rapist fulfills her wish. With the sexual assault on Anaïs in the final sequence it is easy to forget, however, according to Breillat, that Elena's pains are much greater. The director relates in interviews,

> The older sister is the real rape in the film because she is in a position where you have to combine sentimentality with the physical act. I think this is mental rape, the worst rape — because it's a rape in which the woman gives up her self-esteem, a rape that does not even show up as a rape, because everyone lives like that — lives for romantic love. (Rich 2001, typo corrected)

[73] On Final Girl theory, see Clover [1987] 2011.

> Elena… is the victim of a mental rape. What is more shameful than letting yourself be fooled by lies that you know are such from the beginning? (Breillat 2011d: 14)[74]

Anaïs, comparatively, knows the apparent truths of existence, love, and sex. Like Marie in *Romance* who shouts she is not ashamed after she is raped, Anaïs too has willed the fantasy into existence, and for that reason will not lie about being assaulted against her will. But the younger sister's fantasy is not in the time of the body genres Williams outlines – I will argue how the sequence of Anaïs's rape (phantasy/fantasy) has the "on time" of the pornographic genre and not that of the "too early" in horror. My contention that *Fat Girl* is without strict genre coordinates is therefore evinced by this penultimate sequence's distance from Williams's theory of genres. Williams nevertheless provides me with the tools to discuss Breillat's excessive example of what many young women must endure from men.

Williams argues for her body genre's theoretical times of fantasy through the writing of psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis. In the body genre film (horror, pornography, melodrama) the time of fantasy of the main protagonist is as such depending upon an "irrecoverable original experience presumed to have actually taken place [in the person's infancy/childhood]… and the uncertainty of its hallucinatory revival [in that person's teenage years]" (Williams 2009: 612-613; Laplanche & Pontalis [1964] 1986, especially 13-14, 24). Fantasy is that place of discrepancy or disjuncture where the real of the past and an imagined event of the past come together to form "the origin of the subject," that time when the infant or child first discovers their sexual difference, sexual desire, and/or familial romance or primal scene and which is then

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[74] This is the "typically French" position Barker 2010 finds in his research of British audiences on French film – according to Brits the French are cynical and pessimistic about love. On the challenges associated with theorizing rape and seduction in Breillat's films, see Wheatley 2010.

replayed as a real and memorable event of adolescence (Williams 2009: 613, quoting Laplanche and Pontalis). For Laplanche and Pontalis, this origin is not only structural, part of the unconscious and wholly an interior experience; "we must accept," the authors write (1986: 11), "the idea of an intrusion from without in an interior which perhaps did not exist as such before this intrusion." The intrusion from without, at that same moment, is the beginning of the fantasy, which is to say the origin of the subject and the origin of the fantasy co-presently arrive from the outside to reveal, from a subject's interiority, a past trauma in the form of castration/sexual difference, seduction/sexual desire, and the family romance/lost love of the Oedipal complex (Laplanche & Pontalis 1986: 18-19). The filmic and spectatorial interest in the genres of horror, pornography, and melodrama, for Williams, operate according to these psychoanalytic principles on the role of fantasy. It appears as though both the diegetic world and spectator's relationship to that world are as such because of the truth of these claims, e.g., the horror of horror is an image or fictionalized event which registers for the spectator at the level of the sub- or unconscious, a horror of the castration complex and first viewing of sexual difference as a child.

While convoluted in her exegesis of Laplanche and Pontalis's exegesis on Freudian hysteria and fantasy, Williams nonetheless provides a strong foundation for an analysis of the sexual assault on Anaïs. Anaïs's rape is this precise originary moment Laplanche and Pontalis identify. She does not find her subjectivity too early, however, i.e., the discovery of sexual difference before she is ready – such would be the typical structure of fantasy for the horror genre (Williams 2009: 614-615). Instead she is on time with the primal fantasy of seduction, one where the seduction is not tied to the recognition of castration/sexual difference (too early!) or the trauma of lost love on the side of the

maternal or paternal (too late!), but already she grasps the (psychoanalytic) truth of the relations (her sexual desire) between the sexes. "It is apt that this moment [of Anaïs and the madman exchanging gazes], when the isolated Anaïs finally comes face to face with the 'monster' of her dreams, is temporally out of joint, more in line with her psychic registering of events than with any ordered reality of happenings" (Horeck 2010: 206). Phantasy has turned into fantasy for Anaïs, perfectly on time.[75] The repressed memory of a childhood trauma is turned into the real memory from the exterior in the event of the rape.[76] This is the unconscious phantasy co-habiting and becoming the real event of a conscious fantasy (Laplanche & Pontalis 1986: 20-21). But we must not link the fantasy to the precise object of desire, for Anaïs the murderer/rapist, because fantasy is the re-staged scene in its entirety of that originary childhood trauma. In this second hallucinatory experience (the rape), Anaïs becomes subject or, her subjectivity, her drives, and her desires are "articulated into the [setting of] fantasy." This literal setting is the "on time!" of the rest stop and woods, the "favoured spot" of fantasy outside of the "defensive mechanisms through which the psyche deals with… prohibition" (Laplanche & Pontalis 1986: 26-27). In other words, Anaïs finds her structural and literal setting for her desire. This setting into place of a psychic reality is indeed how Breillat constructs her films, quite apart from notions of realism.

Breillat's goal is to portray the "reality of feelings" rather than of an objective reality, which is to say a cinematic realism along the lines Bazin prescribed, insofar as the

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[75] Cf. Laplanche and Pontalis 1986: 19, 32n40. Phantasy is the unconscious memory or "mental processes" such as a repressed trauma or originary structure of sexuality (sexual difference, etc.). Fantasy is at the level of the conscious or subliminal, a daydream for instance.

[76] I have refused the details of the first and second sexual scenes for a child – the former arriving earlier and subsequently repressed, the second arriving in puberty and remembered but is merely the return of the repressed – simply because Laplanche and Pontalis state (1986: 9-11) there would be an infinite regress or impossible to locate first scene. I agree with their views.

latter is taken as a proponent of a theory of imaginative realism rather than verisimilitude. Keesey suggests (2009: 147), like the bloody endings of *A Real Young Girl* (*Une vraie jeune fille*, 1976), *Romance*, and *Anatomy of Hell*, and perhaps he may agree, *Bluebeard* (*Barbe Bleue*, 2009) additionally, Anaïs's rape and the prior murders are "metaphorical rather than realistic." Breillat has not commented on this, but periodically she notes the significance of myth and the imaginary, and thus fantasy, in her films (Breillat 2011: 15). The imaginary, and thus the unconscious as I outlined above, needs to be given a more important place in film. She loathes the demand placed on filmmakers to neglect the ephemeral quality of images and stories (2011d: 15). In the final scene of *Fat Girl*, for instance, Anaïs emerges from the woods escorted by cops, some hours after being violated by the murderer. The heads of the cops are not shown; no one cares about an individual cop – what stands out are the officers in white and "the plastic gloves used to protect the evidence," i.e., placed on the hands of the corpses, Elena and the mother (Breillat 2011d: 15). But the events that transpired before, the murderous man smashing the windshield of the vehicle, the killings and rape, register not in an objective reality but as part of an imaginary or dream-like world through its temporal confusion and the film's defiance of the expected conclusion of a homogeneous narrative. One debate about this ending, then, is whether it is just in Anaïs's mind or really occurs in that world. I suggest that it is somewhere in-between and this in-betweenness, this interruption of our habituated viewing experience by this unforeseeable finale, perhaps shocks us in a way that a happy or structurally satisfying ending cannot.[77] This disruption is the final and

[77] Breillat's penchant for the imaginary, I would argue, began with her first feature. *A Real Young Girl*'s Bataillean heroine spends more time in her imaginary world rather than one connected to and dependent on others. Her love interest, most explicitly, is frequently seen striking poses like a model: dripping water across his chest, elegantly smoking a cigarette, etc.

most powerful effect in the film, as well as evidence for film-narrative's affective and terrifying force.

Body genres are perhaps categorized as simply as their respective times of fantasy; on the other hand, according to Williams, they are also concerned with spectacle, in the case of horror, its "portrayal of violence and terror," "of the body 'beside itself' [or a form of ecstasy] with… fear and terror" (Williams 2009: 604, 605). The body genres follow from the tradition of a cinema of attractions defined by Gunning, i.e., their aggressive address to the spectator. The bodies onscreen, in their fear and terror, are imprecisely mimicked by the bodies of the spectators, and the success of a film is oftentimes dependent upon the degree of sensation that images and narratives are able to produce, i.e., from the formal qualities there are certain hypothesized and/or visible bodily effects. Horror, for instance, "measure[s] success in terms of screams, fainting, and heart attacks" (Williams 2009: 605-606). However, Williams's definition here reminds me of Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the pornographic, briefly mentioned in my introductory chapter ([1960] 2009: 270). The pornographic is any cinematic event which "overwhelms consciousness:" "Elemental catastrophes, the atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death…." A definition of the pornographic, from Kracauer's point of view, also provides a description of the final chapter of *Fat Girl*. Yet spectators can experience the pornographic/horrific in two separate yet linked ways: as singular image/event, such as the murders and rape, and through the force of the whole feature, which is to say the social and cultural reality presented.

Returning to a screening of *Fat Girl* I held in the fall of 2012, I was pleased when a woman nearly jumped out of her seat as the onscreen murderer broke the windshield and made quick work of Elena. This is what Breillat calls "the monster," "the thing in the

film that produces sensation in the viewer" (Brinkema 2006a:160; Breillat 2011a). Breillat is thoroughly concerned with sensation, making the spectator leap from her chair in that moment of horror. But, the director continues, it is not merely the singular event of shock that defines this monster; it is more accurate to say that the sensation cannot be precisely located, is felt "from nowhere in particular" (Brinkema 2006a: 160). Although imprecise, spectators organize the images and sounds for themselves, making sense of the film despite its misuse of genre conventions. Through this misuse we can uncover a view of the world Breillat believes is often masked or hidden.

I now want (to attempt) to locate the sense of the horrible in the film's narrative with some precision, in and through a closer analysis of horror genre conventions. I make a distinction between classical horror and a new kind of cinematic image Brinkema names the "horrible." I examine how this distinction fits with the pornographic and continues to break further from Williams's cursory definition and out to a much more Kracauerian one.

Breillat's Horrible *Fat Girl*

I claim that the sensations experienced during the dénouement of the film – spectators' presumed shock and fear after my own experience during the first viewing – is a product of Breillat's appropriation of horror and its amalgamation into the genres of teen melodrama and pornography. Yet the exact experience or sensation received from the penultimate sequence is difficult to define and locate because it comes as a result of the entire feature, i.e., its images, sounds, and narrative taken as a whole. Furthermore, the difficulty in pinpointing an exact moment of horror, besides the killing of course, is due

to the film containing very little horror (as genre) to accurately identify, or better, the horror is not solely in the most striking and horrific scene at the finale.

Tania Modleski's essay, "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory" (1986), provides a precise account of the narrative features in the horror genre. She begins by identifying the postmodern war against narrative and cinematic pleasure, tracing this line of thought through the Frankfurt School, Roland Barthes, Christian Metz, Jean-François Lyotard, and Julia Kristeva (2009: 617-622). Each of these theorists, in their own way, posits narrative pleasure as a key component of "the supreme ideological construct – the 'bourgeois ego'" (Modleski 2009: 621). The argument is that in spectators' narcissistic (ego-swapping) identification with the "novelistic" or "family romance" narratives and characters, the bourgeois class supplies certain class values that keep the ruling-class and the current system in power. The details of this theoretical position are outlined by film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Stephen Heath through a rigorous engagement with psychoanalysis and Louis Althusser's Marxism. While Modleski sets out to disprove this claim via the horror genre, her text is also significant for its fundamental descriptions of its common traits. Breillat, although clearly working with fear and terror in that penultimate sequence, will not conform to the genre as Modleski defines it.

The first is the denial of closure (Modleski 2009: 622). Horror films are often open-ended, defying audiences' expectations of a neat and tidy finish, and opening the possibility for endless sequels. For Modleski this is the opposite of the closure found in the "novelistic" or "family romance" cinema Heath classifies, which he argues, aids in identification with characters and construction of a particular kind of subject (1981: 125-128, 157-158). Second, horror films "tend to dispense with or drastically minimize the

plot and character development that is thought to be essential to the construction of the novelistic" (Modleski 2009: 622). Characters are "interchangeable" so we have no climax (Modleski 209: 623); the focus is instead on the chase, the killings, and possible salvation for those who have crossed paths with the monster/psycho/murderer. Third, since characters are interchangeable and lack personality, they are nearly impossible to identify with. Horror films are thoroughly anti-narcissistic, Modleski concludes; audiences delight in the slashings and bashings and in having their "expectations of closure frustrated" (2009: 624).

While the open-endedness of horror films is now a staple of the genre, Breillat on the other hand, will close the book on Anaïs's initiation into sexuality; the narrative might not be closed in the conventional sense of an ending – a happy or at worst an indifferent resolution – *Fat Girl* nevertheless concludes with the most brutal of events, namely the murders and rape. The pleasures of terror in the finale of a horror feature become the displeasure of the closure of Elena and Anaïs's story. Breillat does retain the minimal plot, writing, like Bazin suggests, a simple story without touching the level of documentary. But this minimal plot does not, like the horror feature, refuse to build to a climax. *Fat Girl* progresses despite the characters' stagnation, marked by the introductory conversation between Elena and Anaïs in which the two set out their philosophy of love – love required for sex for the older sister, love as bad faith for the younger – followed by the narrative adopting these philosophies, or making their dreams come true, to an excessive and climactic degree.

Since the characters are caricatures, it is also untrue that identification becomes impossible for spectators. Barker's audience research (2011: 113, 114) strongly reveals that the affective dimension for some viewers was the characters' link to their own lives,

whether Elena's gullibility or Fernando's macho posturing and coercion for sexual pleasure. Better, I do not see Elena and Fernando as characters of the world Breillat presents, but as what Cavell names "types" (1979: 33-37, 174-179), through which we see *individualities*. In *Fat Girl* we see the bourgeois teen longing for love and the bourgeois college student searching for sex, and in them, individuals who are, to a greater or lesser degree, like ourselves. Gregory Currie's notion of impersonal imagining is perhaps relevant here. Currie suggests spectators lose the (bodily) awareness of watching a film and that the imagination is caught up in the event without the body physically being there (Wheatley 2009: 33). In Barker's research, on the other hand, spectators do not just re-collect the events which took place in the feature but re-collect themselves in similar happenings in their own past – their bodies, in some sense, are there too in the film. The male identification Barker observed is also despite Breillat's "majority of… male characters seem[ing] to be unsympathetic at best, uncaring, cruel, violent — even murderous — at worst" (Russell-Watts 2010: 72). The director succinctly sums up the role of men in her *oeuvre*:

> There is no masculine psychology in my cinema. They contain only what women feel and desire. Therefore, men must not try to recognise themselves in my male characters. However, the films can help them acquire a better understanding of women, and knowledge of the other is a higher goal. (Russell-Watts 2010: 72, citing Chollet, trans. Russell-Watts)[78]

Yet in Fernando's seduction men find the truth of their real life relations with women, quite unlike, for example, the rape of Jennifer in *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978). In this film the men are so vile and depraved that male viewers cannot identify themselves with the rapists and cannot therefore gain any pleasure from the images of

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[78] See the rest of Russell-Watts's essay for a critique of Breillat's "marginalized males," their processes of sexuation, and how the divergent male leads in *Romance* are ultimately productive for rethinking one-dimensional accounts of masculinity.

(forced) sex (Fulfs 2010: 256-258). Fernando, on the other hand, is all too kind, all too persuasive, and all too familiar. Thus Breillat's own aim is overtaken by real spectators in this instance. A generic horror film, according to Modleski, should not contain this level of identification.

We see how much the French director deviates from Modleski's theory of horror. Breillat is not so much a director of horror as she is perhaps a director of the horrible. Brinkema develops this distinction in an essay on Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997), and I suspect someone, in the near future, will conduct a rigorous study between Haneke's and Breillat's *oeuvres*. Many scholars of extreme cinema write on both directors and so appropriating Brinkema's argument about Haneke and the horrible seems appropriate.

The horrible is engaged not as a direct opposition to horror, whose Latin *horrere* is defined by a bristling, a standing up of the hairs on the nape of one's neck in those scenes of anticipation and excitement (Brinkema 2006b: 156; Williams 2009: 606). As Brinkema explains, the horrible in Haneke is the failure of horror to appear as such. In much of Haneke's work, from *The Seventh Continent* (*Die Siebente Kontinent*, 1989) to *Benny's Video* (1992) to *The White Ribbon* (*Das Weisse Band*, 2009), violence often appears off-screen or out of frame; we get the sounds but not the image, making the horrible appear in our imaginations rather than on the nape of necks. For Brinkema this is precisely the anxiety, the tension, and the encounter of the Lacanian Real within Haneke's film itself. For the purposes of the discussion here, the Real is defined and limited to an eruption or interruption in the Symbolic, which is to say genre expectations

"as frustrated representation(s)" (Brinkema 2006b: 155).[79] According to Lorenzo Chiesa (2007: 126-130), we must not locate the Real as objectivity, a thing without the mediation of a human subjectivity, or a primordial undifferentiated matter. It is instead the psychic effects not reducible to everyday reality, part of the unconscious processes which allow the Symbolic and Imaginary to function. Chiesa calls this the Real-of-the-Symbolic, the Real within the Symbolic, and beyond the knowledge of the Symbolic. When the spectator is cut off from the (Symbolic) representations of genre, the Real is that thing missing from an otherwise ordered and habituated film experience, and is therefore a lack (Chiesa 2007: 131).

In *Funny Games*, something has gone missing from our viewing experience, i.e., the cinematic image itself, and the image we expect to be horrified by disintegrates into sounds: groans of pain, screams, and silences. Coulthard quotes Haneke on aurality (2012: 19), linking the sounds of his films to a haptic experience for spectators, "Asserting that 'the ear is fundamentally more sensitive than the eye' and that it 'provides a more direct path to the imagination and the heart of human beings.'" With his filmic silences and lack of non-diegetic music, "Haneke has argued for the primacy of hearing in ensuring cinema's affective and intellectual impact."[80] It is the auditory element of Haneke's films which renders a phenomenological and sensorial experience possible, pulling the spectator out the more cognitive or psychoanalytic based spectatorship of "narrative logic" or "character identification" (Coulthard 2012: 18; Barker 2009: 51). When psychoanalytic approaches are limited to issues of identification, this form of

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[79] Brinkema 2006b: 155-156 spends much more time than I do here developing Jacques Lacan's affect of anxiety though Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny. On Lacanian anxiety, see also Brinkema 2014: 201-208.

[80] Cf. Laplanche & Pontalis 1986: 18-19. Consider the role of sound from a psychoanalytic perspective as well: a sound, if Coulthard and Haneke are correct, can equally serve as that signifier, that noise of a childhood trauma rekindled.

theorizing is insufficient to account for the phenomenological experience; if, on the other hand, the eruption of the Real into the symbolic is experienced sensuously when viewing a film, then I have found a way to retain the value of psychoanalytic theory insofar as I can integrate it into recent developments and research on spectatorship as an engagement with the senses.

To put Chiesa's point on the Real differently, a haptic hearing, according to Marks, can be located in that moment whereby sounds are "undifferentiated," not as matter but as sounds *for a subject* prior to his or her choice to turn attention (or register psychically) to one in particular (Marks 2000: 182-183). In that instant of equalized sound, that which registers with the senses from the object itself, in the case of films the celluloid, moves out toward the spectator to "quite literally" move their body in sometimes "thought provoking, contemplative and ethically implicated ways" (Coulthard 2012: 18). Breillat accomplishes this with *Fat Girl*. Fernando's grunting, as I suggested in a section above, is both pornographic and horrible. In the silence of Elena and Anaïs's room, without the aid of non-diegetic music, we become another witness to the indignities Elena (and other young girls) come to face, because sound carries with it, like an image, a duty and responsibility to address what is heard (Coulthard 2012: 26-28).

If the horrible is the sounds and anxiety of the Real encroaching on our habitual viewing experience, i.e., as a defiance of our cinematic, narrative, and genre expectations, what better film to accomplish this than Breillat's *Fat Girl*? In Breillat's film we do not see much of the physical rape, as we do in Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused* (1988), Katheryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), and other similar spectacular features. These two films operate according to classical Hollywood logic, a logic that utilizes fast cuts and slow-motion in the former, and a point-of-view shot in the latter to fabricate a

convincing onscreen event. With Elena, the sexual assaults happen in Anaïs's presence, and it is through her we must position ourselves rather than with stylized editing or heightened verisimilitude. We hear the sounds of Elena's rape nevertheless, and again, Breillat forces us to imagine the horrible taking place in front of Anaïs in the first instance and behind her back in the second.

Breillat's *Perfect Love* (*Parfait Amour*, 1996) achieves the same with its horrible images. At the beginning of the feature a police inspector commands a murderer to re-enact his deed; the murderer's brutal actions, comic in this instance as it lacks both the killer's aggression and a live body upon which the stabbing is committed, thus forces us to imagine the killing. When we reach the last chapter of the narrative, Breillat does not show us the stabbing, but rather brings us to a close-up of the young man as he ends his lover's life, full of anger, aggression, and blood splatter. The two murders then, one re-created and the other actually occurring in the diegesis, do not offer spectators a chance to verify (with their eyes) the killing. Thus the final sequence of *Fat Girl* and *Perfect Love* as well, is not Breillat's only recourse to the horrible, although it is perhaps the most evident and affective – the film, as a whole, is also rife with it. The horrific image, graphically detailed, has been replaced by the horrible of the imagination. Because we are forced to imagine something horrible, this is where I locate the spectator's sensation(s) in viewing the film; spectatorship is a collecting of particular images and sounds, onscreen and imagined, followed by their re-collecting and evaluating.

Thus a horrible cinema, I can conclude here with Brinkema (2006b: 151), "locates itself elsewhere than in the image." We can see the analogy here to the Lacanian Real and how a haptic cinema operates as the replacement for the missing Symbolic representation of expected narrative and image. When the psychic reality falters, cinema offers the

sensation of image and sound to produce effects in the spectator's body. This is the import of the haptic and tactile film experience when psychoanalytic analyses refer only to the Imaginary order. In the third chapter, I will further explore the details of these two divergent film theories – psychoanalysis and phenomenology/affect studies – by paying closer attention to haptic visuality and its relationship to the pornographic genre as elucidated in this chapter. It was nevertheless important to introduce haptic aurality in Breillat's feature at this point, as Williams notes the significance of sound for the pornography genre.

For Brinkema the horrible is not a genre but a strange relation, or as I have been expounding here, an expansion of generic categories that function to confound expectations rooted in the spectator's mode of perception. If he, and by proximity Breillat, are classified by pre-established generic categories, the effective presence of the filmmakers' depicted reality disappears. "The problem with genre, for [Haneke], resides in a problem with the cynical marketing of expectations as a palliative for an unthinking, uncritical audience" (Brinkema 2006b: 148). With the reluctance to produce genre-films and in an effort to move beyond generic categories, similarly Breillat first challenges our assumptions about genre and, second, the challenges spectators to develop the courage to see the presence of oppressive sexual relations between men and women.

For myself, critics, theorists, and audiences, the reality or world depicted in an extreme feature is consistently overshadowed by the scenes and sequences of sex and violence, scenes that are perhaps too much to handle in terms of either the trauma induced or the incomprehensibility for typically Bazinian (art cinema) spectators who are resistant to cinematic sex and death. Audiences and critics are often unsure how to respond to *Fat Girl*. One reviewer bluntly asks, "What is this all about? What is the point?" (Barker

2011: 112). The theoretical aims of a picture are occasionally misplaced but this is the risk the director must take in order to get the critical reception desired. Breillat cannot be assimilated into generic expectation; her films demand the careful attention of a theoretical text – one view is possibly insufficient to grasp or feel the presence of the social or cultural reality depicted.[81]

Fat Girl defies three genres: melodrama, pornography, and horror. I argued that the implacable sensation – arousal, shock, fear, terror, pathos – is due not to any event in particular but to the structure of narrative and plot, the shots and length of the scenes, the sounds and bodies on display, all of which contribute to confounding the expectations of viewers. And, "Like in all fine horror," Beugnet writes on contemporary extreme films from France (2007: 45), "shock is the gateway between the plane of sensation and that of discourse." This conclusion follows a growing body of literature that finds extreme cinema opens up debate about ethical engagement with the world (Wheatley 2009: 85-88; Lübecker 2011; Brown 2013; Frey 2014; Dooley 2014).

The discourse and conversation that emerges from the film circles around the utterly frightening position young girls have been put in, "that a quick rape is actually preferable to a long seduction, and that the raped sister exercises more control over her fate than the seduced one" (Williams 2008: 283). The meaning of Anaïs's rape is not "a potentially liberating experience," as Vincendeau suggests (2011: 6), nor is Breillat's aim to show a coming of age story, highlighting the significant event that allows Anaïs to emerge from her "shell," as described by actress Reboux (Breillat 2011d: 14). As I stated

[81] Thus the recent turn in art cinema to a slowness of narrative, cuts, dialogue, and action. In the chapter on Carlos Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), I provide an account of this recent cinematic trend, and how it functions to convey a certain type of reality.

above, part of the difficulty in writing about extreme cinema is trying to decode the director's social/political critique. *Fat Girl* contains a most devastating critique of the existing sexual relations between men and women because of its apparently testimonial quality (evinced by the audience responses) and its ability to provide an existential situatedness without resorting to the documentary genre (the film is, after all, a classical fictional narrative with a beginning, middle, and end). This persistent sexism and violence are part of adolescent and teenage sexuality for Breillat. Men are seducers and rapists – the only freedom allowed young girls is the ability to pick which act of deflowering seems the least damaging. The director reveals this message through the concealing (screening, masking, or hiding) of the sexually explicit image and forcing spectators to imagine the film's horrors. Breillat offers no solution to the problem of sexual difference under patriarchy, merely showcasing it for our cinematic displeasure, which is to say the viewing of this film should produce negative emotions in the viewers. A potential social and ethical change hopefully results from such displeasure.

Chapter 3: Onscreen and Off-screen Flesh and Blood: Performance, Pornography, Spectatorship

The occasional scholar writing on Carlos Reygadas's films theorizes the performances of the director's actors and actresses often with reference to the similarities and dissimilarities they share with Robert Bresson's "models."[82] Little has been written about performance in Catherine Breillat's *oeuvre*. I claim that the limited scholarly engagement with acting and performance in the works of these two contemporary directors is due, in part, to their ambiguous relationships with pornography. We can discuss the delivery of lines and observe the gestures of the performers, but it is much more challenging to accomplish an analysis or develop a theory on the exhibition of the nude body, or how well performers (pretend to) fuck onscreen. As I argued in the previous chapter, the ambiguity of *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur!*, 2001) is in the recognition that despite the film's sexual scenes and sequences, the film's seemingly pornographic form and content, I cannot recite Justice Potter Stewart's famous lines while watching or reflecting upon it: I discover that I do not, in fact, know pornography when I see it. Sexual performance, I contend in this chapter, is a significant part of this re-ordering or confusion of genre. I find that the most fascinating cases of this ambiguity are the performances of Marcos Hernández and Anapola Mushkadiz in Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla en el cielo*, 2005) and Roxane Mesquida's challenging, if not traumatic performance as Elena in Breillat's *Fat Girl* and its re-enactment in *Sex is Comedy* (2002). Whether viewers fall on

[82] For examples of the Reygadas/Bresson comparison, see Foltz 2011: 155-157; Penn 2013: 1161-1162; de Luca 2014: 76-77.

the side of art cinema or pornography as they discuss these films and the performances therein demonstrates the fluidity of the concepts discussed throughout this dissertation: genre, genre relations, and genre expectations. I collect these two films that have little in common to draw attention to the ways performance can interrupt genre identification. I question the claim that "body genres" universally, or at best typically, produce certain effects in and on viewers. I will argue that the performances in *Battle in Heaven*, *Fat Girl*, and *Sex is Comedy* re-organize sense-experience, against the grain of static accounts of the so-called body genres.

I have used the word performance rather than acting. Performance is not merely the "action/function" and "how the lines are said" (Dyer [1979] 2009: 480). Nor is it merely the aura Richard Dyer conceptualizes to discuss stars, i.e., the repeated "gestures, intonations, and so on that a star establishes over a number of films" (Dyer 2009: 481). Although for Mesquida, Dyer's description is now applicable. She has had three roles in Breillat's films: *Fat Girl*, *Sex is Comedy*, and *The Last Mistress* (*Une vielle maitresse*, 2007). However, Marcos and Ana, as well as a third performer in the film, Bertha Ruiz, are all non-professional actors. In addition to Dyer's slim definition of acting, the performances of actors and actresses in extreme cinema often test the limits of the body in a way that is productively likened to performance art. One does not register and evaluate the acting of John Giorno in Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1965), or the man in *Blow Job* (1963), or the stars of his various screen tests – performance is the more appropriate descriptor. In the production trend known as extreme cinema, similarly, the "repertoire of gestures, intonations and so on," includes not just that which a star develops over a career – for most of the actors are non-professional – but requires a re-enactment or performance of the lived body as it comports itself off-screen in the most private realms.

In a chapter on extreme cinema, Linda Williams suggests (2008: 275) performance connotes "an avant-garde edge challenging the more safely contained boundaries of acting and role[,]... the art of opening the body of the performer up to the physical and emotional challenges of the situation being performed." The inclusion of sex within the narrative, Williams submits, performed even poorly, as in Michael Winterbottom's *Nine Songs* (2004), accomplishes something much more "genuine" – more "real" – than just delivering lines and gesturing: it highlights an ambiguous quality in sexual relationships and incites a critical thinking about those relationships. Therefore new methods of performance evaluation and theorizing are necessary to productively discuss contemporary art cinema's move to more "genuine," and at times physically real, depictions of sexual acts. I begin to give this method some flesh in this chapter alongside my extended investigation of performance in the ambiguous space of art cinema and pornography, their relations, and their connections.

With Marcos's, Ana's, and Mesquida's pornographic performances I expand my discussions of the director-auteur to focus on the performances. In Reygadas's and Breillat's films, I see individuals capable of repeated performances of physically and emotionally intense scenes and sequences. Intensity is used here in the sense of affecting the well-being and bodily integrity of the performer; repeated performance is defined as drawing from the performer's "somatic archive" (Paasonen 2011; 2013), a concept further discussed in the relevant section, and in Mesquida's case additionally, performing in one film while drawing creative energies from a prior one. This complicated separation between acting and performance will be further defined as I progress through the chapter. It suffices to note, in the case of the performers under discussion, it is not the embodiment of a screen persona that precisely captures and defines the essence of the film; rather, it is

embodying this persona onscreen while simultaneously balancing the demands from outside the frame – this would signify the essence of a scene and film as a whole.

The first part of this chapter considers the sexual performances in *Battle in Heaven*. In this narrative film about a botched kidnapping and an extra-marital affair, characters and actors participate in some of the most explicit sexual scenes in contemporary art cinema. The "grotesque" and "heavenly" bodies of Marcos and Ana (de Luca 2014: 49-52; Lahr-Vivaz 2008: 146-147), alongside their sexual performances, disturb the coordinates established by mainstream cinema, art cinema, and pornography.[83] I counter Reygadas's claim that this nudity and sexuality demonstrates a kind of authenticity, or genuineness in Williams's analysis, with a revised version of Susanna Paasonen's concept of the "somatic archive." I link this concept with the so-called documentary quality many critics and theorists reference in Reygadas's *oeuvre*, an aspect I discussed in chapter one. It is false to say we have the person as such onscreen, but we do have their bodies which contain the embodied memories of sexual acts performed off-screen.

The second part of this chapter is a careful study *Sex is Comedy*, particularly its final sequence. This is a fictional film that stages the making-of *Scènes Intimes*, a film-within-a-film that more or less replays scenes from *Fat Girl* and stars Mesquida, re-performing similar acts and dialogue. Mesquida's performances bleed between the two roles of *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*. In my following examination of Mesquida's roles, I uncover how performance is one of the possible formal qualities of the films; as I explain below, we can locate the affect of a given film through its form. The roles and the films

[83] I will refer to the actors by their first names to accentuate the film's blurring of reality and fiction. In *Battle in Heaven*, the characters portrayed by the actors share their real-life names.

are paired by their materiality and narratives, but this pairing also transcends an immanence or immediacy of either film taken alone (as a kind of shock or force that effects a spectator); through the films' diegetic and extradiegetic connections I theorize the forms that bind them: pornography (genre), performance (in narrative film), pornographic performance (sexual acts in a narrative film).

We might also call this an intratextual reading. Intratextuality means not just self-reflexivity, i.e., Breillat, diegetically, referring to herself or her *oeuvre*; the "intratextual approach," writes Song Hwee Lim, "allows for productive reading strategies that interrelate one film to another" (de Luca 2014: 101, quoting Lim). It is true that *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy* may be approached separately, but by pairing them I claim they attain a sense of completeness, and at the end of the chapter, I assess how they work together and allow for a re-evaluation of certain strands of spectatorship theory.

Intratextuality calls for a close reading of the films as well as using methods related to auteur theory. I appropriate theoretical concepts as well as interviews with Breillat in which she discusses her filmmaking methods and experiences with her performers. The director ill-treats and exploits her star(s) to varying degrees so as to push them towards becoming an artist, an actor-auteur, even if that auteurism flirts or is tinged with the pornographic. Breillat coerces a performance from Mesquida and, following Williams's praise of art cinema performance quoted above, we could argue that the actress's physical and emotional exertion effectively transmits the director's scathing critique of patriarchal society.[84] In other words, the effect of the films is produced by the

[84] Kath Dooley's thesis is worth quoting at length (2014: 109): "by taking risks as a director, notably by pushing cast and crew into fearful and uncomfortable situations, Breillat is able to capture moments of onscreen intimacy in an affecting and subversive manner. I believe that one must consider her specific

films' forms and affects. I would rank such skilled performances, whether by professionals or non-professionals, at the level of the auteur if the performer were able to achieve this feat across several films. However, given the coercive quality of Breillat's method and the evident traumas of Mesquida's performances, a discussion of performer as auteur needs to be framed in terms of ethics.[85]

A further methodological consideration for the study of Breillat's *Sex is Comedy*: I now expand the phenomenological inquiry of the first chapter. To some degree I follow Eugenie Brinkema's radical de-subjectification of the affects in her essay on "some" Breillat films and in her recent volume, *The Forms of the Affects*: the so-called affective dimension of a film, or its "forms of the affects," exists "independent of its realization in representation" and without the body of the spectator (2014; 2006: 148). Rather than turning critical attention to the hypothesized intentions of the director or hypothesized reactions by an ideal spectator, Brinkema argues for and employs a close reading of form, and therein we find the affects. However, I hope to show that the intentions of the director and a close reading of affects are not mutually exclusive. Nor must we exclude analyses of narrative and spectatorship, as Brinkema does in her study. And finally, as a critique of Brinkema's strict attention to form, I must heed Stanley Cavell's warning (1981: 36-37):

> So many remarks one has endured about the kind and number of feet in a line of verse, or about a superb modulation, or about a beautiful diagonal in a painting, or about a wonderful camera angle, have not been readings of a passage at all, but something like items in a tabulation, with no suggestion about what is being counted or what the total might mean. Such remarks, I feel, *say* nothing, though they may be, as Wittgenstein says about naming, preparations for saying something (and hence had better be accurate).

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approach to performance, alongside approaches to cinematography, mise-en-scène and editing, as key when investigating the level of emotion generated within the director's intimate scenes."

[85] For a treatment of the actor-auteur, see Dyer 2009: 483-485; on a treatment of amateur actors and the star system, see Austin 2004; and for an argument that one cannot do auteur theory when placing the actor in the limelight, see Wollen [1969] 1981: 143-144.

My method, while certainly drawing from Brinkema's theory of the affects, perhaps better resonates with Claudia Breger's method of "configuring affect(s)." In a post-script following her essay on this topic, Breger writes (2014):

> "'Configuring Affect'… conceptualizes narrative as 'a realm of affective encounters': 'a world-making "assemblage" of affects, associations, images, sounds, and words.' Thus, I propose a more inclusive, multilayered notion that transcends (unsustainable) form-vs.-content oppositions [as in Brinkema's volume] and connects a broad range of compositional elements—from screenplay and dialogue via mise-en-scène to editing and music—to the audience responses (re)configuring these elements into a reading of the film.

Provided with Breger's methodological considerations, I retain my emphases on narrative and spectatorship. While my investigation here does not fully counter Brinkema's critiques of spectatorship theory, I will demonstrate that my method of studying film does not entirely fall victim to an "affective fallacy" (Brinkema 2014: 34). Films offer themselves up to be read as separate or paired entities according to the logic of the viewer or scholar. For the corpus known as extreme cinema, nudity, sexuality, and the performances of both are "absolute necessities" that grant a status to the films as one of this nature (Brinkema 2006: 148). In this chapter, a close reading of form begins with a key component of narrative cinema's mise-en-scène, the performers. A discussion of performers and their performances, however, cannot do without considerations of narrative and other elements of the mise-en-scène.[86] These close readings can then be brought to bear on spectatorship theory.

Once I have accomplished my study of the films by Reygadas and Breillat, I transition to the body of the spectator, not in terms of how he or she is effected by the

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[86] Daniel Yacavone 2015: xix, by way of Alan Goldman, expands notions of spectatorship via his concept of the "film world." "As philosopher Alan Goldman has suggested, to be fully engaged with any artwork, including a film, is 'not simply to pay attention to formal detail and complex internal relations in the object's structure, but also to bring to bear one's cognitive grasp of those external and historical relations that inform one's aesthetic experience, and to be receptive to the expressive qualities that emerge through this interaction. Knowledge that *can* inform one's experience of a work includes that of the artist's intentions, techniques, attitudes, problems overcome, and so on.'"

films, but to theorize a possible experience of them given the analyses of form in the prior sections. Current and popularized theories of pornography spectatorship do little to address the films discussed in this chapter. Affects shift, slide, coincide, and collide when Breillat's films are paired; neither Brinkema's affect theory, Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic theory, nor phenomenological film theory can adequately situate the spectator in relation to the forms of the affects I uncover. In the three chapters of this dissertation, my aim has been to show that genre is constituted after the viewing of the film, as a kind of collection and recollection by the spectator. I work through various theories of pornography spectatorship and turn to my analyses of the three films in this chapter to enhance my contention, and prior demonstrations, that genre and genre spectatorship is more ambiguous and porous than we have perhaps been willing to grant.

***Blow Job* (2005)**

Reygadas's second feature shares a theme with Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). In *Battle in Heaven*, however, we are not privy to the character's inner turmoil; Marcos apparently feels not "remorse but a natural revulsion" to a kidnapping that resulted in the infant's death (Reygadas in James 2005: 32). "Natural revulsion" permeates and indeed sets the tone for many of the scenes and sequences. I take revulsion, as Reygadas uses it, to mean not "extreme disgust, shock, or repugnance; feeling of great loathing," but "a sudden, complete, and violent change of feeling; abrupt, strong reaction in sentiment" (Webster's 1999). Marcos and his wife Bertha abducted a sister-in-law's baby, to be returned at a price, but through their maltreatment or neglect the infant dies. Yet this criminal act is largely the backdrop and not the narrative concern. Narratively, the film is more interested with Marcos, a chauffeur for a General, beginning

an affair with the prostitute-by-day Ana, also the daughter of the General. Ana partakes in sex work seemingly for fun and, similar to the protagonists in Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* (2011) and François Ozon's *Young and Beautiful* (*Jeune et Jolie*, 2013), the young and beautiful girl's motivations for this career path remain unexamined and unimportant. As an additional move against narrative conventions, the question or debate about the extra-marital affair between Marcos and Ana is not pursued in any depth.

In the couple's first and unsuccessful sexual encounter, Marcos reveals the botched kidnapping, and Ana recommends he turn himself over to the police. A later and quite graphic sexual encounter serves as their only and last (sustained) physical contact. Ana again recommends he confess to his crimes once they have finished their brief and boring sex. For further reasons unknown to spectators, Marcos visits Ana at her boyfriend's home, perhaps to say his final goodbye. As I described in the first chapter, the two lovers share a passionate kiss then Marcos leaves. In a long shot in the hallway, he urinates in his pants, a shot and act emphasizing Reygadas's contention that Marcos feels a natural revulsion. Marcos returns to Ana's apartment, fetches a knife, and puts an end to her life. Perhaps finally accepting his guilt, Marcos proceeds to walk, on his knees, with thousands of others on their way to church to celebrate the Feast of the Lady of Guadalupe, a significant holiday in Mexico. On his trek, Marcos stumbles and bumps his head on the concrete, a fall that will a few minutes hence be the cause of his death.

Battle in Heaven exhibits something of the "melodramatic tradition" (Penn 2013: 1160). On the genre of melodrama, following Peter Brooks, Williams suggests ([1984] 2011: 728):

> [the] late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century melodrama… took on the burden of rewarding the virtue and punishing the vice of undivided and comparatively powerless characters. The melodramatic mode thus took on an intense quality of wish-fulfilment,

> acting out the narrative resolution of conflicts derived from the economic, social, and political spheres in the private, emotionally primal sphere of home and family.

But Reygadas's film, despite its thematic concerns with the private sphere, does not fully deploy the melodramatic in Brooks's definition. According to Elena Lahr-Vivaz (2008: 140-144), *Battle in Heaven* intensifies the characteristics of the genre or, in the terms of the narrative analysis in the first chapter, renders it excessive. The gestures, tears, intimacies, lack of clarity in characters' psychological motivations, and the traditional bonds of "faith and family… are stretched beyond the breaking point" (Lahr-Vivaz 2008: 142). While it is important not to undermine Lahr-Vivaz's study of the film's proximities to melodrama, in the previous chapter we saw that the difficulty in assessing *Fat Girl*'s genre had much more to do with the pornographic than it did with the melodramatic (although Breillat's film could certainly be recollected as a teen melodrama). Reygadas's feature, first and foremost, was received as a scandal; the director faced challenging interviewers who asked about these melodramatic qualities to be sure, but more to the point, they wanted to know about the sex, the sex scenes, and the recourse to what James Quandt dismissively called "shock tactics" in extreme cinema ([2004] 2011). Thus, I find relations between this film and pornography, much less so than I find melodrama.

I want to exclusively focus on the pornographic in *Battle in Heaven* as it relates to the performances therein and what, if anything, unsteadily tethers them to that genre. The ambiguity of genre identification has already been demonstrated by reference to the melodrama. The use of the pornography genre also has a productive resonance with the documentary genre. Reygadas's film and Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* are also documents of bodies and sexual practices. I focus on two heretofore unmentioned sexual numbers in *Battle in Heaven* to make this point: the parallel prologue and epilogue with Marcos and

Ana.[87] "Natural revulsion" appears in the opening sequence and finds an out-of-body solution in the last three shots.

Figure 3.1 *Battle in Heaven* (Carlos Reygadas, 2005)

It was not unintentional in my above paragraph to draw a comparison between the performances found in extreme cinema and Warhol's *Blow Job*. *Battle in Heaven* begins with a close-up of the shirtless and bloated Marcos. He stands in an unidentifiable grey room, a non-place perhaps outside of reality. His spectacled visage remains

[87] The two other sexual numbers in the film (Marcos and Ana, Marcos and Bertha) are interesting for a number of different reasons. It would be redundant, however, to discuss them at length in this section. My close reading of the performance in the opening and closing sequence could help to locate the affective dimension of the longer sexual displays in the middle of the film. During the sex sequence with Ana and Marcos, Reygadas shoots the torsos and limbs of the performers in close-ups, rendering them into "unfamiliar shapes." This is a different cinematographic technique than an eroticism, for instance, in Abdellatif Kechiche's successful *Blue is the Warmest Color* (*La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2*, 2013). De Luca continues (2014: 62): "We are then offered their hands, feet and even their genitalia, all of which magnified by close-ups. This is followed by yet another close-up of the actress's vagina, which, taking up the entire screen, threatens to overflow the borders of the figurative, with the porosity of her skin and the texture of her pubic hair taking on an eminently tactile quality." Where de Luca's analysis falls short is identifying the affect(s) of the film itself, particularly in this sequence; with the still poses of the performers Marcos and Ana, and the succession of shots of body parts, we could follow Reygadas and declare the affect as a natural revulsion (to the death of an infant, one's own death [Marcos and Ana lay on the bed as if corpses], and religiosity). On the sexual performances of Marcos and Bertha, and the ties to religiosity, see de Luca 2014: 46-52.

expressionless and his body is uncomfortably still. The greyness of the space, his posture, and his immobility suggest a statue, but an unfamiliar and grotesque one. The camera continues to slowly pan down; it zooms out to reveal the dreaded hair of a fellator. Next, continuing this long take, a slow pan right of the fellator eventually cuts just prior to reaching a maximum visibility shot of Marcos's penis. Now to Marcos's left, the camera tracks forward and shoots a close-up of the young Ana with a mouthful of Marcos. Her hand covers the base of his member, perhaps masking the suturing of fake genitalia and his own. Ana is indifferent to this performance, perhaps not bored, but she does not reach the intensity or the enthusiasm of some Internet porn performers. There is no variation in her technique – it is as slow and steady as the camerawork. As time passes, the camera, still slowly panning, replaces Marcos's member; the extreme close-up of Ana's closed eyes cuts when her eyes open wide and a tear descends first from the right and then the left (I will have more to say about tears when I turn to *Sex is Comedy*). Marcos's heavy breathing began the scene and the "saccharine string music" of Taverner fills the non-diegetic aural space as the sequence comes to an end (Hoberman 2012: 227). After the tears there is a cut to black; the music continues to play, the title appears, and a fade-in starts the film proper.

The epilogue of the film documents a similar situation, but the deaths of Marcos and Ana suggests that this final fellatio scene takes place outside of time and space. The sequence is as follows: a POV shot of Ana fellating Marcos (a frequently employed shot in porn);[88] a close-up, shot from below, of Marcos without glasses and smiling (not quite Ana's POV); a return to the POV shot and Marcos's off-screen voice, "I love you so, Ana." She halts oral sex to utter the corresponding reply.

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[88] For a treatment of the POV shot in a stag film, see Williams 1995: 34-37.

The first point to consider is Reygadas's diatribe against pornographic interpretations or readings. He compares the prologue and epilogue to the symmetrical narratives of opera. He further notes the "layers of significance" to the scene (James 2005: 33): the ambiguous facial expressions, the differences in age and body type, and the tear that concludes the prologue allow for multiple (non-pornographic) interpretations and a recollecting of this sequence as the narrative unfolds. Taverner's music, the director continues, provides aural pleasure alongside the "cold and difficult" sexual act (James 2005: 33). The emotional ambiguity lends the scene a serious quality, quite apart from arousal, Reygadas concludes. This is not porn.

But what is porn if not images of sex whereby spectators experience what Paasonen, borrowing a phrase from Anu Laukkanen, names "kinesthetic empathy" (Paasonen 2011: 202; 2013: 360), a theoretical empathy not unlike the kind Jennifer Barker identified as part of her phenomenological film theory and I referred to in the Introduction and in chapter one? Paasonen would contend that Ana's performance of and Marcos's reception of oral sex offers an imaginary relation to that act via our own "somatic archives." Paasonen further argues that kinesthetic empathy is made possible by the somatic archive and affectation as defined by Henri Bergson: "that part of aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies" (Paasonen 2011: 202, quoting Bergson). Thus the perception of fellatio onscreen "calls forth responses in one's own body," an experience Paasonen links to the body genres discussed at length by Williams and in the previous chapter of this dissertation (2011: 202-203). In the reversible exchange of spectator and screen, the latter informs and activates spectators' "somatic reservoirs" while these reservoirs, in turn, "orient ways of looking and sensing pornography" (Paasonen 2011: 203). But the effects of a piece or pieces of pornography

are not universal. Indeed, these reversible exchanges offer themselves in varying degrees of force and intensity, from “faint” to “overwhelming” (Paasonen 2013: 361). For Paasonen, a video that centers upon the act of forceful fellatio resulting in gagging serves as an example. She writes, “my discomfort as viewer grows through my ability to relate to sensations of suffocation, the excessive proximity of another body (inside and next to oneself), body heat, saliva, and the lack of air” (2011: 204). Paasonen describes her own moment of being affected as an example of the ways in which hypothesized spectators may engage similar materials – not a universalized revulsion to gagging, but an account of one of many possible bodily responses.

Brinkema calls an analysis such as Paasonen’s an affective fallacy (Brinkema 2014: 31-36). Rather than discuss or theorize affects in a work itself, Paasonen has described the experience of one who is affected and the intentions of those who produce pornography, i.e., to cause this aversion, but perhaps also be aroused by the aggressive behaviour. Brinkema, on the other hand, accomplishes an analysis of narrative and experimental films without the mediating intervention of a hypothetical spectator or with personal accounts of one’s affective responses. Inherent to works themselves are forms of the affects, material expressions that are not bound to kinesthetic empathy, somatic archives, or any spectator at all (Brinkema 2014: 36). This entails a close reading in the usual sense of formal analysis, such as mise-en-scène, cinematography, etc., as well as the “grammatically impossible” “mise-n’en-scène”: “more ephemeral problematics such as duration, rhythm, absences, elisions, ruptures, gaps, and points of contradiction (ideological, aesthetic, structural, and formal).” More enigmatically, she adds to the definition, “what is not put into the scene; what is put into the non-scene; and what is not

enough put into the scene" (Brinkema 2014: 37, 46).[89] However, we do not need to throw away Paasonen's contribution to affect studies nor do we need to adopt Brinkema's methodology entirely (is it even possible to study the forms of affects in gonzo and amateur pornographies?). Is not one of the forms of the affects a performance or performances informed by somatic archives? The specificity of Reygadas's cinema, I argued in the first chapter, is his investment in the profilmic event. What is expressive in Ana's and Marcos's performances is not the naïve view held by the director that the onscreen presence is the person as such. In my efforts to demonstrate the fluidity of the categories of art cinema, pornography, and genre generally, it is appropriate to claim that the profilmic event in narrative cinema is also an expression of or from the somatic archive of the performer. This would be one part of the formal qualities of the film.

The action of fellatio differs greatly in the mainstream porn on the Internet than the pornographic content in *Battle in Heaven*. The performer in mainstream porn, as in classical narrative cinema, adopts a screen persona. The affects of the performance – in heterosexual porn: the woman's exaggerated enthusiasm during fellatio, the man's loud and perhaps aggressive commands – are not those of the performance of the non-professional Mushkadiz in Reygadas's film. Her apparent indifference to the actions marks the natural revulsion of the story and style. If we follow Jonathan Foltz's (2011), Sheldon Penn's (2013), and Tiago de Luca's (2014) assessment of Reygadas's performers – the non-professional performances disrupt the cinematic codes of "acting naturally"

[89] Breger asks the following questions as a critique of Brinkema's methodology (2014): "In going 'a step further' even than Deleuzian affect scholars and discarding not only 'the subject' with its presumably stable emotions, but also 'bodies' and 'spectatorship,' doesn't Brinkema's '*radical formalism*' advocate a new purism entangled in a web of theoretical tensions and unsuited to actually developing newly complex readings of film? With spectatorship removed from the equation, who is doing the reading that is of such central importance to Brinkema's new formalism? And with all 'narrative or thematic expression' stripped away also, do *The Forms of the Affects* not return film scholarship to a poststructuralist celebration of absence and 'negation,' as indicated by Brinkema's guiding concept of 'mise-n'en-scène'?"

and, in fact, they perform quite poorly – Ana and Marcos perform sexually in what Thomas Waugh names a "hybrid" manner ([1990] 2011: 83). Drawing from the distinctions between acting styles in modern dramatic theatre, Waugh opposes the "representational" mode of acting in documentary filmmaking, as a feigned naturalness, with the "presentational" mode, defined as an awareness of "presenting oneself explicitly for the camera" (2011: 76). The hybrid mode combines both these elements. Although Waugh does not frame the hybrid mode in these terms, provided his study of documentary performance and my appropriation of Paasonen's concept Ana and Marcos offer their somatic archives "presentationally" within a "representational" scenario. My use of concepts developed from a study of documentary performance here is not controversial. As I referred to in Chapter One, De Luca (2014: 77) emphasizes the documentary aspects of Reygadas's *oeuvre* when he notes the films' "ethnographic qualit[ies]."

The ethnographic quality in *Battle in Heaven*, de Luca continues, is the camera lens's passive recording of an "unlikely couple." Revisiting my discussion of presentation versus representation in Breillat's films from the last chapter, similarly, the sexual intercourse between Marcos and Ana is not a representation of their respective ethnic, class, and age differences: "To borrow Nagib's words, here the film medium is used 'as a means to produce, as well as reproduce reality'…, meaning that these are fictions which are also, and perhaps more importantly, facts" (de Luca 2014: 88-89). In other words, there is no social or sexual situation outside of the film in which the two performers would come together; however, neither of them have the practice or talents to adopt a screen persona. Thus *Battle in Heaven*, regardless of the director's intention or performers' experience at the time of filming, presents sexual scenarios that are more real

than what the mainstream porn genre depicts: the techniques of "acting out" a (representational) blow job are drawn from the non-professional performer's (presentational) somatic archives and this blow job is real simply because the performers do not know how to perform. As I argued in the first chapter, and following de Luca, the material presence of the performers is on display, not to capture the individual's essence, but here, to document the presentational performance in a representational context. Or, put different, I have argued for the form – non-professional pornographic performance – in which natural revulsion is configured.

The hybrid quality of the performances is emphasized by Ana in an interview. She notes that she wore her own clothes during the shoot and "declared herself 'to be even more 'excessive' than her character" (de Luca 2014: 89, quoting Smith).[90] Marcos, similarly, is a chauffeur in film and life, and as in the film, has an obese wife. The gestures and sexual performances of Ana, Marcos, and Bertha (the fictional wife of the fictional Marcos, apparently less obese than his real wife) are several of many forms of natural revulsion. When Marcos and Bertha have intercourse in the film, my argument about the performers' somatic archives and Reygadas's persistent shooting of the profilmic event again appears: the gestures, the postures, the holds, are in some ways those that are intimately familiar to Marcos due to his sexual practices with his real wife.[91] To determine the way natural revulsion is configured in this sequence would take another close reading. But revulsion here and in the oral sex sequences is not an observable part of the mise-en-scène, for instance, in a pile of vomit on the floor or the

[90] For an illuminating discussion on the specific qualities of Ana's performance, see Reygadas 2009.
[91] By bringing the somatic archive to bear on these performances, I do not intend to draw a parallel between this idea and "the performance of everyday life." I explore the latter in a video essay, "Camera-Confessional/Camera-therapist" (2014).

heaving and choking in the process of vomiting (Brinkema 2014: 141-145). Revulsion is in the bodies of the performers during their poorly performed sexual scenes. Marcos is immobile and Ana cannot alter her pace of fellating. The performers must be in a state of discomfort lest they begin *to act*.

The point of this section was not to study *Battle in Heaven* closely, as I did with *Post Tenebras Lux* and *Fat Girl*, but to introduce my differing methodological approach in this chapter and to introduce and put into practice the concept of the somatic archive. These will be significant developments for the following sections.

Mesquida's Tears

> *[Libero de Rienzo] said, '[Mesquida] wants to talk to you. She's not okay with me being nude.' I said, 'If she doesn't come talk to me – The point is, I don't want to talk to her. I swear I'm right.' Actors must be drawn into a scene. You mustn't talk to them. The scene will do the talking. They'll see it's not like they imagined it.*
>
> - Catherine Breillat, "The Making of *Fat Girl*"

In *Fat Girl*, Mesquida exhibits her nudity, and further, her sexuality – the nude and sexually active body, in its private and secluded appearance, is on full public display. The distinction between private and public, interior and exterior withers in extreme cinema. This blurred division is a space of critique and concern, namely from those critics and viewers who see Elena's/Mesquida's tears and body as not merely part of the act, but the traumatic expression of performing sexually for a camera. *Sex is Comedy*, as a fictional behind the scenes and making-of *Fat Girl*, restages the trauma of performative vulnerability. In this feature we have Jeanne (Anne Parillaud), the director of the film-in-progress *Scènes Intimes*. Jeanne is clearly Breillat and the film-in-progress is certainly *Fat Girl*. Mesquida plays an unnamed actress, i.e., herself performing in *Fat Girl*, and Grégoire Colin plays an unnamed actor, undoubtedly the male star of *Fat Girl*, Libero de

Rienzo. The film replays various scenes from Breillat's 2001 feature and the narrative fictionally documents the challenges and difficulties in directing and performing.

Katherine Ince (2006: 159) declares that this autofiction (an autobiographic account that is fictionalized) is an account of Breillat's experience of making a film, which is of course true. Ince's conclusion is that *Sex is Comedy* is a creative enterprise that uses self-reflexivity to offer a "general theory on how women may achieve auteurship" (2006: 163). Ince's analysis and argument additionally applies to Mesquida's leap into auteurship herself. I therefore attempt to include *Sex is Comedy* as an account of Mesquida's experience as a young actress and in doing so continue the discussion of Breillat's appropriation of pornography. How one performs is constitutive of a particular genre. I connect these films to further challenge notions of stability in regards to pornography. Studies of this genre have neglected the performers and their respective performances; however, with the concept of the somatic archive, as I transformed it from Paasonen's writing – from a conception of spectators' empathetic experience of characters and actions to a concept which assesses actors' relationship to their extradiegetic selves and onscreen performances –, much can be said about the bodies onscreen in the same way as I have discussed other formal aspects of specific films.

Sex is Comedy restages the conflict between Mesquida and Breillat quoted in this section's epigraph. The unnamed male actor informs director Jeanne that the unnamed female lead does not want to do the scene: "She doesn't know I'll be naked. She won't agree. She says total nudity isn't in her contract." The director and actress will not discuss this matter in detail as the conversation continues; it will go ahead as planned. Jeanne, echoing Breillat's words on the set of *Fat Girl*, mentions that the actress can talk to her personally about any problems, and "Until she tells me, things are fine." This is a harsh

and yet possibly necessary response from a director whose art depends on specific acts accomplished onscreen (Dooley 2014: 117). Breillat reiterates this point in an interview for *Fat Girl*; she mentions she simply could not talk to Mesquida nor provide her with precise direction (2011c). Elsewhere the director acknowledges (2011b) the stresses she places on her performers. “Sometimes you have to spur an actor on,” she mentions. “The actor will think he did well because you were nice, but if you hadn’t been mean first, he wouldn’t have done well. … It’s changing gears like that that helps you get the shot.” Jeanne in *Sex is Comedy* echoes Breillat again: “You know, I think they have to hate me to act well. Once they don't care if I love them, they can face my look, my judgment, without being afraid to disappoint me.”

For my purposes here, much of *Sex is Comedy* does little to advance my argument about genre trouble, so I focus instead on what I believe to be the key sequences. With the above preliminary remarks, I turn to the most challenging episode in *Fat Girl*, i.e., the long seduction and rape sequence between Elena and Fernando, and its modified repetition at the end of the *Sex is Comedy*. During this latter film and on the set of the fictional film-in-progress *Scènes Intimes*, we see the unnamed actress/Mesquida in tears just before the long take. Jeanne/Breillat exploits her anxiety and forces into her the character’s conflicted desire of love and sex. The camera is close-up; Jeanne embraces the unnamed actress and tells her to scream. This is the attempt to put the actress into a “state of crisis” similar to that of the character (Dooley 2014: 115). She screams several times and a cut takes us to the appalled faces of the crew. The shot-reverse shot works against the affect of fear. A scream is often a scream of terror coming from the body as a paralyzing response to a horrifying situation. Mesquida’s powerful vocalization, alongside the shot-reverse shot, exudes a bravery – to scream at the thing that one fears in

order to conquer it. Douglas Keesey describes the scene (2009: 65) and importantly, for my argument here, does not refer to Mesquida by her fictional character's name, but by her own: "Jeanne prompts Mesquida to express herself *in extremis*, to push through her pain in order to affirm the cry of longing within it, a desire strong enough to live through mortifying shame." For narrative economy, Jeanne's directing does the trick; the actress is ready and the scene can now be shot.

Figures 3.2-3.3 Sex is Comedy (Catherine Breillat, 2002)

The unnamed actress's tears are justifiable. The interaction between the characters Fernando and Elena in *Fat Girl* is firstly troubling because of its emotional intensity: the character must resist yet submit, love and hate, cry and show the shame of the sexual act. Secondly, the push of the real, the demand to perform, as is revealed in *Sex is Comedy*, is much too great for Mesquida. The unnamed actress mentions she must call her boyfriend – and we can hypothesize problems for monogamous relationships and performed sexual acts – because the actor's penis, in various positions throughout the scene, will no doubt come into contact with Mesquida's body. *Sex is Comedy* then plays with the comedy of resolving this issue (Ince 2006: 160), a little comedy amidst the seriousness of bodily integrity. But the comedy itself is perturbed by the genitals of the unnamed actor.

I was compelled, then, to bring together *Battle in Heaven* and *Sex is Comedy* not because of the similarity in props, but because of what I discovered in the use of these

props and what they add to the discussion of performance. The penis as a prop is pushed to hyperbolic lengths when the member itself is faked. The unnamed actor's large prop is chosen out of a suitcase, suggesting that the real penises in videos and films are but a means to an end, namely, as a narrative device. The largeness of a penis in pornography is frequently commented upon by the performers and its size marks the degree to which it is capable of violence. However, unable to bring his real genitals to the screen, the unnamed actor mockingly flaunts and swings his prosthesis around, perhaps to compensate for his fear of not being able to perform, i.e., get erect, when necessary. He cannot scream about his performative difficulties, nor overcome them, so he stands isolated and apart from cast and crew in a long shot. If we believe Simone de Beauvoir, the actor's trepidation does not come as much of a surprise. Beauvoir contends that the male is overly concerned with his activity, his transcendence. An erection, she writes ([1949] 1989: 381), "becomes activity, potency, the sex organ is no longer an inert object, but, like the hand or face, the imperious expression of subjectivity." The joke of the film, perhaps, is that the actor has no subjectivity: the actor is a prop.

While the male actor therefore shares some of the unnamed actress's concerns about performing sexually, in an unethical move both actor and director neglect her wishes and desires not to be nude. If we believe Beauvoir again, the male gaze both frightens a woman – in terms of being dissatisfied with her nudity – and is the requirement for the unveiling in which he is judge to her flesh and commends it (1989: 381-382). Although Beauvoir's account of women's experience is subject to criticism and perhaps some of her phenomenological descriptions of the relations between men and women are less applicable now than in the 1940s, it is nevertheless the case that Breillat seems to be taking up Beauvoir's ideas and putting them into her narratives and even into

form. *Sex is Comedy* is therefore superficially comedic if we set aside Mesquida's distress; better, it is as if contemporary patriarchy were still at work 50 years after Beauvoir penned her opus.

The comedic aspect of the film, foreshadowed by the title, is immediately questioned in the first sequence of an uncomfortable Mesquida kissing the male actor poorly and who is subsequently replaced by the director herself. The comedy is then entirely devastated by the final sequence. Following from the actress's scream "*in extremis*," the two unnamed performers are shot in medium close-up. Mesquida's character is still in tears following that initial panic and multiple screams. Her tears now fully complicate the division between onscreen and off-screen; we have lost track, as viewers, of the realities depicted in the film, much like Emma Wilson observed (2001: 154) of her viewing Caroline Ducey's/Marie's scene of sadomasochism (2001: 154) in Breillat's *Romance* (1999). The author could not identify her own affective engagements with the performer and character: Wilson asked herself whether Ducey was crying about the pain of bondage or performing the difficult scene, i.e., crying in the profilmic event, or these were the character's tears after the brief trauma of sadomasochism. Kath Dooley received Ducey's performance in similar terms, but with reference to the character's tears after the fictional rape (2014: 110). But as I noted above, Brinkema is critical of theory merely describing personal affective experience. Her discussion of Marion's (Janet Leigh) single tear in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is more applicable to my discussion of Breillat's performers – the tear in her films is no longer tied to a body (2014: 22). As Brinkema undertakes in her readings across three of Breillat's films, I trace an affect and read the materiality of the tear(s) in *Romance*, *Fat Girl*, and *Sex is Comedy* as a fold: what does the tear do as it bleeds in and through these three films, three

films turning on the theme of feminine desire and patriarchal oppression?[92] The personal accounts of Wilson and Dooley describe the layers of reality; my reading of Elena's tears in the prior chapter and Mesquida's tears in this chapter speaks to the characters and performers to be sure, but also to the countless tears shed by young girls and women at the hands of horrible men.

In this last scene of *Sex is Comedy*, one which warrants so much prefacing and theoretical investigation across not one but two chapters of the dissertation, the unnamed actor recites the same lines as Fernando, namely, the apparent truth that all the girls do it from behind so "it" does not count. Anaïs's perspective on the anal rape has been exchanged for the film crew's. Without direction, the unnamed actor and the unnamed actress begin to play out the scene. Breillat states, "we never have rehearsal – I film them right away" (Dooley 2014: 113, quoting Breillat). This is Breillat's tactic, to get "the magic and surprise of the spontaneous gesture" (2011c). "It's terrifying. I don't tell the actors a thing. I throw stuff at them. Even for complicated scenes, I don't tell them anything," she says elsewhere (Breillat 2011a). The unnamed actor does not even bother to lubricate – in *Fat Girl*, Fernando licked his fingers and then lubricated her anus (shown not in a close-up, but a diegetically implied gesture). In a passionate several minutes he gets astride, thrusting, and valiantly attempts to quell her still flowing tears by kissing her neck, cheek and ears. He chokes her slightly as well, and seems to enjoy this empowerment after his repeated emasculation regarding the donned fake member. Mesquida's breasts spill out of her nightshirt, accomplished not as planned it seems but in the heat of the moment.

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[92] Cf. Brinkema 2006. Brinkema provides a treatment of an affective bleed between *A Real Young Girl* (*Une Vraie Jeune Fille*, 1976), *Romance*, and *Fat Girl*.

A repetition such as this would be obscene if we considered André Bazin's philosophy of film. There are two unrepeatable moments that are subjects of the camera's "impassive lens" yet violate the ontological principles of life and film: the sexual act and death. The sexual act is metaphysical and is experienced firsthand; death is "the unique moment par excellence" (Bazin [1958] 2003: 30). In a strange and incomplete effort at filmic self-censorship, Bazin claims that if cinema portrays the former, it is possible for the spectator to demand the latter ([1957] 2005b: 173). This is because sex and death are unrepresentable events that do not happen twice and thus documenting them constitutes an obscenity, first, ontologically as a "desecration" to love and to the dead, and second, cinematically as fictions without "imagination" (Bazin 2003: 31; 2005b: 174).[93] "Ontological pornography" is the perversion of realist aesthetics, a perversion which neglects the abundance of creative and imaginative potential of film-production (Bazin 2005b: 173). It is "unaesthetic and therefore out of place" (Williams [1989] 1999: 186) to depict real sex and real death – it is what Williams calls a *perversion of cinema*, a misuse of (Bazinian) cinematic forms and codes (1999: 189). Despite the obscenity of shooting and playing back sex and death, the profilmic event is not entirely Bazin's concern – i.e., its indexical quality – but the actual emotions and physicality of the actors. Sexuality in the cinema could lead spectators to confuse acting with real life. However, in a contradictory move, Bazin claims that the ontologically real of photographed sex and death is, in fact, impossible to accurately reproduce. Any attempt to reproduce such a scene distorts the capacity for active spectatorship. The activity of spectatorship should

[93] Cf. Bazin 2003: 31: "I imagine the supreme cinematic perversion would be the projection of an execution backward like those comic newsreels in which the diver jumps up from the water back onto his diving board." The opening of Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* (1992), perhaps an antecedent to New Extremism, shoots Bazin's fear. The execution of a pig is rewound then played back in slow motion.

instead be in the realm of imagination and illusion; the importance of a "simple story… which never touches the level of reality," never reaching a "documentary quality," is imperative to cinematic realism (Bazin 2005b: 174). I argued in the first chapter that a "documentary quality" is essential to Reygadas's aesthetics, and in the second chapter, the same held for Breillat's aesthetics. But Bazinian realism only gets theory so far; we see the limits of Bazin's philosophy of film when we consider these two director's *oeuvres*. If *Sex is Comedy* is a repetition, or a repeated performance of a prior performance, and Bazin's assessment and criticism of cinematic sex and death has numerous "objections" that could be rallied against it, (Bazin 2005b: 174), there remains a theoretical void to be considered.

On the one hand, there is the here and now of spectatorship, the experience of pure presence of movement onscreen. "On the other hand, there is also the inevitable past tense of a recording that is also a reiteration, of inscribing the traces of an event that can circulated and witnessed far from the place and time of its original occurrence" (Doane 2006: 35). Mary Ann Doane's reflection on the ontological character of photography and film can be transposed to the reflexivity of *Sex is Comedy*. The film produces a reiteration of a scene in the past, thus doubly constituting an ontological failure as the scene showcases that which should not be re-presented, the sexual act within the diegesis, and further, is a repetition of the sexual act from the prior obscenity in *Fat Girl*. This repetition is also the here and now of spectatorship, a real bearing witness to the nudity and performed sexuality. Therefore the final sequence in the autofictional film drags on and carries a much heavier weight than *Fat Girl*. Mesquida must struggle, Keesey suggests (2009: 64), like Elena; both must undergo an experience of shame, and feel ashamed during the performance, for authenticity. And not only does she embody this in

the profilmic event, long takes and their duration can add an affective weight or heaviness to a sequence (Brinkema 2014: 105). Thus the re-performance of the rape scene carries the affects of the first film and brings them to bear on the later. Breillat's observation (2011b) of the twentieth take in *Fat Girl* now seems more apt for Mesquida's re-enactment in *Sex is Comedy*: it was "something heavier, more painful, more muted." Additionally unlike the previous film, we do not see and hear a male orgasm to mark its finish – Jeanne softly addresses the crew with "cut" to put the motions to an end, and "the cut equates to an existentialist conception of death: it is the punctuation that allows what would otherwise be articulated, to become meaningful" (Crowley 2007: 77). The simulated sexual act fades into oblivion with a lingering resonance onscreen or, like tears that leave salty traces on cheeks, so too does the heavy, painful, and muted sexual performance leave its mark on the black screen. This trace, I will argue in the last few sections of this chapter, also embeds itself in spectators' memories.

Mesquida's performance is for the crew, exhibited by the shot-reverse shot. Additionally, Keesey contends (2009: 64) that Jeanne, behind her monitor, is the stand-in for the shaming gaze of the public eye. But the director is also her sympathetic companion as the unnamed actress continues to weep uncontrollably after the cut. Jeanne wraps her arms around the performer, then, unexpectedly, the unnamed actress smiles. The fade to black that concludes the film marks it with a sense of joy. "...[W]hen you go to the end of an intimate scene, the actors take on an enormous pleasure from it, as does everyone on the set, even if, afterward, no one wants to admit it" (Keesey 2009: 65, quoting Breillat). In the filming of *Fat Girl*, Breillat mentions (2011b), after she uttered cut, she went over and thanked both performers for participating in such an "ordeal." Her kind words exhibit her satisfaction with the scene. "During filming, Roxane [Mesquida –

in the role of Elena] and Libero [de Rienzo – in the role of Fernando] were amazingly brave. I think of cinema as an initiation, so ordeals are a part of it. For sex scenes, I make the actors do things that I don't film. Then I film the state that it's put them in" (2011c).

The affective dimension finds a home in the blurred space between fiction, reality, and the fictional repetition of a prior reality. Therefore the extradiegetic, intratextual, and the profilmic event contribute to the form of the film, the intensity of the scene perhaps largely dependent upon them. This Breillat knows well. Yet there is room for a productive critique, especially given some of the director's statements about young actors. Whether Mesquida's roles were given ethical consideration by the filmmaker and her audiences will be the next question for this chapter. I look to Breillat's 2001 feature, *Brief Crossing* (*Brève traversée*), to situate this concern, then link it back to Mesquida's performances.

The Extradiegetic and Profilmic Event in Breillat's *Brief Crossing*

Immediately following *Fat Girl*, Breillat directed a made-for-TV film for the channel Arte, as part of the series of ten on the topic of masculine/feminine. *Brief Crossing* presents, in near real-time, the journey of the 16-year-old and virginal Thomas (Gilles Guillain) and 30-something Alice (Sarah Pratt), from Le Havre to the shores of England via ferry. The title is quite literal in the sense of crossing the English Channel as well as the (brief) hours of onboard sex and romance. Breillat develops a number of the same themes of patriarchal oppression, male seduction, etc., in the dialogue between Thomas and Alice, the latter wounded terribly by men in the previous years of her life, the former not yet part of the world in which men consistently emotionally damage women. The brief crossing, however, will be Thomas's rite of passage into the horrors he may one day commit as an adult male; the narrative is centered upon the production of a misogynist.

Keesey suggests (2009: 102-103) that Thomas, after his abandonment by Alice when they reach the shore, will go on to lose his sensitivity and tenderness – traits he expressed in his romance with the older woman – and further, will likely never open himself up to love, i.e., present his vulnerability, ever again. Alice shatters the illusion of love by lying to him about her life – alone, divorced, mistreated by men – and left the young man in the rain. More tears appear in a Breillat film: Thomas's eyes turn red and moist as Alice speeds away with husband and child, without as much as a look of acknowledgement, appreciation, or farewell.

Keesey proposes that Thomas is the younger version of Christophe from Breillat's earlier feature *Perfect Love* (*Parfait amour*, 1996). There, a 28-year-old man falls for a 40-year-old woman, and this man cannot control his jealousy and hatred of women, leading to a brutal murder. Reading Breillat's films intratextually, we may also say that in just a few years, Thomas could become Elena's Fernando. It would also be appropriate to hypothesize Alice as the older Elena, had the teenager not been slain in that story. Alice spends a great deal of time proclaiming generally the psychological horrors men have committed against women. If an affect is to be located here, it is withdrawal from or apathy to the world and this is all the more emphasized by the low resolution of the digital camera. The duration of Alice's partial monologues creates a rhythm, enhanced by the conflict of opinions between Alice and Thomas as the camera slowly pans back and forth between the protagonists during their arguments. "There's no love," she quips in the middle of foreplay with Thomas, "just ploys to bed us," giving a voice to Elena's deflowering by Fernando in *Fat Girl*.

Keesey does not pay enough attention to the sexual and emotional performances or to the formal qualities of Breillat's films. An affective consideration of the

performances would reinforce his conclusions about the film's message and how it was possible for him to be affected by the film's images and narratives (2009: 9). For instance, the most popular discussion on the IMDB.com message board is about *Brief Crossing*'s sex scene. Similar to many debates surrounding extreme films, *Brief Crossing*'s initially centred on whether or not "real sex" occurred between the performers and if so, the complications with Guillain being a minor (under 18) on the one hand (he was actually 19 at the time, although this was his first film), and praising Breillat's use of unsimulated sex in narrative cinema on the other. After a lengthy seduction – who is seducing whom becomes one of the more interesting questions of the story – Thomas and Alice go to the latter's room. Thomas undresses anxiously, hiding his genitals, evidently ashamed. His gestures mark a departure from Breillat's earlier focus on the shame exhibited by her female protagonists. "Inside [the room], the virginal Thomas is initially shy: he undresses with his back to Alice and shuffles toward her in his underwear while biting his thumb as if sucking it like a little boy" (Keesey 2009: 101). The likely simulated sex that follows is shot from the head of the bed and the two lovers/performers roll atop one another. Thomas, the obviously more enthused, wraps up the intercourse rather quickly.[94]

While the cinematography offers an intimate moment in the sexual intercourse with the use of a close-up, it is more significant to note the changes in Guillain's skin tone and bodily comportment, seemingly caught unawares by the digital camera. The redness of Thomas's skin (heightened by the low resolution) and his shaking and nervousness is described by Breillat, if we believe her, as the embodied responses of the actor: he is, in

[94]This is something Breillat depicts in all of her films. While she is known for the long take and graphic simulated and unsimulated sex, the men are inadequate in their longevity. The male orgasm is always accomplished in under two minutes.

fact, a virgin – he has "never done that with a girl before" (Breillat 2004). To shoot the scene without rehearsal, then, was significant if the affect of his (fictional) loss of virginity was to get across to viewers. Reygadas used the same tactic in *Battle in Heaven*, shooting the penetrative sex scene between Marcos and Ana before the two had the chance to work together onset under more normal circumstances. In both *Battle in Heaven* and *Brief Crossing*, the documentation of the sexual performances offers embarrassment and shame not only diegetically, but visible in the bodily comportment of the actors. Similar to Marcos, Ana, and Mesquida, the limits of acting are tested as Guillain exhibits his abilities to get into a role slightly thwarted by his embodied experiences. Thus film criticism and theory requires a shift from an assessment of acting, e.g., delivering dialogue and exhibiting "the grain of the voice," to an evaluation of performance alongside both the demands of the scene and from the embodied existence of the performer. Whether Guillain's and Mesquida's roles are given ethical consideration by the filmmakers and audiences will be the final question for analysis, focusing on the latter, Mesquida, to answer for both young and then burgeoning performers.[95]

The Ethics of Breillat's Method

It must be difficult. If it's easy for the actors, there will be no suffering, no danger, no beauty.

- Catherine Breillat, "2001 Berlin International Film Festival"

Given that performances in her films require an extra amount of bravery and produce an excessive amount of anxiety, e.g., the scream in *Sex is Comedy* and the countless tears

[95] Since working on Breillat's *The Last Mistress*, Mesquida continues to have a successful career. She has a starring role in Phillippe Grandrieux's *Malgré la nuit* (2015), a filmmaker associated with extreme cinema (although, similar to Reygadas, he has moved beyond using the shocks of sex and violence in his films – Grandrieux's formal excesses are much more experimental in nature). Guillain has had much less success than Mesquida. He has played roles in a few shorts and an occasional feature-length film.

across several works, Breillat should show some form(s) of responsibility to her actors. The demand placed on Breillat's actors and actresses is incalculable: consider the twenty takes of a scene Mesquida did not wish to perform, the scene's emotional intensity, plus a performed sexual act bordering on the real (or at least causing some discomfort for both Mesquida and boyfriend). If Breillat invokes something like Beauvoir's description of deflowering – as "destruction", "defilement", and "violation [*viol*]" (1989: 155, 375, 383) – and power relations between the genders, then perhaps a re-performance of that trauma needs to be taken into account. Yet, when asked after the filming of *Brief Crossing* if she felt responsibility for her young actors, Breillat shirks it, saying she is "not a social worker", and besides, "actors are pretentious" (2004). "The first thing to protect is the film," she unabashedly states (Wiegand 2001).

This seemingly unethical remark is all the more troubled by Catherine Wheatley's argument about *Sex is Comedy*. Wheatley argues that the twenty-five minute seduction scene in *Fat Girl*, i.e., the rape performed by the fictional Fernando, is similarly in *Sex is Comedy*, Jeanne's long seduction of the unnamed actress. In this sequence, equally as long, the director coerces the actress to shoot the final sex scene in the nude despite her desire to remain clothed. The latter sequence's duration and abuse thus rivals that of the former. Wheatley concludes (2010: 37) that both Fernando and Jeanne conquer Elena/the unnamed actress/Mesquida with a kiss, punctuating the man's rape and director's coercion into performance as "the symbol of the seducer's ultimate betrayal of their victims, feigning love in the pursuit of self-serving gratification." We may invoke Beauvoir again (1989: 152): she suggests that it is not only sexual pleasure that men seek, but the desire "to conquer, to take, to possess." Thus the fictional film centered on the loss of virginity is the *mise en abyme* of Breillat's filmmaking methods. Where Beauvoir

(1989: 385) describes deflowering as the act of aggressor who takes a woman's body from her, and humiliates, overpowers, forces, and conquers her, she may well be speaking of Breillat's art.

Breillat works as an aggressor. *Sex is Comedy* shows the unnamed actress immobile and in tears; she has been transformed from a young girl into a woman after her first filmic sexual encounter. The woman "lies in the posture of defeat…. She feels passive: she is caressed, penetrated; she undergoes coition, whereas the man [or Breillat] exerts himself actively" (Beauvoir 1989: 385).[96] Nevertheless, in 2007, countering any possible controversy surrounding unreasonable requests, Mesquida asserts that Breillat "teaches me to discover my emotions, at the risk of being submerged by them. But it's so good! I have such confidence in her that I completely let myself go, because I know very well that she will not abandon me" (Keesey 2009: 9, translation Keesey). Mesquida can say, post-filmmaking, her job "was really easy." "It was really easy and I've never been so happy in my life," Mesquida had told Breillat. Mesquida, after *Fat Girl* and according to Breillat, had become a "real actress… whose intimate feelings are revealed to the world" (2011b); "She could say these words to the camera, at the same time blushing with shame. For a young girl, she was just marvelous" (Breillat in Rich 2001). Returning to the starting point of my essay, Mesquida, after *Fat Girl*, was becoming an auteur. Breillat positively asserts (Wiegand 2001) that one must get into a role because that is the chosen career, then get out of the role, and put personal identity back together again. Mesquida, through much work, was able to ignore the reality of the set and focus on the reality of the

[96] We might locate Georges Bataille's influence on Breillat in the latter's connection with Beauvoir. Bataille and Breillat's similarities are not merely in the likenesses between their transgressive heroines, particularly Simone in *Story of the Eye* (*Histoire d'oeil*, 1928) and Alice in *A Real Young Girl*, nor is it in the transgressive sex found in *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell* (*Anatomie de l'enfer*, 2004). Breillat is at her most Bataillean in *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*: the sexual act, for the philosopher and the filmmaker, is always in the domain of violence.

role despite her humiliation, shame, and tears. She performed as a young girl in a world where men as well as women such as Breillat, in various ways, seduce and coerce. While the analogy can be drawn between Breillat as seducer and Mesquida as coerced victim, the director employs the same tactics with her male actors, thereby leveling the power dynamics between the genders on set and as Keesey contends, in the film as well.

Ince (2006: 162) observes that Jeanne's treatment of the male actor is likewise coercive, thus the numerous conversations "*tête-a-tête*… in which she coaxes, cajoles, and bullies him into a convincing performance." We find within the film a further message about gender and power, both onscreen and culturally. Keesey observes (2009: 69), "[t]his exchange [between Jeanne and the unnamed male actor] denaturalizes the 'active male' and 'passive female' roles to show that they are indeed roles, with either sex able to play both parts, desiring and desired. … Thus, by mocking certain gender roles and by revealing that these are indeed performances…, Jeanne/Breillat shows that sex is comedy." According to Breillat, the cinema can simultaneously represent contradictions. Ambiguities over directorial responsibility are rendered as ambiguous as the motives, desires, and pleasures and pains depicted onscreen. Consequently, the fictional narrative of a deflowering and the fictional narrative of the filmmaking of a fictional deflowering, are doubly complex and meaningful, speaking to ethical problems within the respective diegesis and then, as paired films, out to the spectator who mobilizes these ethical problems not just for the obvious issue of male aggression and patriarchal oppression, but also to question the techniques filmmakers can use to present and represent these social and cultural concerns.

Affective and Possessive Spectatorship

In the last paragraph I noted how spectators can mobilize the affects of a film to address social, political, and ethical issues. This is not to fall victim to an affective fallacy; for Brinkema, the affects are not inherent to the viewer, nor does the viewer receive them as a force from the film itself. She contends that affects are inherent to the form of the film and therefore require a close reading of the work. In my chapter here, I expanded the scope of close reading of form to include performances, extradiegetic materials, and intratextuality. In this section I move from the film itself to discussion of spectatorship. What do my prior investigations unveil about the spectatorship of *Battle in Heaven* and *Sex is Comedy*, and in the next section, prior conceptualizations of pornography spectatorship? I take the latter film and my analysis of it as a case to answer this question. Where appropriate, I connect the discussion to Reygadas's work.

In extreme cinema performers are required to strain their physical and emotional strength up to the point of encroaching upon personal and private values, acts, and practices. The body of the performer is pushed to its limits by directors such as Reygadas and Breillat, and their performers exert themselves no less than artists testing their respective physical forms for aesthetic or political ends. These roles, I have been arguing, give the interactions between characters, whether physical or emotional or both, their supposed intensity/affectivity, because performing, Williams suggests (2008: 296-297), "involves the feeling of emotions generated between the actors, who are not just putting on an appearance, but on some level, necessarily feeling." Performance is a revealing to the world of one's "intimate feelings" (Breillat 2011b); in Breillat's films, this is accomplished through sexual acts and other interpersonal contact as well as fictional traumas which may impact the star's world outside the film. This is done at the

performer's risk. Yet spectators can minimize the risk by implicating themselves in the film and by being attentive to their responses to the work. It is perhaps not incongruent to suggest a viewing position that includes absorption, critical thinking, and ethical consideration as the best way to understand Breillat's *oeuvre*.

Laura Mulvey's conclusion in "The Possessive Spectator" is helpful here. She problematizes apparatus theory, stating that the automata (the human bodies that appear in the cinematic image) are in fact "an actual, literal inscription of the figure's living movements" (2006: 161). Her account addresses the problem of Cavell's "human something," a concept invoked in the prior chapter. Cavell saw that the cinema produces a strange relation between actor and audience, namely, the former is in the presence of the latter while the latter is not present to the former. Precisely "*who* is present" onscreen becomes a topic for Cavell's investigation. He concludes that the star "explores his role like an attic and takes stock of his physical and temperamental endowment; he lends his being to the role and accepts only what fits" (Cavell 1979: 28). In Mulvey's terms, the real and extradiegetic elements "intrude from outside the scene and off screen giving an unexpected vulnerability to a star's on-screen performance" (Mulvey 2006: 160). Signification is blurred by the iconicity, in the case of a star or, as I argued above, drawing from the performer's somatic archive as a component of his or her performance. This extradiegetic quality (for Mulvey, "semi-biography, anecdote and gossip"; for my analysis, trauma, boyfriends, and nudity) is a compulsory component of the star's image onscreen, becoming "inextricably woven into the narrative by performance, in gesture and action." Bazin believed the same when he observed that Carl Th. Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928) has a timelessness due, in part, to viewers' knowledge of the extradiegetic conditions of the filmmaking ([1951]

2005a: 109). Indeed, we may suggest with Cavell that the "performer is not an actor at all: he *is* the subject of study, and a study not his own" (1979: 28). Thus I possess the star, Mesquida, across the paired films, the latter film providing extradiegetic and profilmic elements which further that possession when I re-watch/re-think the former. This is what I call an affective bleed. Affective bleed names this moment when a film breaks spectatorship from pre-discursive immanence and activates our memory of a related film. Further, in the affective bleed, the consequence of pairing the films is that an unknown actress becomes iconic in the sense Mulvey describes.

The crucial point I want to make is that reception and spectatorship are tied to the following elements identified in the affective bleed between Breillat's paired films: the performer and her past including the difficulties in shooting a film, her performance and use of her body, and finally the moving-images where these two personages – one real and one fictional – coincide, shift, and change places depending on the viewer and the viewing experience. This consideration runs counter to Lisa Coulthard's claim (2010: 64), paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, that "the filmed sexual act always relies upon a derealization, an emphasizing of the performative and spectatorial contract – even when it is clearly presented as actually occurring." *Sex is Comedy* has shown us that the experience of this fictional film is quite real in a number of different registers.

We can therefore draw three interconnecting ethical nodes, each of which have been implicit in my above arguments: 1) ethical filmmaking requires that the director be aware of the degree in which their film(s) blurs the fiction/reality boundary – once considered, possible coercive directing methods may be employed, at the risk of both director and performer; 2) in conjunction with the first point, performers must fully consider the risks they are willing to take for their art and be prepared for the possible

repercussions, on set and in the world; and 3) spectators should not reduce a difficult performance to a display of nudity as an attempt to arouse, and neither should spectators, and producers of films for that matter, let one sexual performance hinder an actor's or actress's chances at performing in future roles and artistic endeavours. On all three levels, ethical filmmaking and ethical spectatorship pose great challenges; however, this is what Breillat desires: "I hope people will leave the film troubled, totally uneasy yet totally happy" (2011c).

Pornography and Psychoanalytic Film Theory

Continuing the theoretical investigations of the last chapter, i.e., my linking of Williams's psychoanalytically-inspired theory of body genres to recent accounts of embodiment in the film experience, in the following sections I will expand upon this theory of spectatorship and genre in regards to the films investigated above. To begin, I will argue that spectatorship of pornography cannot be accounted for by psychoanalytic theory alone, despite widespread attempts to do so. A pornographic film tinged with melodrama and horror, such as those in Breillat's *oeuvre*, is a haptic and tactile engagement. This claim substantiates itself from the analyses of forms in the prior sections.

The spectatorship theory I put forward here requires the combination of three differing yet intertwined modes of the film experience. First there is psychic reality at work, explained in the previous chapter's section on horror as the symbolic representation of genre as well as the imaginary component whereby certain viewers identify and relate to the fictional characters; second, as the psychic reality dissipates or malfunctions, disrupting both the symbolic and imaginary orders, spectators embody the emanations from the celluloid, performers, and narrative, the result of which is an engagement with

the senses; and third, the paired films discussed above involve *psychic and bodily* processes which are necessary to remember the events and details of both the features. To articulate this last mode, I will expand the concept developed by Victor Burgin: "the remembered film." Before discussing Burgin, I will detail the conflicting accounts of one psychoanalytic theory and one phenomenological theory.

In *Looking Awry* (1991), Žižek argues that cinematic enjoyment is lost when viewing pornography. There is something amiss with this genre when compared to the pleasures of otherwise narrative cinema. First, he asserts (1991: 109) that from the look of the viewing subject, pornography is supposed to reveal all that is hidden, echoing Williams's discovery that pornography has always had this function, from Kinsey to *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972) and beyond. But this revealing is too much for the spectator, "it *misses* what remained concealed in a 'normal' nonpornographic love scene" (Žižek 1991: 110).[97] In its "going too far," pornographic representations unveil the narrative function as a superfluous element; narrative takes a backseat to the sexual performance, showing instead "a stupid plot serving as a pretext for the actors to begin copulation." The actors appear to launch out of the plot and become extradiegetic performers as these introductory formalities need "to be gotten over as quickly as possible so as to begin tackling the 'real thing'" (Žižek 1991: 111). This is the "on time!" of pornography Williams discussed in her essay "Film Bodies." Žižek additionally suggests that the actors in porn films always already have the knowledge of which genre they are in, i.e., the characters onscreen are ready, willing, and able for sex when the moment/camera beckons. He calls this a "knowledge of the real," a kind of knowing too

[97] Cf. Heath 1981: 184-186. Psychoanalytic film theorist Stephen Health dismisses pornography in much the same way as Žižek and, following Christian Metz on the film experience generally, identifies it as a genre which promises to show everything, but reveals instead "the absence of the body."

much of something (Žižek 1991: 44), namely the truth of the falsity of the cinematic illusion. I interpret this knowledge as the real outside of the film, including the actor who knows his or her place in the respective genre as well as the spectator who looks upon the film with visual pleasure if it aligns with the subject's desire (at the level of the symbolic and imaginary orders).

This leads Žižek to his second point about pornography. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the gaze is always on the side of the object. "When I look at an object," Žižek writes (1991: 109), "the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point in which I cannot see it." He then quotes Jacques Lacan who claims we cannot see the things that are looking at us, or in other words, we cannot see the object's gaze. There is something *a priori* to the normally seeing eye, Lacan argues ([1964] 1998: 72), namely "the pre-existence of a gaze – I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides." Further, it is not the gaze Jean-Paul Sartre describes, as being caught in the midst of voyeurism by an other/Other and the accompanying shame. Lacan's notion of the gaze, as the elusive and indiscernible gaze from an object, is constitutive of a subject's function of desire. The gaze is the threat of castration or an otherwise perpetual state of anxiety which constitutes the field of human experience (Lacan 1998: 84-85, 88-89). It is important to stress this elusive something that is outside the field of phenomenological experience – Lacan calls it *the stain* of perception (1998: 72-74), the mark on the object which signifies "the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen." Working against certain strains of phenomenological theory, Lacan contends that a stain occurs in perception which haunts a subject as that which is there, in existence, without a human awareness, consciousness, and intentionality. The stain is the necessary point from which the object gazes at us; according to Žižek, this stain that "sticks out" and has no

meaning, leads the subject to continually try to produce meanings: “it is a driving force of endless compulsion” (1991: 91). The stain organizes desire around the elusive search for an object that can never be truly possessed. A lack, then, seems to constitute psychic reality, resulting in an anxiety of castration or in other words, the knowledge of the real (Žižek 1991: 83-87).

Žižek’s most potent example of this lack/real problem is from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958). He writes,

> The hero [Scottie] puts all his effort into transforming Judy into a new ‘Madeleine,’ into producing a sublime object, when, all of a sudden, he becomes aware that ‘Madeleine’ herself was Judy, this common girl. The point of such a reversal is not that an earthly woman can never fully conform to the sublime ideal; on the contrary, it is the sublime object herself (“Madeleine”) that loses her power of fascination. (1991: 85)

In *Vertigo*, when the knowledge of the real is attained, the fantasy is crushed, and desire ceases to function. The validity or details of Lacan’s claims about the gaze as well as Žižek’s are not the objects of interest here, merely how they describe the functions of the psyche and its relation to spectatorship. We can now bring these psychoanalytic concepts to bear on Žižek’s writings on pornography spectatorship. The organization of desire, Žižek claimed, is off-kilter in the pornographic film experience.

After the first claim that pornography is narratively stupid, Žižek’s second criticism of pornography is that it positions the viewing subject as an object and further, the films in this genre do not contain the mysterious point – the stain – in the form of a gaze. Žižek suggests it is we who stupidly gaze at the actors copulating and subsequently the viewer also becomes an object for the look of those performers. “[T]he fundamental prohibition determining the direction of the gaze of actors on the screen is suspended in a pornographic movie, the actor – as a rule, the woman – in the moment of intense sexual pleasure looks directly into the camera, addressing us, the spectators” (Žižek 1991:

180n6). The real subjects, he continues, are the actors who try to stimulate our sexual and voyeuristic pleasure; spectators are objects for them. Paul Willemen ([1980] 2006: 51) locates this look more in line with Sartre, stating the direct address to the spectator from the porn actress surprises the viewer, and causes shame. Willemen also establishes that in the midst of this surprise there is the mark of the not-to-be-looked-at of copulating bodies, i.e., from the censorship of the superego, or the legalized censorship of authorities, or possibly the two combined. Whatever definition we need to give this exchange of looks and gazes, the whole of the organizational structure of desire is thrown out of joint by the malfunctioning image in the pornographic feature.

Combining the two arguments, Žižek concludes that what we view in a pornographic video is a fundamental incongruence between an image and the narrative: along with the misplaced gaze – the performer looks at the viewer, the viewer becomes object for the performer – porn narrates too much and shows us what we should only imagine, thus disrupting our fantasy.[98] Porn films constitute disillusionment in the viewer who wanted to be shown all – the viewer realizes the film-object is unable to (re)produce his or her fantasy. Instead, the spectator experiences the images and narrative as so obviously a fake – what is produced is "an effect of depressing desublimation" (Žižek 1991: 111). In other words, a flat image or the death of a viewer's imagination. Psychoanalytic film theorist Stephen Heath argues that the foundation of spectatorship is the imagination, an imagined ideal whereby the ego finds the body it wants *in* or *from* the

[98] Cf. Willemen 2006 56: "Porn imagery directly addresses the viewer with the fantasy itself. The fantasy no longer needs to be reconstructed. But now it is the very incarnation of the fantastic that cannot but produce a mismatch: the actors' bodies…, the lighting, the sets, the noises on the sound track, everything is excessively concrete and never quite coincides with the selective vagueness of a fantasy image. A sexual fantasy can proceed very satisfactorily without having to specify the pattern of the wallpaper. A filmic fantasy cannot. In porn, and perhaps in all films, it is the loss generated by the friction between the fantasy looked for and the fantasy displayed that sustains the desire for ever-promised and never-found gratification."

cinema – not the ideal body for the ego itself, but what it wants out of the cinema (1981: 188-189). Pornography, according to Žižek, halts this process and no exchange of imagined bodies is possible. A harmony of narrative and explicitness, ego exchange and ideal body, is dissolved and not to be resolved (Žižek 1991: 110-111). Twice Žižek calls the joining of narrative and graphic sexuality "structurally impossible." His last few sentences in his short section on the genre deserve to be quoted at length:

> Even if [the live sexual act in a narrative feature] were to be shot, it simply 'would not function'; the additional ten minutes would derail us, for the rest of the movie we would be unable to regain our balance and follow the narration with the usual disavowed belief in the diegetic reality. The sexual act would function as *an intrusion of the real* undermining the consistency of this diegetic reality. (Žižek 1991: 111, italics mine)

In the first chapter I adopted the phrase "the intrusion of the real" from film critic Paul Julian Smith to discuss Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012). I now want to implement the term and its theoretical associations to discuss the experience of *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*. With the appropriation and misuse of the pornography genre explicated in the second chapter, and this new revelation elaborated in the prior sections about the affects of the latter film, Žižek's description of pornography turns into the theoretical foundation for Breillat's films. Pornography is a failure, Žižek says, and Breillat seems aware of the genre's failure to produce a harmonious narrative and series of congruent images. However, as I have argued in chapter two and three, genre and spectatorship are not reducible to universalizing accounts such as Žižek's. I therefore read a critique of naively classical notions of spectatorship in her work, particularly as a response to the desperate need of both theory and culture to develop multivalent concepts and ideas about pornography.

Breillat's "monster" (2011a) reappears when we try to find a link between psychoanalytic film theory and the theories of haptic visuality and sensation. She says of

Fat Girl, “Yes, there’s a story and there are scenes, but when they come together, they resonate with each other, and we feel the emotions that come not from any particular scene, but from nowhere specific.” Brinkema argues (2006a: 160-161) that the monster is not the rape or murder but the celluloid from which we receive these emanations: “Far from neutralizing the horror, far from sanitizing it and protecting it from the male violence in the film, this material, temporal formulation should leave us shattered because our encounter with in the cinema is not with flesh but always… with the film proper.” But we must not forget, Jennifer Barker reminds us (2009: 29-30), the film-experience is much more than screen and celluloid. She names it the “film’s skin,” a contact between the concealed, invisible and untouchable elements of the images and sounds – up there, on the screen – and the spectator’s body that empathically embodies the revealed images and sounds. This is not an effort to describe what the experience is as such, the kind of criticism Brinkema notes as an affective fallacy; rather, it is a careful treatment of the film experience as it is lived in a mutual exchange amongst screen, apparatus, and observer. Laura U. Marks, similarly, names this a haptic visuality. “By engaging with an object in a haptic way,” Marks wrote prior to Barker’s formulation (2000: 184), “I come to the surface of my self…, losing myself in the intensified relation with an other [the celluloid, screen – the apparatus] that cannot be possessed.” Thus we see the “*the film seeing*,” Barker writes following Vivian Sobchack additionally (2009: 9), “we see its own (if humanly enabled) process of perception and expression unfolding in space and time.” As I revealed in the previous chapters, Marks, Sobchack, Barker, and I share this theoretical point of departure whereby the bodies (images) onscreen are co-constituted with the bodies of spectators. The so-called “monster” that Breillat strangely identifies in *Fat Girl* – the affect from “nowhere specific”, an implacable and imprecise moment of co-

constitution in the form of shock – is revived in *Sex is Comedy* through sensorial memory.

Tom Gunning convincingly claims that spectators receive "a succession of sensual assaults" (Gunning 2009: 748) from that celluloid and apparatus in all its complexities, which means the exact sensation localized in the body of that spectator is rather imprecise because of its inability to be outwardly located – on the screen to be sure, in which frame, shot, or scene is contestable. Something is similarly awry, so to speak, in Breillat's features, something which we cannot label and pinpoint. I have considered this in light of genre in the prior chapter. The value of watching *Fat Girl* and its fictionalized making-of side-by-side, in addition to the interests I found in Mesquida's performances, is re-tracing and rethinking spectatorship theory. The affective dimension of each film are altered and re-constituted with my reading of them as a pair. *Fat Girl* may be a simple story about the plight of a young woman and her initiation into sexuality; *Sex is Comedy* is a rather boring narrative, on the whole, about a director making a slightly erotic film. Together these films accomplish much. I have demonstrated that they allow for productive and critical considerations about sexuality and patriarchy, the ethics of filming sex scenes, performing sexual scenes, the aesthetics of pornography, and embodiment and memory. As far as spectatorship is concerned, we may surmise that the knowledge of the performances, direction, and all the troubles in between even begs for a reading.

The Confrontation with the Real of the Film

Žižek seemed to be arguing that pornography is a failure of cinematic and narrative pleasure. Once pornography has been codified, its conventions understood by its consumers, the images and sounds lose their capacity to produce sensation in the viewer.

It is too much of a jumbled mess that does not function. Breillat's films, on the other hand, have yet to be or are completely unable to be, categorized and coded with certainty. This is her tactic, to refuse to be pigeonholed within generic terms. With neither definitive symbolic representation – in producing a genre film or in the form of being classified as a genre filmmaker – and imaginary representation – in the form of spectators' direct identification with characters, an investment in their lives, and in an expected cause and effect pattern that clearly establishes a narrative arc – Breillat confronts viewers with the two notions of the real that are tied to the affective dimensions of the paired films. These two notions of the real are 1) the extradiegetic materials, the profilmic event, and the intratextuality discussed above in *Sex is Comedy*, and 2) the Lacanian version, which I discussed in the previous chapter (that part of our psychically-mediated experience which is indefinable and allows the Symbolic and Imaginary orders to function). Marks's theory in *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and Burgin's in *The Remembered Film* (2004) can help explain the paired films' affects and its implications for spectatorship theory, in other words, to build a bridge between two concepts of real/the real. The key concept Marks develops is haptic visuality. While discussing Marks, Barker argues (2009: 37) that haptic visuality is the "horizontal look along a flat surface" and in that look, something of the surface of the images make contact with a spectator; it is a touching with the eyes, a tactile perception. But we will see that the reduction of the film experience to a theory of tactility is, like the case for Žižek's psychoanalytic account of spectatorship, insufficient to fully account for the experience of watching Breillat's films.

Žižek's theory of spectatorship fails to account for Breillat's pornographic films because he posits something like a command over the image. Pornography, for Žižek, is voyeurism, which entails according to Marks, a distance between object and viewer.

Marks would rather posit an eroticism of the image, a closeness to what is seen without possessing or mastering it. "Visual erotics," she claims (2000: 184), "allows the object of vision to remain inscrutable." In the incomprehensibility of the image we find ourselves implicated because a haptic visuality is a relationship of "mutuality," opposed to the psychoanalytic description of spectatorial opposition and distance (Marks 2000: 183, 184). Marks thinks of the image as an other that cannot be possessed, and therefore this element of mutuality or mutual recognition, as an intersubjective relationship between "beholder and a work of cinema," is erotic – the viewer gives herself over to the image and loses herself in it (2000: 183, 184). Haptic visuality is not merely what is seen, the relationship to a narrative or character, or the aura of an actor for that matter; with co-constitution, spectators arrive at the "surface of the image," not just what is represented therein. Marks describes (2000: 185) it as a dialectical movement between the surface and "depth of the image" (its content). As I outlined in the Introduction, this requires the passivity and activity of spectatorship, the ability to lose oneself while also willingly giving up a mastery of the image.

From the conclusions Marks posits, Barker (2009: 36) suggests that we simultaneously experience our own body and that of the surface of the image, or what she calls the "film's body," in a sense which is both "here" with our own bodily surfaces and "there" in contact with the surfaces of the film's body. Barker describes the film's body as a lived body "capable of perception of expression and the expression of perception." In other words, the film's body is not a human body, a subject or subjectivity, but acts as if embodied and material in a "irreducible relation with the world…: the film… perceives, experiences, is immersed in, and has a vantage point on the world, and without a doubt the film signifies, or otherwise there would be nothing at all for us to see, hear, feel, or

interpret" (Barker 2009: 9). Following Marks, Barker claims that there is an exchange or mutuality or reversibility between the human body and the film's body (2009: 19). In the first chapter I demonstrated how the theory of the film's body works in *Post Tenebras Lux*. In Marks's terms (2000: xii), we can speak of the relationship to the image as a brushing up against another body; the film is "impressionable and conductive, like skin." What is haptic, then, is the relinquishing of control in favor of this reversibility and grazing over the surface of an image before one has the time to "come to their senses" (so the phrase goes). Thus for Barker and Marks, the film-experience can be thoroughly about texture rather than "illusionistic depth" (Barker 2009: 38, quoting Marks).

In the spirit of erotics, Marks posits a caressing gaze. Barker, alternatively (2009: 39), whose expanded ideas about the haptic are useful for Breillat's features, includes the "gentle" as well as "aggressive or cruel, comforting or uncomfortable" gaze. Marks and Barker therefore appear to be correct about the film experience when we try to recount an image or scene within a particular film. On the one hand, the content is important for fostering a spectator's haptic visuality; however, in proximity to Brinkema's theory of the affects, we can also consider something more formal: a haptic visuality can manifest in a feature that does not give us the frequent edits we are accustomed to. To give an example of how haptic visuality works in *Fat Girl*, I provide not a particular object or body in an image, but the work of temporality and duration.

Tanya Horeck observes that many extreme films contain lengthy scenes, not just in terms of the duration of action, but the frequent employment of the long take. She likens the nine-minute (perhaps "excessive and grotesque") rape scene in Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible* (*Irréversible*, 2002) to *Fat Girl*'s rape scene, noting that their respective duration is essential to "their brand of cinematic realism" (Horeck 2010: 203). Realism,

for Breillat, as we went along with Martin Crowley and Eugenie Brinkema at the beginning of chapter two, is a pornography that is restorative of female dignity through the explicitness of the portrayed acts. This aesthetic turns to the unconscious or irreal and thus refers to a reality that is not a correlation to an objective world. In addition, the sitcom (Breillat 2011c, Vincendeau 2001) quality of *Fat* Girl, i.e., the melodramatic or teen comedy elements that show common and banal events, is made epic and indeed timeless, argues Sarah Cooper (2010: 107), by the respective length of the scene. This is the novelty and originality of these films for Williams (2008: 282): their explicitness and duration "allow the battle over the loss of virginity to become a more psychologically and emotionally accurate ordeal.... The scene is true, sad, funny, and devastating all at once." Duration is a formal indicator of a film's affect – in *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*: a fear or dread from the traumas of rape and performance. In some shape and form, then, the realism of performance and duration coincide and in this form I read the horrible as an affect in chapter two.

On the spectatorial side, we can surmise that the horrified viewer will perhaps ask when a shot will end, when will it cut, and when will the assault on the senses conclude. According to my analyses and those of other extreme cinema scholars, this assault is productive for theorizing spectatorial ethical engagement (Grønstad 2006; Beugnet 2007; Lübecker 2011, Brown 2013). For our discussion of haptic visuality here, what is important is that the time of the shot prolongs its effect on viewers; the unbearable duration and the affect of trauma is embedded in viewers' memory because of the aesthetic choices. The long take enhances the possibility for remembering the sequence when it is restaged in *Sex is Comedy*. Haptic visuality is therefore bound to memory,

something Barker neglects in Marks's work – a haptic viewing is impossible, or at best incomplete, without embodied memory.

On the one hand, with Žižek, we have the requirement for total control over the pornographic image and that control exists insofar as narrative and image is able to deliver on its promise of resembling the fantasy viewers had in mind (prior to and during the watching of the film). If an image or film cannot provide the conditions necessary for mastery, the feature fails or does not function; a real intrudes on our otherwise narrative pleasure. With Marks's and Barker's account, spectators give themselves over and become "vulnerable to the image" (Marks 2000: 185) by relinquishing mastery and thereby experience the surface of the image which, through this optical absorption, comes into contact with their senses. But I think there can be a middle ground between these two positions and with this middle ground I can provide a conclusive statement on the experience of Breillat's paired films, for neither Žižek nor Barker via Marks gives a completely satisfying theory. Haptic visuality must be recounted in full, stressing the importance of the spectator's relationship with the world including their memories, without which the visualization of images would not be possible – it is not enough to describe haptic visuality as a correlation between bodies onscreen and the spectator's own. In my efforts to define and locate the film experience of *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*, a theory of spectatorship must include the inner reality of the spectator, the relationship between perceiver and world, their co-constitution, the apparatus, the co-constitution of viewer and film, haptic visuality as just outlined, and finally, the memory of the film including all of its attractions and, in the case of Breillat's two films, their conjunction and co-constitution with the spectator who embodies (remembers) them.

The Remembered Film

For both Marks and Burgin, the film-experience is more than the image, content, or even the surface of the image and haptic visuality. It is the material of the film to be sure, as well as the "institution of cinema," "cinema-going" (Marks 2000: xii), and attractions:

> …posters, 'blurbs', and other advertisements, such as trailers and television clips; … newspaper reviews, reference work synopses and theoretical articles (with their 'film-strip' assemblages of still images); … production photographs, frame enlargements, memorabilia, and so on. Collecting such metonymic fragments in memory, we may come to feel familiar with a film we have not actually seen. (Burgin 2004: 9)

The important thing here is that the film itself, cinema-going, and its various attractions shape and help us recollect a feature. Burgin's last sentence reflects not only the "not-seeing" of a film: the experience of a work is often remembered as a single element, image, gesture, effect, scene, poster, etc. To articulate the experience of *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy* I must go farther than Barker on tactility and describe the processes involved in remembering. Turning my attention to embodied memory is to wrench an analysis of Breillat's paired films from merely their materiality (original celluloid and subsequent digital, DVD, and blu-ray incarnations).

Marks repeats her thesis of *The Skin of the Film* over and over. The sensuous experience of a film, and of cinema, is activated by a memory stored not in the mind, but in the body (Marks 2000: 75). This means not just the perceptual or audible; Marks includes (2000: 26) all the other senses as well. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has argued, perception is an experience of the whole body, and the perception of cinema follows similarly (Marks 2000: 48-49). The link to memory is in the nature of embodiment in which each sensuous encounter with the world is stored in the body then later recalled to engage with the phenomenological present. When the senses are awakened by cinema, it is both from an individual's memory as well as a cultural memory of institutions,

practices, etc. (Marks 2000: 147, 110). Marks calls this “attentive recognition,” a more participatory form of spectatorship: “We move between seeing the object, recalling the virtual images that it brings to mind, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us” (2000: 147; cf. 48). The mode of attentive recognition can produce a sensation in the viewer. For example, if a film depicts the cooking of a certain meal, a meal which is associated with a particular culture, the spectator whom is familiar with that food or meal will not only register it perceptually but, through her remembering of the film-image and associations with that culture, might also sense smells and tastes.

Food is the most obvious test case, but Marks will also employ many different film and video images to show how certain directors use images to revive their own memory, memories of the dead and of forgotten communities, and finally to create new memories for the spectators who engage haptically with the work. Her focus on intercultural cinemas and cinemas of diasporas rests heavily on this form of embodied spectatorship; only bodies not limited by sight and sound “bear… the marks of sense memories” of peoples, homes, communities, and territories lost (Marks 2000: 129).

Marks brings to light two different types of memory: voluntary and involuntary. The former was developed by Bergson. He posited an unconscious or latent memory that can be willfully recalled to engage the present. On the other hand, from the fiction of Marcel Proust and the theoretical writing of Walter Benjamin, Marks suggests there is also an involuntary memory. “Involuntary memory cannot be called up at will but must be brought on by a ‘shock’ – … [e.g.,] the fragrance of the madeleine Proust dunked in his cup of tea” (Marks 2000: 64). What Marks relates here in similar to Roland Barthes’s experience of James van der Zee’s portrait-photograph of a family, dated 1926. Barthes is first uncontrollably moved by the ankle-strap of a woman in the photograph, then,

reflecting more carefully, Barthes decides that the woman's necklace actually generated the feeling. He explores his memory and finds a similar necklace worn by his mother and, by association he feels the dullness and dreariness of his provincial childhood. Burgin (2004: 60) also calls this kind of memory involuntary, although this is not immediately so in Barthes's case. Barthes must willfully search before he can locate the exact appeal of the photograph, the accompanying memory, and I would add the *recalled sensation* of a dull and dreary provincial childhood.

The location of a bodily sensation produced by the involuntary memory is imprecise or disassociated from the representation as such. Burgin finds a similar event in one of Sigmund Freud's patients. This patient one day broke into sobs in the street. She subsequently imagined a fantasy of being abandoned by a lover, and this fantasy, according to the patient, led to the tears. This patient, as well as with Barthes in his discussion of the photograph, are initially dissociative affects and demonstrate "how in the course of everyday life a chance encounter with an image may give rise to an inexplicable feeling, and how, by retracing the path taken by the affect, we may be led back to its origin in a suppressed or repressed idea" (Burgin 2004: 61). Burgin names (2004: 21) the *factual* image that accomplishes this – not a daydream, hallucination, or delusion – the "sequence-image," "a transitory state of percepts of a 'present moment' seized in their association with past affects and meanings." This associative affect is often tied with psychoanalytic markers for Burgin (2004: 16), such as "death, childhood, the mother." His formulation of the sequence-image and the discussion of Barthes aid him in developing a general theory of film as one that is not just phenomenologically present to spectators, but is remembered. With film spectatorship there is more to the experience than the story, feelings, and judgments of a single viewing, namely, spectators'

remembered or associative images (Burgin 2004: 59). Further, with new technologies, remembering or being re-shocked is ever more possible and accessible: one can endlessly repeat "a favorite sequence" or fix "upon an obsessional image" (Burgin 2004: 8).

Is this not what Reygadas put into practice in *Post Tenebras Lux*? His film travels back in time and leaps ahead to impossible futures and these temporal and fantastical leaps, I argued in the first chapter, were shot with a realist style to capture the ontological condition on the one hand, namely, daydreams and fantasies as embodied aspects of existence, and on the other, to grant the spectator a bodily experience "as if" they too were experiencing daydreams and fantasy. In chapters two and three, have I have not fixed upon *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*, argued at length about my favorite sequences and images? With Breillat's paired films there is something simpler transpiring than in Burgin's more complicated account. The affective bleed of the features does not need recourse to psychoanalytic concepts such as the mother or death. Indeed, such theorizing is perhaps overly complex, as exhibited a Steve Reinke's short film. He mocks psychoanalytic (film) theory in *Instructions for Recovering Forgotten Childhood Memories* (1993). We see an extreme close-up the artist's tongue inserting canned fruits and vegetables into his nostrils. Marks notes (2000: 197) the short film's critique is of psychoanalysts' wishful thinking on the ease of recovering "forgotten memories." Without resorting to (un)conscious association, what is affective in Breillat's features is the repetition of Elena's rape in *Fat Girl* restaged in *Sex is Comedy*, including all its formal qualities, in spectators' experience of the involuntary revival of the key sequences (that matter for the individual), and an involuntary fixation on them

This process, as I have been explaining, is not simply a mapping of the images of one film onto another for, in *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*, the scenes and sequences of the

latter are completely restaged in a different context, form, and even tone. We have instead the experience of the "recollection-image," a concept Marks adopts from Gilles Deleuze and through which she restates the importance of attentive recognition (the mental comparison between an actual image and the virtual image it "brings to mind"). She writes (2000: 50), "A recollection-image embodies the traces of an event whose representation has been buried, but it cannot represent the event itself. Through attentive recognition it may provoke an imaginative reconstruction, such as a flashback, that pulls it back into understandable causal relationships." The final sequence of *Sex is Comedy*, then, is not merely the recollection of the appropriate scene in *Fat Girl*; the affect of the autofictional film contains all the forms of the affects I discussed in chapter two in relation to the Fernando/Elena rape sequence and the narrative. Moreover, the entirety of the difficult shooting conditions, depicted in *Sex is Comedy*, cuts across the entirely of our imagined projection of the making-of *Fat Girl*. Put differently, a recollection of the previous rape sequence undergoes a substantial revision when Mesquida's fictionalized performance of vulnerability and distress in *Sex is Comedy* is considered. And, if we return to or rewatch *Fat Girl*, the involuntary revival of Mesquida's trouble with the performance saturates our reception of the feature. We therefore do not have the event of Mesquida's fear, anxiety, and unease as such in either film; what we do see is the actress, in this latter feature, working through a "traumatic interrogation" (Marks 2000: 5) of a past shoot that was difficult if not exploitative – this interrogation is why I stressed Mesquida's becoming-actress and the actor-auteur. For the spectator of these events, through combined recollection – the triad of co-constituted elements amongst the embodied spectator, his or her memories, and the two films – we have a sensuous experience of the imagined reconstruction of Mesquida's troubles, her overcoming of

them, and other involuntary links between the films. It is as Burgin states: an image is associative, which is to say not direct, but happens involuntarily and with much attentiveness.

In these last few sections I theorized the sensuous encounter with the profilmic event and extradiegetic materials in *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*. The first of the paired films has an ability to convey the emotional state of its characters, and in the second film, these states are mobilized by spectators to overwhelm themselves with involuntarily shocks, spurning an imagined recollection of the conditions under which the prior film was shot. A new experience for spectators is born out of the pairing, beyond what is available to theorizing the immanent materiality of a single film.[99] Sensation is therefore not limited to the surface of the image alone and it need not be associative in the psychoanalytic sense, or if it is associative, it is associated with the embodied experience (past and present) of the individual spectator.[100] Memory is therefore housed in the senses because the earlier film was itself such a shock, as I argued in chapter two, through its content, its representations, its misappropriating genre and confusing spectatorial expectations, and Breillat's message. We need not even re-watch *Fat Girl* to feel its force once we experience the apparently accurate accounts of its filmmaking, the relationship between Mesquida and Breillat, and Mesquida's (feigned) apprehension in *Sex is Comedy* – we need only our memories.

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[99] I am only recounting a positive experience of Breillat's paired films. It is possible, in the "'physical shock effect'" which reorders "common-sense patterns of sense experience" and makes "room for new cultural organizations of perception" (Marks 2000: 195, quoting Benjamin), the trauma of form and content would be too much for the viewer to handle and the spectator may block the film both perceptually and from their memories (Marks 2000: 152).

[100] Cf. Marks 2000: 148. The author has her own associative experience during a viewing of Shani Mootoo's *Her Sweetness Lingers* (1994). The gardens on display in this film "calls up associations with gardens I have known in my ancestral Alabama." Marks does not posit anything psychoanalytic about this association; what is most powerful in the film is the magnolia flowers, thus reinforcing Marks's claim that cinema can be viewed haptically, for she experiences through the images the smells of Alabama.

Post-script

On the other hand, one cannot help but sometimes laugh during the collective experience of watching pornography. Williams's first experience of *Deep Throat* was arousal perhaps, but more precisely, she remembers "how much we laughed" (2008: 131). Manohla Dargis (2005), upon her first viewing of *Battle in Heaven* at Cannes, echoes Williams: "When I wasn't laughing at the film, I loved it." I held a screening of this film and the prologue got a few chuckles as well.[101] Indeed, Taverner's music in the opening sequence is an absurdity. But rather than addressing the seriousness of Reygadas's and Breillat's films and the directors' forays into the pornographic as something either narratively valuable or "silly and misjudged" (Bradshaw 2005), I think the critical incongruity between art and porn is also accurately addressed in such moments of collective laughter and personal memory. In other words, the form of the film combined with the recollection of those forms is the film. Bruno Dumont, a key figure in New French Extremism, asserts (Gibert, [2010] 2013), "The reward is in remembering the film, not watching the film…. That's cinema, what we do with it later. The film will leave you with a fantastic memory, but the day you watch it, it's an effort. It's all in retrospect…." The theory I developed in the preceding sections seems to do justice to a larger portion of the film experience, not merely assessing the mediation between spectator and screen (psychoanalysis) or the relationship between particular images and the viewer's embodied relationship to them (phenomenology). We must not forget to include the extradiegetic, profilmic event, intratextuality, and spectators' memory in either Bergsonian or Benjaminian forms. To accomplish a close reading of the above

[101] "Trent Film Society Presents: Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven*," Artspace, Peterborough, ON, Tuesday, February 12th, 2013.

films and articulate a theory of the pornography genre and its spectatorship meant going beyond the film object and its materiality.

Conclusion: Know Genre, No Trouble

If, as Cavell argues, the reality that film holds before us is that of our own perceptual condition, then it opens the possibility of once again being present to self or acknowledging how we may again become present to ourselves…. Cinema takes up where philosophy leaves off, as the preconceptual expression of the passage to another way of being.

- D.N. Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory," 2007

The means by which Carlos Reygadas and Catherine Breillat challenge the assumptions of spectatorship theory and genre theory were explored in the three chapters of this dissertation. Reygadas and Breillat serve as examples to bolster my claim that spectatorship is a process of collecting images and sounds that matter for the individual. Based on the embodied quality of the film experience as well as an individual's personal knowledge of and familiarity with notions of genre, this interpretive process determines a film's genre. In my three chapters I do not simply argue for a film's inclusion within a familiar category; rather, I demonstrate that the directors' works push the generic film experience to its inevitable end, i.e., the impossibility of declaring the stability of one or more genres. Through the style and narrative of films such as Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (*Batalla en el cielo*, 2005) and *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), and Breillat's *Romance* (1999), *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur*, 2001), *Brief Crossing* (*Brève Traversée*, 2001), and *Sex is Comedy* (2002), I show how these works allow for a multivalent experience of genre. These films are experimental, documentary, melodramatic, pornographic, and horrific, sometimes all at once. The films under analysis aim to facilitate the spectator in his or her collection and recollection of images and sounds, not as forms and narratives that make sense within one sensuous experience of pornography or horror, for example, but as a

having sense of the film as such. In turn, this having sense of the film allows for a reflection on film experience itself and thereby solicits an engagement with the embodied quality of that experience and the role genre plays (or does not play) in that experience. I also articulate the ways these films are assemblages of the directors' formal, narrative, and ethical and political visions. As much of the cited and quoted scholarship in this dissertation attests to, Reygadas and Breillat have been largely successful in conveying a sense of the issues of class and race in Mexico and patriarchy and rape in France.

However, this sensuous account of the film experience is also contested as I move through the third chapter to eventually posit a spectatorship theory that does not rely solely on immediacy. In a consideration of Breillat's *Fat Girl* and *Sex is Comedy*, I built a bridge between one version of a phenomenological theory and one theorist's psychoanalytic theory. The payoff from this analysis, the concept I call an affective bleed, expands my original thesis that the film experience is a collection of images and sounds that matter to an individual. I demonstrate that the ways these two films speak to each other are not just to present Breillat's vision of patriarchy in the 21st century; they also address issues of performing sexually in a narrative film, both from the perspective of the actor and/or actress as well as the director. In developing my argument, I required the affective bleed between these films and thus put into practice an intratextual theory of spectatorship. Breillat's films are much more than an immanent experience.

The third chapter also situates an obvious yet frequently overlooked aspect of an analysis of the pornography genre. Performance is one element of the formal qualities of a film. The manner in which an actor or actress performs and the way the director chooses to document that performance play a significant role in spectators' collection and recollection of the film. This is similarly the case with numerous elements of *Fat Girl*, the

film I discussed at length in the second chapter: mise-en-scène, performance, duration, fantasy, sexual desire, among other techniques and themes, constitute a particular type of film experience or, at least aims to do so. A critique of patriarchy is made possible through Breillat's filmmaking method and vision.

On the one hand, the first chapter is concerned with Reygadas's observations on class, race, and sexual difference; on the other, it is invested in placing *Post Tenebras Lux* up against dream sequences that populate cinema's rich history. I initiate a discussion of the avant-garde in this chapter to emphasize the role sensuousness has in the director's vision. Much of *Post Tenebras Lux* exists as dream and fantasy sequences; however, Reygadas is devoted the realist style, thus the film, as a philosophical and cinematic experiment, demonstrated that dreams are better expressed as part of embodiment and, through the expression of this idea, the film aims to generate a spectatorial experience "as if" in a dream or fantasy (through the mediation of the cinematic apparatus).

My aim was to elaborate, in a philosophical way, interpretations of films within the parameters of genre theory and phenomenological film theory. The dissertation may have minimized contextualization, cultural history, and genre history, but this was to provide close readings of the very objects under investigation. In Stanley Cavell's words, my readings of these films allowed "the object of interpretation… [to] become a means of interpretation" (Macarthur 2014: 96, quoting Cavell). While I do not necessarily take up the discourse of an expert, I do make claims with rigor and demonstrate attentiveness to debates surrounding extreme cinema and contemporary film theory. My study generates three broad conclusions that are applicable to contemporary art cinema to be sure, but also to spectatorship and genre theory as well.

1) Scholars of extreme cinema have been too quick to demarcate the tendency as art porn, horror, or some kind of hybrid genre. Based on my work here, such passive remarks or conclusions about genre and the boundaries of genre are not sophisticated enough to either do justice to the films or genre theory and spectatorship. According to my account of extreme cinema, these films facilitate or make more apparent that spectators collect and recollect individual elements of a given film or attempt to think the film as a whole. The film may fail to move spectators: e.g., *Post Tenebras Lux* may be too boring and *Romance* may be interesting because of its display of bodies and sex. Conversely, *Post Tenebras Lux*, in line with the director's claims about his work, may be successful in demonstrating the experimental possibilities of the medium; and by being formally rigorous, *Fat Girl*, despite its presentation of nude bodies and sex, is successful in communicating the director's message about contemporary romance. My dissertation thus expands upon the scholarship of extreme cinema that I have heretofore found to be inadequate when dealing with the question of genre.
2) Given that extreme cinema confounds genres and genre theory, new conceptions of genre and methods of studying it are therefore necessary. As Rick Altman notes, genres do not exist over and above, or prior to, a film's production and its reception. Genre is more complex than tracing a body of films' semantic and syntactic elements. The moment one speaks of genre, one must also attempt to locate its pragmatic components: how is the film advertised, how was it received, and in its reception, how do spectators' reactions inform and shift producer-driven definitions of genre. Genre theory,

production, and audiences exist in circuitous communication with one another. The methodology of this dissertation attempted to replicate this communication process by recognizing my personal investment in particular genres and trends, developing close readings of individual films, and expanding the range of scholarly understanding of these films by utilizing director interviews, critical reviews and commentary, and theoretical essays and books. This method better approximates both the concept and experience of genre.

3) Extreme cinema fosters a reconceptualization of genre and spectatorship. If we are to more appropriately theorize the distinctions between genres (or lack thereof), many strands of spectatorship theory are insufficient to help provide a satisfactory account. It was necessary to bring phenomenology and phenomenological film theory to bear on extreme cinema. Spectatorship is an immanent experience firstly, from which differing analyses of films and their relationship to genre(s) may be studied. An immanent experience of film does not foreclose the influence of memory; in fact, genre is possible in and through preceding experiences with genre films and discussion of films. Memory thus plays a role in both the collection of an individual film and a recollection of one or more films. It is this process of recollection that also generates another affective engagement with the film(s), albeit of a different sort than the immediacy of the film experience. My study thus provides alternate means to assess the spectator and generates new conclusions about spectatorship.

This dissertation intervenes in a number of fields. I was able to produce provocative methods and conclusions about contemporary film theory, genre theory, and

spectatorship theory. My intervention in spectatorship theory demonstrates that extreme cinema is a risk insofar as the meaning or message of a film may be lost on its viewers. Throughout the chapters, perhaps most importantly, I reflect upon the ethics of spectatorship: in chapter one, ethical spectatorship would understand Reygadas's depictions of class, race, and sexual difference; chapter two contests certain film critics' assertions that Breillat's films are naught but shock and sex; and concretely, in the final chapter I posit three ethical nodes in which *Sex is Comedy* (and other films with narrativized sex scenes) might be viewed. If we wish to assess these works as critical works of art then film scholars need to continue to develop theories that speak to the ethics of collection, recollection, and curatorship. Indeed, my work on specific films and on the film experience redresses possible criticisms such as art for art's sake, since Reygadas and Breillat immerse their viewers in social and cultural critique, and dismissive criticisms that cinematic violence and sex serve no critical or ethical purpose. The latter, in fact, was shown to be quite the opposite. However, the universalizing of interpretation is not entirely my aim here. My references to Cavell were efforts to demonstrate that films may reveal themselves to us as objects *about us*. For D.N. Rodowick, Cavell's work on cinema is also an ontology. Cavell evaluates

> a particular way of Being. This is not the being or identity of a film or what identifies film as art, but rather the ways of being that art provokes in us or more deeply, how film and other forms of art express for us or return us to our past, current, and future states of being…. Cavell comprehend[s] cinema as expressing ways of being in the world and of relating to the world. In this respect, cinema is already philosophy, and a philosophy intimately connected to our everyday life. (Rodowick [2007] 2011: 1120, 1121)

Put in the terms of this dissertation, when a film turns us back on ourselves to have a sense of our bodies, of our social, cultural, and gendered situation, of our relationship to the screen and those human somethings that appear therein, we are confronted with an

imperative to assess, evaluate, and interpret what we see and feel according to our pasts, the contemporary moment, and what the film reveals about our futures. If we collect and curate Reygadas's and Breillat's films with this in mind, we find their sometimes bleak depictions nonetheless carry the possibility of individual (and thereby social) ethical transformations.

It is true that this dissertation does not take up Cavell's writing about film in great detail; however, his mark on my theorizing and style of writing is apparent. First, I follow his philosophical approach. Robert Sinnerbrink muses on Cavell's method, describing it as an "openness to questioning, to having our habitual ways of seeing and thinking put into question, which makes film *philosophical* in the best sense" (Sinnerbrink 2014: 66). Second, by bringing philosophical questions to certain films, I was prompted to ask how my style facilitates personal and readers' understanding of the film experience (Sinnerbrink 2014: 55). My work here is thus neither mere rhetoric nor personal taste. The limits of a so-called Cavellian approach may be considered here, i.e., it is philosophizing without argument, but Sinnerbrink (2014: 60) is able to counter Cavell's critics by suggesting that the work of philosophy is to illuminate the artwork and transform horizons "of understanding by aesthetic as well as conceptual means." I therefore bring together genres and theory in order to develop and assess the questions for film-philosophy raised by Reygadas's and Breillat's respective *oeuvres* and I accomplish this through a practice of writing that engages theorization and aesthetic criticism. What I see in and think about these films is thus a work of creative expression. As I wrote in the Introduction, perhaps the label of theoretical cinephilia might be appropriate for my work.

While my study evaluates the film experience in theoretical and poetic ways, it simultaneously raises questions about the nature of Film Studies and Film Theory and

how to take up those disciplines. This is not the place to thoroughly reformulate how one could or should study films; what my work in these chapters demonstrates, as well as Rodowick's brief discussion of Cavell, is the imperative to connect studies of the embodied engagement with film with ethical considerations. But this imperative merely extends what filmmakers already know – Jean-Luc Godard had famously said that tracking shots are a "moral issue." By way of a conclusion, I offer Breillat's most recent film as a final example of studying the intersections of genre, extreme cinema, and ethical spectatorship. Similar to the placement of *Post Tenebras Lux* in Reygadas's *oeuvre*, *Abuse of Weakness* (*Abus de faiblesse*, 2013) is a unique contribution to Breillat's career. However, the film still functions as a Breillat feature – she develops familiar themes but approaches them via a radically different story than in prior work. As with my discussions of Reygadas and Breillat alongside one another, *Abuse* has little in common with the Mexican director's films. Nevertheless, with my brief discussion of the film, Breillat contributes yet another work on gender and power and adds age and illness to the narrative. The director demonstrates that the difficulties facing young girls and young women carry forward as women age; furthermore, the ill body in this latest film complicates the issue more so.

A Courageous Supplement

Breillat's recent film is her most poignant narrative about gender and sexuality or, in terms of discussed in the first chapter, sexual difference. However, unlike her earlier work, *Abuse of Weakness* does not contain a single scene of explicit sex. Breillat's ability to navigate themes of sexuality, gender, and power relations without resorting to representations of sexual acts perhaps marks the film as her greatest success (artistically,

not necessarily commercially). Instead of paralleling or complementing the violent and sexual plot lines of *Romance* or *Fat Girl*, films I explore in the second chapter, Breillat's newest work finds its thematic resemblances in her autofiction film (fictionalized autobiography) discussed at length in Chapter Three, *Sex is Comedy*.

As we know, *Sex is Comedy* fictionalizes Breillat's experience of making *Fat Girl*. It traces the heated relationship between Jeanne (Anne Parillaud) and her young and unnamed male lead (Grégoire Colin). Jeanne's varied attempts to equalize the gender and power dynamics on set not only unveils Breillat's directorial methods, but also functions as an example of the fraught difficulties creative women experience while collaborating with men on artistic endeavors. The result, as depicted in the film, is that the young male actor refuses to drop his ego, pride, and apparent invulnerability; luckily, not at the expense of the finished product. Thus the inherently challenging process of filmmaking is made all the more so when a woman takes the helm. While Douglas Keesey observes that the aggressive exchanges between Jeanne and the actor "denaturalizes the 'active male' and 'passive female' roles to show that they are indeed roles, with either sex able to play both parts, desiring and desired" (2009: 69), *Abuse* displays a more ambivalent and complex relationship than the one between director and actor because there is no object or goal that the protagonists struggle toward – the object of *Abuse* is not the process of making of a film, but the negotiation of illness, affection, and artistic integrity.

Before getting to the film itself it would be helpful to first make a brief biographical note. Breillat suffered a stroke in 2004. In 2007 she met Christophe Rocancourt and in the 18 months that followed, Rocancourt conned approximately €800,000 from Breillat. Finally, in 2012, the director charged Rocancourt with an "abuse of weakness" and the conman was sent to prison. *Abuse* is the fictionalized account of this

victimization. It depicts a filmmaker who has suffered a stroke, Maud Shainberg (Isabelle Huppert), and an ex-con who exploits her weakness, Vilko Piran (Kool Shen).

Prior to depicting the story of Maud and Vilko's relationship, a relationship built around the push and pull of dominance and submission, coercion and aid, the film begins with the event that rendered Maud physically weak. To a piercing score, the opening shot slowly tracks up a white blanket with the frail Huppert hidden underneath. When the camera comes to frame her in medium close-up, Maud is distraught, clearly in some sort of shock and pain; she slaps her right arm in a gesture that suggests she has become disassociated from it. She then telephones for help, and in a humorous exchange Breillat almost imperceptivity presents another disassociation, i.e., between the pains experienced by an individual and the inability of others to fully comprehend those sensations. Maud cries out to the emergency-line operator, "I need an ambulance. Half my body is dead," to which the person responds, "You're talking so you can't be dead." [102] This ontological discontinuity between persons establishes the affective and emotional tone for Maud's relationship with Vilko.

After a year of convalescence and rehab for her severe cerebral hemorrhage, late one night a drowsy Maud happens upon a TV talk-show. She watches Vilko answer questions about his new book on the years he spent in a Hong Kong "pokey" for conning the rich and poor out of $135 million. Vilko's "icy hangdog look" and "bitter pride"

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[102] Carel 2008: 42-43: "The core idea of phenomenology is pertinent [in the discussion of illness and intersubjectivity]. If healthcare practitioners devoted more time to understanding the experience of illness, much of the misunderstanding, bad communication and sense of alienation that patients report would be alleviated. Phenomenologically inspired medicine would become a more human science, where each term in the phrase illuminates the other. One way of developing such understanding is by enabling the medical practitioner to have first-hand experience of the patient's world[, e.g., by training them on devices that temporarily restrict breathing or mimic perceptual and motor impairment.] … Another phenomenological avenue uses Merleau-Ponty's holistic approach to personhood in nurse training in order to shift the focus away from disease and symptom alleviation to a more holistic view of the experience of illness."

appeal to Maud's sensibilities. She repeatedly observes how "fascinating" he is and at one point describes him as a "caveman," thus establishing Vilko as her inferior. This man, however, is precisely the type she needs for her next film. In her initial interview with Vilko, appropriately coloured by Breillat with the director seated on a white couch and the conman on a black one, Maud describes her next work as a love story with a bloody end, not unlike the one depicted by Breillat in *Perfect Love* (*Parfait amour*, 1996).[103] The caveman likes the ending and accepts the role. Once Maud seduces Vilko into becoming one of her "actors," a word Breillat uses to demarcate her ownership and possession of performers, Vilko turns the tables on Maud by blocking her usual directorial methods. Maud does not usually see her actors before shooting but Vilko states that she will see him often. His ensuing attention and modest affection over the months that follow as well as Maud's apparent sexual attraction to this brutish man – a man who frequently appears in his boxer shorts and without a shirt – produces certain kinds of pleasure for the debilitated filmmaker. Breillat mentions (von Hoeij 2013), "Perversely, what's interesting is that an abuse of weakness is, in a way, absolutely delightful while you are experiencing it. It's just that the final result is a real nightmare."

Although Vilko reveals his conning methods on the TV talk-show as well as to Maud during their first meeting, and he supposedly recognizes the differing levels of intelligence between himself and the director, the latter cannot stop herself from signing checks over to him because he "just asked." Maud's justification for her behaviour at the end of the film is slightly uninteresting, albeit honest. Instead, it is more provocative to suggest that Vilko exploits Maud's desire to feel as if in control of her future creative

[103] The film, never completed, was based on Breillat's novel *Bad Love* (2007). Vilko steals this book from Maud's bookshelf after their first meeting.

endeavour. For instance, he tries to return the first check because her funds are also a loan from the bank, and later, he places all responsibility on Maud to loan him €100,000 or he will again get sent to the pokey. With Vilko's feint that Maud has seduced him into becoming one of her "actors" – e.g., his frequent calls, flirtation, modest to severe verbal abuse, and reluctant aid – combined with Maud's belief that she remains in control, Breillat reveals that sexuality and desire are significant objects to navigate when a woman requires the obedience of a man (or men) to achieve her personal goals. Indeed, Vilko is never mistrusted or questioned about his frequent demands for money; Maud simply buys his lies so that her film could eventually be produced as she envisions it with Vilko in the lead. He thus exploits Maud's desire to create and the conman ends up getting the better of her. For Breillat, this is the unfortunate position women artists are forced to reckon with.

On the one hand, *Abuse* traces the difficulty of being both a woman and an auteur in contemporary times. Vilko's coercion is nothing like Jeanne's in *Sex is Comedy* – the latter uses the vulnerability of her performers, in frame, for productive ends. Vilko's abuse, if we want to make the parallel to filmmaking, is perhaps similar to the imagined and real fears we have regarding porn actresses – forced to perform for one man's profit and not in the creation of a work of art. On *Sex is Comedy* but similarly applicable to the director's latest work, Kathryn Ince concludes (2006: 163) that "Breillat has achieved a rare degree of reflexivity about the relationship of female sexuality to artistic creation (in this case, film directing)" and also "shows women's film directing to be a tussle and a struggle involving an altered sexual economy, a redistribution of men's and women's death drives that allows a female director's desire to be successfully sublimated in the creation of her film." Unlike Jeanne however, Maud's sexual desire is unsuccessfully

sublimated into her art, but in this space of reflexivity we find Breillat's sexual politics, her real-life experience of the unfinished work of feminism, and a critique of the dominant "sexual economy."

On the other hand, Maud is debilitated by the stroke. It is important to now remark on a heretofore unexplored theme of extreme cinema. As I explored in the introduction, critics and theorists have noted the explosion of extreme representations of violence, sexual violence, and sex in contemporary art cinema over the last two decades; however, extreme cinema is not limited to displays of sexualized flesh and blood alone. Some films have turned to another type of body in the throes of ecstatic states, namely, the ill or suffering body. Alternatively, Havi Carel (2008: 26), using the language of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, has named these embodied states "the malfunctioning body." Marina de Van's *In My Skin* (*Dans ma peau*, 2002), Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* (2011), Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012), and *Abuse*, among others, establish the aged, ill, or suffering body as one of many possible bodily comportments, although these depictions of the body are oftentimes uncomfortable spectacles to be sure. It is these films' discomforting narratives, styles, and excessive displays that therefore situate them within the bounds of extreme cinema. It seems worthwhile, then, to end my comments on *Abuse* with a brief account of its visual displeasures. The formal techniques of this film resonate with those explored by Breillat in her earlier films.

Figure C.1 *Abuse of Weakness* (Catherine Breillat, 2013)

Reygadas and Breillat frequently employ the long take. The long take intensifies what is transpiring onscreen, thus scenes of violence in *Fat Girl*, for example, become all the more jarring and unpleasurable to witness (Williams 2008: 280-282; Horeck 2010: 203-204). This technique also contributes to a sensuous experience of the profilmic event, a key device used in *Post Tenebras Lux*. Furthermore, the long take is testament to real time passing within the diegesis as well as at the level of spectators' lived time and, for Yvette Bíró (2006), the long take thus heightens spectators' sensuous engagement with the film. In *Abuse*, over 20 very long seconds, we watch Maud struggle to walk across a small street. Shortly thereafter Maud arrives at her home and attempts to remove her backpack full of groceries; instead of succeeding in this simple movement, she tumbles over and Breillat documents her incredibly trying process of getting up, lasting some two and a half minutes. Once a healthy, "transparent" embodied existence, "[i]llness is [instead] an abrupt, violent way of revealing the intimately bodily nature of our body" (Carel 2008: 27). Carel's observation is also evident in the visually uncomfortable scene

of Maud's second stroke, preceded by the excruciatingly long take of the fictional director attempting to open a package of cooked meat. After opening her package, Maud falls to the floor and convulses until the emergency operator is reached via her medical alert pendant, again, all accomplished in a single take.

While these scenes are shocking to be sure, we should not reduce the film to its shock-value or shock effects. Rather, Breillat deserves praise for the courageous act of representing herself with a great degree of verisimilitude and, as she says through Maud and in the interview featured on the Strand Releasing DVD, for not pretending that a full recovery is possible or that death is still years away. The director demonstrates that "illness is not local but global, not external but strikes at the heart of subjectivity" (Carel 2008: 29). Additionally, in the final shot of the film, as a teary-eyed Maud looks directly into the camera after pathetically recounting her story of victimization to her lawyer, friends, and family, it is undeniable that Breillat has challenged and shamed the real-life conman Rocancourt. Maud's brave statement on her hopes for filmmaking is also a statement from Breillat to her aggressor: "I've sunk like the Titanic, but if I ever resurface, I'll be like an atomic bomb." *Abuse of Weakness* is Breillat's triumphant return to filmmaking post-con as well as an act of vengeance against the man who had ruined her.

Abuse demonstrates Breillat's ability to change her style while also maintaining consistent themes. The film is perhaps the longest in terms of diegetic time. Due to the time of the narrative, there are more scenes and edits than we are used to in this auteur's work. Non-diegetic music also accompanies many of the scenes, again a filmic device rarely used by Breillat. In no way do these slight changes make a bid for popular consumption; instead, the changes are appropriate for the narrative and for the director's

vision. Several genres do resurface in *Abuse* but without the effect usually associated with them. First, Maud's plight is thoroughly melodramatic. The obviousness of Vilko's con is revealed even prior to the initial meeting. Vilko's feint on the TV talk-show that he has "served" his time for his crimes is clearly false and each encounter between the conman and the director reinforces the former's scheming interest in the latter. The film thus takes on a comedic aspect as Vilko's shifty eyes glance in Maud's direction each instance she signs a cheque. But this comedy is contrasted with the horror of the ill body – the long takes of Maud suffering offset the tone of comedic melodrama. And with *Abuse*'s perspective on Maud, the thrill of the con shown in many Hollywood films is completely foreclosed. There is nothing entertaining about Vilko's abuse of weakness. The film is in fact full of displeasures and these displeasures push us to examine our relationship to gender and power, age and illness, film and ontology.

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Appendix

Appendix One

Video Essay: “Mexico is Bleeding: The Films of Carlos Reygadas,” 2015:
https://www.vimeo.com/131807474