

Seeing Red: Blood images in American cinema, 1958-1969

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Abstract

This thesis makes a theoretical and methodological contribution to the study of film and (audio)visual media by developing conceptual tools to examine how images operate as material assemblages with expressive potentials. The study formulates how theoretical perspectives from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari can be put to work in an empirically grounded study of the production of images and their potentials for affecting viewers in specific social, cultural and political locations.

The study furthermore contributes to studies of film violence by mapping the shifting roles and performances of images of blood in American cinema from the 1950s through the 1960s. During this era, blood went from predominantly being used as a signifier, providing audiences with information regarding a film's characters and plot development, to taking on other, and more sensational, roles. These new blood images not only inform the audience about characters and plot-lines, but rather *do* something to the audience, evoking visceral responses and performing affective intensities. In order to examine what these images do, this thesis formulates the images of blood as assemblages to examine how blood operates in terms of affect in films such as *Blood Feast* (1963), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). The study shows how these and other films bring about very different affective potentials that intersect with social, cultural, and political dynamics.

To conceptualize images of blood as assemblages that perform and express affective intensities, connecting with social and discursive formations, the thesis combines the actor-network approach of Bruno Latour with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. These blood assemblages are themselves transformative and transient material constellations, performed through multitudes of relational factors. The study elaborates a methodology that traces how images are historically constituted and

operate in concrete material, economical, cultural and social settings. As such, this dissertation makes a unique theoretical and methodological contribution by focusing on the constitution and performance of affective potentials of images, as well as on how these potentials are actualized in encounters with audiences. In this regard, the study presents concepts and methodological approaches of wider relevance to media and communication and cultural studies.

Keywords:

Actor-network theory; affect theory; American motion picture history; blood imagery; cultural studies; Deleuze, Gilles; film studies; media violence; visual culture.

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Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
Prologue: The feast is on	1
Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Exploitations and Attractions in American Cinema: Entering the 1960s	42
Chapter 2: Seeing Red, Acting Dead: Blood and guts in the early gore films of Herschell Gordon Lewis	85
Chapter 3: Blood Assemblages	120
Chapter 4: Blood in the 1960s: <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>	149
Chapter 5: Blood and Chaos in <i>The Wild Bunch</i>	205
Conclusion: An End	254
References	262

Prologue: The feast is on

In a key scene from the 1959 movie *Rio Bravo*, the sheriff (John Wayne) and his deputy, 'Dude' (Dean Martin), chase a bandit who has just shot and killed a man. It is night time, so they don't have a clear view of the killer as he flees. Dude fires a shot after him but is unsure whether he has hit his target. The killer escapes into a nearby saloon that is frequented by his gang. Inside, Dude lines up the gang members patronizing the saloon but the killer is nowhere to be seen. Dude stands by the bar, being mocked by the bandits, when suddenly he notices something red dripping into a glass of beer on the counter. It's blood; someone hiding above the bar is bleeding. Dude quickly turns and fires his gun at a figure above the bar. The killer falls dead to the floor below. His blood gave him away.

In total, between 15 and 20 people are killed during *Rio Bravo*;¹ and with the exception of the incident described above, they are all killed with a single gunshot. These killings are clean; no blood is seen; no pain is expressed. The blood dripping into the beer in the saloon is not repulsive. Neither the characters in the film nor audience members watching the film are made to respond viscerally to the red fluid. Rather, the blood serves a specific function within the film's plot-line: it provides clues that connect cause and effect. It serves as a sign that ties previous incidents – an escaped killer hiding above the bar – to the next set of actions. Dude instantly realizes that the blood is coming from the wounded bandit hiding above him and then shoots him dead.

Let us next consider a scene from another movie: A woman enters a nondescript room, turns on the radio and starts undressing. The radio broadcasts an alert about a killer on the loose. The woman steps into the bathtub and relaxes in the water. A threatening shadow looms above her. She panics, and then is stabbed

¹ Since most of the killings take place during a chaotic gun battle towards the end of the movie, an exact number cannot be given.

repeatedly. We see the glaring eyes of the mad killer as he chops away at her body, tearing it apart and ripping out shreds of flesh. He stabs one of hers eye out, and proceeds to sever her leg, before leaving her dead in the bathtub – naked and dismembered. Next follows a cut to a shot of the figure of a sphinx against a bright blue backdrop. Letters in red emerge over the sphinx, spelling out the title, *Blood Feast*. The red letters start dripping, as if the title is oozing blood.

We are witnessing the opening sequence of the 1963 movie *Blood Feast* – a movie that presented blood and gore on screen in an unprecedented manner. Recognized as the first ever ‘splatter’ or ‘gore’ movie, *Blood Feast* is structured around a series of graphic scenes displaying women being chopped into pieces, ripped apart and flogged. Blood flows freely in all the scenes of slaughter.

The differences between *Rio Bravo* and *Blood Feast* are remarkable on many levels. However, my focus is on the use of blood in the two scenes described above, which I argue can be seen as indicative of a shift happening during the 1960s with regard to the use of blood as a visual element in American cinema. The examples from *Rio Bravo* and *Blood Feast* illustrate how one visual element, a red fluid, can serve fundamentally different functions within a motion picture. In *Rio Bravo* the blood answers questions like, “Was the killer hit?” and “Where is he?” The blood provides clues and drives the plot forward. Not so in *Blood Feast*. Here the blood does not provide any answers regarding what will happen next. In this film, the blood is mainly operating on a visceral level, addressing the viewer directly and evoking embodied responses.

Rio Bravo invites the viewer into a diegetic universe, where we interpret signs and connect the different elements in an unfolding plot of cause and effect. What we take from these signs is reinvested into the images. The blood may invoke a response from us, which encourages us to further engage in the film’s characters and plot. In *Blood Feast*, on the other hand, no such engagement is encouraged. In this

film blood and gore are put on display, but not necessarily integrated into the narrative of the film. As we take in the gory sights we are not invited to empathize or become more involved in the film's characters. Likewise, the excessive gore is not something that connects elements of the film's plot. It is displayed as if for our eyes only, as a spectacle.

In terms of the film's plot, blood and gore do not have a clearly defined role in *Blood Feast*. The story unfolds regardless of how the slaughters are portrayed. The blood in *Blood Feast* is a surplus, exceeding its narrative function. In other words, the blood does not appear to have any signifying or symbolic value. The blood here operates in a performative role. It reaches out towards the audience in an exhibitionistic manner. The viewers are affected, and reactions unfold. The blood is primarily something to be experienced and sensed, rather than interpreted. These aspects of sensation and affect are what *Blood Feast* brings to the forefront, in an excessive manner.

My argument is that both blood itself, when used as a visual element in a film, and the effects of blood images in their encounters with viewers, can be understood as a process and a multiplicity. Blood makes a difference when it appears in a film. These differences cannot be traced back to any single or uniform characteristic of blood but are rather distributed across transient sets of relations that in various combinations perform the effects of blood.

This dissertation will explore how these processes are enacted across a series of American films from the late 1950s to the end of the 1960s – an era marking a fundamental shift in the portrayal of violence in cinema. This study maps out a trajectory that delineates how these new blood images came into being. Furthermore, I seek to analyze how these processes and transient sets of relations carry differing potentials with regard to how blood images connect with, and affect, their audiences.

Introduction

This dissertation starts with the observation that blood seemingly all of a sudden became much more visible in American cinema in the 1960s (Horsley, 1999; Prince, 2000a, 2003; Slocum, 2001; 2004; Sobchack, 2000). During the era of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, riots and student demonstrations, changes happened also in American motion pictures. Among these changes was the sudden prominence of blood.

Landmark movies of the 1960s include *Psycho* (1960), which constituted “new ways of seeing, and new ways of feeling, films” (Williams, 2000, p. 351), putting thrills and visceral sensations to the forefront, best exemplified by the well-known shower scene where Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) is killed with a knife and blood shown running down the drain. A few years later, more explicit bloodshed was presented in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), a film that “choreographed a dance out of blood and death” (Sobchack, 2000, p. 114) and that arguably introduced violence as a “thing-in-itself” in Hollywood cinema (Prince, 2003, p. 30). Towards the end of the decade the ultraviolent western, *The Wild Bunch* (1969), was released, a film whose unprecedented bloodletting proved immensely influential and arguably set the standard for depictions of violence in later American cinema (Cook, 1999; Prince, 1998; 1999a).

This turn towards more explicit bloodshed was even more prominent in productions outside of the Hollywood circuit. In the late 1950s more sensational images of blood and gore could be found in low-budget movies, influenced by the success of the British Hammer horror films (McCarty, 1984; McKay, 2007). This trend escalated in the 1960s and in 1963 the independent micro-budget production *Blood Feast* was released. This film is recognized as the first ever “splatter movie” (Crane, 2004; McCarty, 1984; Dixon, 2010, p. 124), the horror sub-genre whose

audience appeal is characterized by the explicit presentation of gore images (McCarty, 1984).

This eruption of graphic bloodshed in the 1960s was the culmination of a long development in the depiction of violence in American cinema (Cook, 1999; Prince, 2003). However, as film scholar Vivian Sobchack (2000) recalls, even though violence and death have always been part of the movie-going experience, blood was previously absent. Earlier movies could be brutal and violent deeds did occur but these acts were portrayed without emphasizing the explicit impact of violence on the human body (Prince, 2003). When blood did appear, its main role was to provide information, not to evoke visceral reactions in audiences. In films like *Rio Bravo*, blood was not presented as horrific or repulsive, nor was it presented as highly stylized and aesthetically affective. But then in the 1960s, seemingly all of a sudden, blood came to take on these qualities. This shift wasn't simply a matter of blood being made more visible; the blood impacted audiences differently. It did something to you, in ways that differed from the earlier displays of blood.

This shift in the appearance and portrayal of blood in American cinema is the topic of my dissertation. I will explore what happened, how it happened, and how these new blood images operate – within the films, and towards their viewers. Starting from the early emergence of sensational blood images in films such as *The Return of Dracula* (1958) and *The Tingler* (1959), the thesis will follow a trail of blood in American cinema, culminating with *The Wild Bunch* in 1969.

The study thus covers the interlude between what is frequently labeled the era of “classical Hollywood cinema,” which came to an end during the 1950s (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985; Schatz, 1988), and the “new Hollywood” emerging in the late 1960s (Biskind, 1998; Harris, 2008; Hillier, 1992; King, 2002; Pye & Myles, 1979). Within the classical Hollywood era there was little blood present, as in *Rio Bravo*. “New Hollywood” movies, on the other hand, frequently display

graphic bloodshed, as exemplified by films such as *The Godfather* (1972) and *Taxi Driver* (1976). As I will argue, the 1960s was a period when the use of blood in American motion pictures underwent drastic changes, moving in several directions and with different potentials for affecting viewers and audiences.

Although acknowledging that this shift can be seen as part of wide-ranging social and cultural developments, my focus is on the cinema, not on American society at large. The turn to violence and intensified antagonisms in American society in terms of culture and politics in the 1960s have already been widely written about (e.g., Gitlin, 1987; O'Neill, 1971; Perlstein, 2008), and likewise the impact of the Vietnam War on American society (e.g., Wiest, Barbier & Robins, 2010). My aim in this dissertation is more local and specific, focusing upon the medium of cinema. I will thus not explicitly address developments in other cultural or aesthetic forms, such as, for example, contemporary art, which also saw an increased focus on blood from the 1960s onwards (see e.g., Weiermair, 2001), apart from when this is relevant for my own topic. While I recognize that the on-screen appearance of blood is part of a more general trend, I argue against seeing this appearance merely as a reflection of changes in society at large. Clearly, the production of motion pictures is connected with other aspects of society in a myriad ways, and likewise movies are always encountered by viewers and audiences that are historically, socially, and culturally situated. As such, society and motion pictures can never be seen as separate realms but are always closely entangled. However, movies do not simply reflect and represent what is already there, present in the existing culture. Movies are also productive, quite literally introducing new images into the world. Rather than approaching motion pictures as reflections of society at large I will focus on images of blood in American motion pictures from the late 1950s to the end of the 1960s, and from this starting point where pertinent to my argument, trace specific points of connection and intersection between cinema and society, be it in terms of

economics, politics, cultural tendencies, or whatever else. These connections will be made throughout the text, in concrete and specific terms.

Theme and research question

This dissertation takes the form of an exploratory inquiry. As illustrated above, a pronounced shift took place in American cinema in the 1960s with regards to the portrayals and stylistic features of blood. Earlier films, like *Rio Bravo*, used blood infrequently and then mainly as a provider of information. This can be contrasted with a number of later films, such as *Blood Feast* or *Bonnie and Clyde*, where blood is displayed frequently and in excess of its narrative function. Starting from this observation, the questions I will address are as follows: *What happened? How did this happen? What are the potentials of these new blood images, and how do they differ from earlier blood images as well as from each other?*

To address these questions I combine a historical exploration with a detailed study of films that have proved innovative or influential in their use of blood as a visual element. I outline transformations in the American film industry during the 1950s that made way for the incorporation of sensational blood images in low-budget films like *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler* towards the end of the decade (Chapter One). I will further focus on how the field of independent exploitation movies turned towards gore and graphic bloodshed in the 1960s, starting with *Blood Feast* in 1963 (Chapter Two). Changes in mainstream Hollywood productions during the 1960s were even more influential on later displays of blood in American and international cinema. I will thus trace the development of blood imagery in Hollywood cinema of the 1960s, from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* in 1960 to the equally successful and influential *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 (Chapter Four). Finally, I will discuss in greater depth 1969's *The Wild Bunch*, the film that perhaps

more than any other film shaped subsequent portrayals of violence in motion pictures (Chapter Five).

As I outline the transformations in how blood has been portrayed in American motion pictures from the late 1950s until the end of the 1960s, I will argue that blood took on radically new roles and functions during this period of time. Earlier, within the era of classical Hollywood cinema, blood predominantly operated as a signifier, contributing to a film's plot and character development. This role and function has never disappeared, and is still in operation today. However, from the late 1950s onwards, blood increasingly came to take on new roles on the screen, with different stylistic features and modes of audience address. My argument is that these new blood images no longer operate within strictly defined structures of signification, integrated within a film's narrative. Rather, blood now to a greater extent comes to operate in terms of affect, appealing to and encountering viewers and audiences in ways not accounted for in narratological, semiotic, or discursive terms. My study will map the conditions making these new formations possible, and will trace the use of blood images across a number of films. The films discussed in this study exemplify very different stylistic features in their portrayals of blood. I will argue that in these films, blood does not operate as a contained and stable unit but, following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), can be instead characterized as an assemblage, constituted through ever-shifting sets of relations with varying expressive potentials.

The study is driven by several theoretical and methodological concerns, and in the remainder of this introduction I will position my study theoretically and then provide an overview of my methodological approach before finally presenting a summary of the chapters in the dissertation.

Theoretical positioning

In this section I introduce the theoretical perspectives central to my study, and situate my approach more broadly in relation to cultural studies and theories of film and visual culture. First, though, I will outline how my thesis relates to studies of violence in film and argue for an approach that analyzes violence not so much in terms of representation but rather as a capacity or potential of cinematic images. This leads to a discussion of the concept of affect and how affect is central to my study. I will explain how this approach to the study of film is aligned with a more general concern in studies of visual culture, where scholars have increasingly supplanted questions of meaning and representation based on models of language with questions concerning what images do and what images want (Mitchell, 1994; 2005). I will then present Gilles Deleuze's theory of cinema and argue that this approach, building upon the philosophy of Henri Bergson, is particularly well-suited to the study of how film operates in a way that differs from language.

As mentioned above, this dissertation starts out from the observation that in the 1960s American films became more violent, and bloodier (Horsley, 1999; Prince, 2000a; 2003; Slocum, 2001; 2004; Sobchack, 2000). Film violence itself became an area of academic scrutiny from the 1960s onwards (Slocum, 2004). Academic studies on film violence can broadly be divided into two camps, namely social scientific studies of the *effects* of movie violence and more interpretive approaches that seek to reach an understanding of the *meaning* of movie violence. The social scientific approach seeks to study the causal relations between film violence and real-life violence, and to detect the formal characteristics of film violence that makes it prone to induce real-life violence (see e.g., Berkowitz, 2000; Felson, 2000). This model characterizes the work of film scholars such as Stephen Prince (1998; 2000b; 2003) whom I critically discuss later in the thesis (see Chapter Five). The various interpretive approaches are to a larger extent focused on the content of films and the

meaning of film violence and how it is representative or indicative of other social phenomena, be it in terms of psychology, politics, gender, class, ethnicity, culture, or something else. Film violence here is approached more as social and cultural commentary rather than as a possible cause of real-life violence. This approach can be found both in general approaches to film violence as a phenomenon (e.g., Slocum, 2001; 2004) and in a number of studies dealing with specific films, themes, or genres (e.g., Clover, 1992; Wood, 1984).

My study differs from both of these approaches. My focus is on affect and potentials, not on questions of effects or meanings. What the social scientific and the interpretive approach have in common is that they both approach violence as representation (Abel, 2007). Violence is something that is represented in images, and it is as a representation that violence has effects or produces meanings. Unlike these perspectives, my position is that images are fundamentally performative, and acts *as* violence, rather than being a representation *of* violence.

My use of the term “performative” in this dissertation is indebted to notions of performativity in speech act theory and linguistics (see e.g., Austin, 1965; Benveniste, 1971), as these ideas have been reframed in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In their chapter on linguistics in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 75-110) draw upon these notions of performativity in order to arrive at their concept of the assemblage, which accounts for dynamic constellations of content and expression. As I will explain in greater detail below, the concept of the assemblage in this study informs my approach to cinematic images.²

With my focus on the performative aspects of violent images, I follow Marco Abel in his agenda to explore the violent reality of images – that is, images *as* violence – and the effects provoked by these images (Abel, 2007, p. x, pp. 10-11).

² For further discussions on performativity, in a non-Deleuzian framework, see e.g., Butler (1990; 1993), Sedgwick (2003).

Rather than starting with an assumption that blood somehow represents violence, I will seek to explore the specific connections between images of blood and violence and how images of blood can operate in terms of violence. To study these violent potentials, I will explore how images operate in terms of affect and, as I will argue in Chapter Five, how an affect analysis reveals how images at an ontological level are by themselves violent.

In this study I approach affect as a form of material residual that registers experientially (although not necessarily consciously) on the body and affects actions, thoughts, perceptions, sensations, and so on. By material residual I mean that affect has a real ontological status yet cannot be explained solely by social, discursive, or cognitive factors. My approach thus differs from those who would approach affect as an *effect*, as a product of the circulation of signs or social or discursive structures (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Hemmings, 2005). I here join Brian Massumi (2002) who, following Deleuze, understands affects as a-subjective ontological intensities, which act upon, but do not originate from, the body. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari describe affects as "*nonhuman becomings of man*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169, emphasis in original). In this perspective, affect is not residing within any biological organism but is rather a fundamentally relational matter. In this regard, my perspective is different from theories that would see affect as a biologically innate system (e.g., Sedgwick & Frank, 1995; Tomkins, 1995).

Massumi further distinguishes between affect and emotion, which are both described in terms of intensity but whereas affect is impersonal and unqualified, emotion is subjective and qualified and formed into recognizable narratives of function and meaning (Massumi, 2002, pp. 27-28). Affects are singular, and cannot be mapped onto any system of classification. Only as affects turn into emotions can they be categorized and made familiar. For Deleuze and Massumi the subject as well as the organism itself is always secondary to its affects and desires (see e.g.,

Deleuze, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Massumi, 2002).³ Needs and wants are neither merely social nor merely biological, but rather a product of the inscription of desire into the social. In practice, the social and the material thus become inseparable. Our experiences are always social, but never merely social. Rather, affect introduces new potentials into the social formations where our lives are lived.

Affects in this perspective reside neither in images nor in viewers, but are rather intensities that come into play each time an image is perceived and a relation is made between image and viewer. I approach affect in terms of Deleuze's concept of the virtual, where the virtual is that which is real, yet not actual. Or as Deleuze puts it, "The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 208). The virtual is that which can potentially be actualized. Actualization, for Deleuze, is contrasted with realization. Realization is the making real of already existing possibilities, and does thus not bring anything new into the world. Actualizations of the virtual, on the other hand, operate according to potentials, not possibilities. Unlike the possible, the virtual is not already defined but rather brings about potentials for different realities, taking unforeseen and unknown directions. Hence it is "difference that is primary in the process of actualization" (Deleuze, 1991a, p. 97).

My focus is on the affective potentials of cinematic images, and how these potentials are actualized in encounters⁴ with situated viewers. Encounters with cinematic images bring about affective potentials that in principle can be actualized in an unlimited number of different ways. Affect, as I see it, comes into play each time a relation is made, to a greater or lesser extent, in one form or the other. Affect, in this sense, is always already there. It operates in a multitude of different

³ For a further discussion of Deleuze's philosophy of vitality and its relation to biological models, see Ansell Pearson (1999).

⁴ For a discussion on Deleuze's notion of *encounters*, and how encounters with art objects operate as both ruptures and affirmations, see O'Sullivan (2006).

ways, intoning and modulating variations in a wide spectre of practices. This does not mean that affect always makes a (perceptible) difference but it carries a (virtual) potential for doing so. Hence my interest is in affect as a non-discursive and a-social difference engine, that always operates entangled with discourses and social formations and which in practice can never be seen separate from these elements. As argued by Elspeth Probyn, it makes little sense to talk about affect outside of its specific effects (Probyn, 2010, p. 74). Affect is, perhaps more than anything else, characterized by its productivity; it makes things happen. Still, in practice, we have no direct access to its operations, as affect (for us) is always immediately socialized, without ever being fully captured. Paraphrasing Massumi, Patricia T. Clough makes the point that “[a]ffect and consciousness are in a virtual-actual circuit, which defines affect as potential and emergent” (Clough, 2010, p.209). Clough further argues that the virtuality of affect provides it with openness and excess which resists being fully captured by consciousness, some residuals will always remain. Affect is thus a slippery and evasive phenomenon. We cannot capture affect, only its effects, and these effects never appear as purely affective.

In a sense, this is where metaphysics and empirically grounded studies of affect part ways. Steven D. Brown and Ian Tucker make the argument that “[i]f, with Massumi, we define affect as in essence beyond ordinary experience (this again, a key tenet of Bergsonism), then we are in effect pushing the motive core of affective phenomenon outside of analysis” (Brown & Tucker, 2010, p. 238). Brown and Tucker thus call for the creation of what they label “intermediary concepts” in order to “articulate the ‘middle space’ of affective relations” and that “attempt to express the specific conditions of a given experience rather than general conditions” (Brown & Tucker, 2010, p. 242).⁵ The analytic move Brown and Tucker advocate is hence

⁵ Felix Guattari, in his characteristic idiosyncratic prose, argues that “[t]he human sciences, especially psychoanalysis, have for too long accustomed us to think of affect in terms of an

explicitly different from the philosophical approach, exemplified by, for instance, Brian Massumi, that points towards affect as uncontainable experiences beyond subjectivity. The singularity of affect makes each affective event unique but still, affects generate effects that form patterns. What we have are affective traces: of sensations, experiences, emotions, visceral responses, and so on. These phenomena cannot easily be operationalized and recorded as empirical data. Any empirical study of affect thus raises methodological challenges. But as Brown and Tucker argue, we can still “attempt to express the specific conditions of a given experience” as well as strive to give a comprehensive expression or description of that experience itself. Such expressions or descriptions will be at best partial, and will often encounter resistance towards categorizations or even linguistic terms at all. But again, this is a challenge, not an insurmountable obstacle.

A study of affect calls for an empiricism of movement and change, of systems in motion, while tracing and mapping relations and unfolding processes. Affect cannot be ‘read’ like a ‘text,’ it is not something which appears as the product of the circulation of signs or that can be detected as the outcome of solidified and segmented hegemonic or ideological power relations. Affect cannot be seen as a product or an effect of another, and determining, system of power, signification or social structures. The operations of affect relate to, connect with, influence, and are influenced by, such other systems of circulation but affect can never be contained within, or seen as resulting from, such systems. My focus on affect involves locating ‘other potentials’ from the operations of concrete cinematic images, and how these potentials become actualized and intersect with other social and material forces, artifacts and processes. These are empirical questions, focusing on how various

elementary entity. But there also exists complex affects, inaugural of irreversible diachronic ruptures that would have to be called: the Christic affect, the Debussy affect, the Leninist affect” (Guattari, 1996, p. 165). What Guattari here argues can be taken as a call for adding complexities to a study of affect, and to seek out their historical and contextual specificity.

elements are constituted within and in-between specific images, and, in continuation of this, on how these images operate in relation to, and intersect with, other ongoing processes.

My analysis is striving to capture the experiential aspects of films and images. Rather than seeking to detect what films and images mean, my approach is to seek a description of the experience of watching these films. The question is thus not so much what images say but rather what they do or want (Mitchell, 2005), how they can potentially affect their viewers and audiences. Echoing Steven Shaviro, I take the position that my approach

is 'personal' in the sense that it foregrounds visceral, affective responses to film, in sharp contrast to most critics' exclusive concern with issues of form, meaning, and ideology. Film is a vivid medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame. I try to evoke these prereflective responses in my own discussions of various movies (Shaviro, 1993, p. viii).

Such an approach is less radical today than when Shaviro made this statement nearly twenty years ago but it is still far from common fare, or even commonly accepted. A number of publications have opened the way for focusing upon experiential dimensions of movie-watching, including visceral and affective responses (e.g., Abel, 2007; Beugnet, 2007; Gormley, 2005; Kennedy, 2000; Marks, 2000; Pisters, 2003; Powell, 2005; Shaviro, 1993; 2010),⁶ but these do not constitute the mainstream in contemporary film theory, which is still predominantly occupied with "issues of form, meaning, and ideology."

My project can thus be located within what Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams identify as a recent tendency in film studies to pay "attention to the sensory

⁶ Besides these Deleuze-oriented studies, this tendency can also be found in studies operating within other theoretical paradigms, such as psychoanalysis (e.g., Affron, 1982; Williams, 1991; 1999), phenomenology (e.g., Sobchack, 1992; 2004), or cognitivism (e.g., Grodal 1997; 2009; Plantinga & Smith, 1999; Plantinga, 2009; Tan, 1996).

experience of the cinematic mass medium ... and the need to take account of movie-going as a concrete, physical experience with distinctive, and historically changing, sensory appeal" (Gledhill & Williams, 2000, p. 2). This recent focus stands in opposition to earlier paradigms in film theory, which, according to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2000) since the 1970s have predominantly been concerned with questions related to meaning. Nowell-Smith questions the narrow focus on meaning characteristic of both film studies' turn towards Saussurean semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis in the 1970s and the turn towards narratological and cognitivist models in the 1980s. While such approaches, each in their own way, can address and answer questions of meaning, other, and at times more pertinent, questions are left aside. As Nowell-Smith states,

Films mean. But they do not just mean. Because they can be described with the aid of language we can be led to think that description can substitute for the film. This is the perennial temptation of what I have called the linguistic analogy. But films also work in less describable ways. They work as painting or music do, partly through meaning but partly in other ways; partly in ways that have linguistic equivalents and partly in ways that do not (Nowell-Smith, 2000, p. 16).

This orientation in film studies can more generally be located in the aftermath of what art historian W. J. T. Mitchell labels as the "pictorial turn," which he describes as

not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence': it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding,

interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality (Mitchell, 1994, p. 16).

Mitchell here makes an argument for an *expansion* of studies on images, pictures and visual objects. Visual experiences are complex and multifaceted and cannot be fully explained through any "textual" model. Rather than seeking to distill some sense of meaning, ideology, or formal structure from an image or picture, this perspective advocates to *fold in* other factors, that all contribute to the experience of encountering a picture or an image.

Despite his focus on the "nonverbalizable surplus in the image" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 344n13), Mitchell does not claim that language is irrelevant for the study of the visual.⁷ Rather, Mitchell's interest lies in cases where text and image appear together. He claims that the key question raised by such image-text relations is not what difference (or similarity) there might be between the words and the images but rather what difference these differences (and similarities) make (Mitchell, 1994, p. 91). Mitchell's concern is thus with the relation and the tension between text and image. He stresses the futility of attempts to generate pure images, independent of any linguistic reference. Indeed, according to Mitchell all media are mixed media, "combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 95). Or as Mitchell later states, "There are no visual media. All media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign types" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 343). He rejects the possibility of pure visual expressions or of meaningful content without any verbal support. But again, pictures cannot be

⁷ Mitchell (1994, pp. 71-72) here follows the distinction Gilles Deleuze (1988) made in his commentary on Michel Foucault, where Deleuze distinguished between two elements in Foucault's thought, namely the visible and the utterable. For another text in visual culture and media studies which explicitly draws upon this distinction made by Deleuze, see Rodowick (2001).

reduced to words. Neither the visual nor the textual can exist in pure forms;⁸ even the 'purest' visual representations incorporate textuality, and likewise all written text is visually presented (Mitchell, 1994, p. 95). What is most important, according to Mitchell, is not to compare image and text but rather to explore the relations between image and text, between the visual and the verbal (Mitchell, 1994, p. 89).

Cinema is a medium that par excellence combines "different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 95). Films take part in constructing (discursive) meanings but this is not all they do. Rather, they are engaged in numerous other productive activities as well, engaging audiences in multi-sensory, physical experiences in a multitude of historically, socially and culturally located settings. These other aspects and activities evoked by and through the multifaceted ways viewers engage with films, do not operate completely apart from the meanings films partake in producing. The emotions and visceral responses evoked by film experiences are closely interlinked with the meanings produced. However, the one cannot be fully captured or contained within the other. Films tell us, and they shake us. They provide meanings and laughs, stories and screams, make us think and make us feel. My argument is thus that something needs to be *added to* the existing paradigms for the study of films and visual images. A focus on meaning or formal qualities alone will not do the job. While a formal, semiotic or discursive approach might well account for the way blood functions in a film like *Rio Bravo*, an understanding of the operations of blood becomes more complex when we look to films such as *Blood Feast* or *Bonnie and Clyde*. What seems most pertinent about the blood in these films is not the meanings it signifies. In these films, blood appears to do something else. The question then becomes how to explore and analyze this 'something else.'

⁸ Michel Foucault explicitly discusses this irreducibility of visual images to linguistic signs in his essay on Rene Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* (also known as *This is not a pipe*) (Foucault, 1998).

I will here turn to Deleuze's theories and concepts on cinema, which can be seen as attempts at getting a handle on how cinematic images operate in ways not contained or captured in the same manner proposed by structuralist models of language.⁹ He contrasts a linguistically inspired semiology with the pure semiotics of cinema which he describes as "a composition of images and of signs, that is, a pre-verbal intelligible content" (Deleuze, 1986, p. ix). In this perspective, cinematic images do not represent reality; rather they are a form of reality. Deleuze's theory of images follows from the philosophy of Henri Bergson – especially the first chapter of Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1988), originally published in 1896. In Bergson's philosophy, the concept of "images" replaces the distinction between subject and object. Matter, according to Bergson, "is an aggregate of 'images'" (Bergson, 1988, p. 9; p. 22). By image Bergson refers to "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*" (Bergson, 1988, p. 9, emphasis in original). Images are matter, yet they are also at the same time perceptions. What Bergson labels as matter is an aggregate of images external to the body, while perceptions are "these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body" (Bergson, 1988, p. 22, emphasis omitted). Perception is then a process that concerns the relations between the image system of matter and the image system of the body. The external images precede the perception, which again precede the actions of the body (Bergson, 1988, p. 47).

The perceiving and acting subject is itself a result of the external images and the processes of perception. In his interpretation, Deleuze (1986; 1989) draws

⁹ Gregory Flaxman locates Deleuze's cinema books within a French "intellectual climate that had begun to veer away from structuralist and psychoanalytic models that still dominated discourse in England and the United States" (Flaxman, 2000, pp. 1-2). Flaxman here traces a line that runs from Deleuze's earlier writings, especially *Anti-Oedipus* (co-authored with Felix Guattari), first published in France in 1972, through film critics such as Serge Daney, Pascal Bonitzer and Jean-Louis Schefer, leading up to the publication of Deleuze's cinema books in the mid-1980s (Flaxman, 2000, pp. 1-2; also see pp. 47-48n6).

Bergson's understanding of the subject as a product of the external images and the process of perception to its extreme consequence; the subject itself is just a by-product of the image-relations, not its central location or origin. Deleuze states that consciousness is an outcome of these image-relations. Thus, there is no central location where images are stored, managed and reproduced. Rather, consciousness itself is a relational product, with no specific location.¹⁰

According to Bergson, the difference between the images is of degree, not of kind (Bergson, 1988, p. 37). The external image and the perceived image correspond to each other but the perceived image is always less than the external image. Perception is thus a process of subtraction. In practice, perception is never pure but is always joined by memory. While the concern of perception is the present, memory concerns the past. As Bergson states, "if there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place" (Bergson, 1988, pp. 65-66). As these memory images are recollected they may complete, enrich, cover up, or submerge the images perceived in the present. Perception involves a co-mingling of images presently perceived with images recollected from memory. This brings some sense of structure and familiarity to our experiences, while at the same time making possible perceptions that divert from the external images as these exist in the present. In this process, the "relatively invariable" images of the universe become "infinitely variable in perception" (Bergson, 1988, p. 25).

¹⁰ Deleuze's thought here takes a materialist direction, which separates him from the more subjectivist elements in Bergson's thought that became more prominent in the phenomenological understanding of Bergson (see e.g., Sobchack 1992; 2004). See Guerlac (2006, pp. 176-187) for a discussion of Deleuze's eradication of 'subjectivist' elements in Bergson's philosophy.

In his cinema books Deleuze sought to apply Bergson's general theory of images to the field of cinematic images.¹¹ Cinematic images connect with the body of the viewer and produce immediate effects and reactions – be it in terms of perceptions, actions, affections, or thoughts – without being mediated through language. Cinema “consists of movements and thought-processes,” as well as of “points of view on these movements and processes” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 262). A film is an image system operating according to its own logic, and as it is being perceived this image system enters relations to the image system of the viewer.¹²

Different cinematic images can be classified, and Deleuze elaborates a complex taxonomy of images and signs. Deleuze's two main categories are given by the sub-titles of his volumes on cinema, “the movement-image” (Deleuze, 1986) and “the time-image” (Deleuze, 1989). Movement-images follow a logic of cause-and-effect and link images together in a narrative where each image acts and reacts to other images. The three main varieties of the movement-image are perception-images, affection-images, and action-images: movements of perception, movements of affection, and movements of action. These images appear in combinations, and films can be classified according to which type of image that is dominant (Deleuze, 1986, p. 70). Movement-images can only indirectly address time, through montage. This is contrasted with the time-image, which addresses time itself, without being subordinated to a logic of causality (Deleuze, 1989).

¹¹ See chapter 4 of *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Deleuze, 1986) for Deleuze's presentation of Bergson's theory of images.

¹² Along similar lines, in his book on Leibniz and the concept of the fold, Deleuze presents a more general theory of perception and the relation between the body and the world. Every singular monad, with a material body, expresses the entire world it exists within. The world does not exist outside the monads but is rather folded into the monads – through perceptions (Deleuze, 1993, p. 86). The same world is included in all monads, yet, at the same time, each monad actualizes the world differently. What one monad perceives is thus different from what is perceived by the next. The differential relations constituting each monad will impact which perceptions that play a role for this singular monad (Deleuze, 1993, p. 90). Perception is thus a differentiating process where each actualization brings about new variations.

Deleuze's own agenda in his cinema books is explicitly philosophical. He explores cinema's capacity for producing images of thought and creation. As argued by Andras Balint Kovacs, Deleuze's historical account of the evolution of cinema and cinematic images is a teleological one. His "cinema books are by definition written from the point of view of the modern" (Kovacs, 2000, p. 156, emphasis omitted). What Deleuze (1986, p. 206) labels as "the soul of the cinema" is its capacity for furthering thought, to move beyond a cinema of the movement-image towards a cinema of the time-image. This cinema provides mental images that are not limited by the sensory-motor schema; rather, the images produced are virtual, they have yet to be made actual. A cinema of the time-image is a cinema of innovation, a cinema that explores potentialities and opens vistas for new thoughts and ideas.¹³ However, as argued by Sean Cubitt (2004), Deleuze tends to fetishize the time-image, turning it into a general paradigm for philosophical art cinema. For Deleuze, the time-image, as a formal style, becomes equated with a capacity for generating innovative images of thought. As Cubitt argues, there is nothing intrinsic to the time-image making it "available only to an artistic or philosophical cinema" (Cubitt, 2004, p. 360). Like all formal stylistic features, the time-image can enter an unlimited number of different relations and combinations, being utilized for a wide array of different ends. Formal analysis alone cannot determine how an image will operate when entering relations with concrete audiences. Hence, I argue that Deleuze too readily slips into a binarism where the virtual time-image is opposed to the actual movement-image (Deleuze, 1989, p. 41). Deleuze contrasts the creativity and emergence of the time-image with the sensory-motor model of the movement-image, where perceptions, affections and actions are already actualized in the

¹³ Hence, Deleuze can at times sound like an arch-modernist, with statements such as: "What the artist is, is *creator of truth*, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created. There is no other truth than the creation of the New" (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 146-147, emphasis in original).

cinematic images. Hence, potentials for differentiation through other means than the capacity of images to further the creation of new thoughts are of less central concern to Deleuze.

Deleuze himself only addresses one side of the equation, namely the cinematic images, and the potentials they bring about. He is less concerned with the processes of actualization that runs from cinematic to embodied images, and how these processes affect concrete viewers. Thus, as pointed out by Jill Bennett in relation to performance art, it is crucial to take up "the question Deleuze is less concerned with," namely "how precisely sensation is encountered by the viewer" (Bennett, 2005, p. 41). As Ian Buchanan further argues, Deleuze's quite narrow philosophical focus on the functions of the filmic images comes with a price, namely the "exclusion of questions to do with audience reception, technical development, industrial and commercial process" (Buchanan, 2008, p. 4). These are empirical and historical questions, which involve mapping the concrete productions and operations of cinematic images as these unfold and interact with their audiences as commercial products. Unlike Deleuze's philosophical agenda, my aim in this study is to trace the historical constitution of cinematic blood images, and to explore how these images operate in concrete settings and in encounters with situated viewers and audiences. Rather than making any categorical distinction between virtual and actual images, my position is that all images operate in virtual-actual circuits. I study images as assemblages that perform and express affective intensities, connecting with social and discursive strata. These assemblages are themselves transformative and transient material constellations, performed through multitudes of relational factors.

The concept of assemblage is here taken from Deleuze's work with Guattari, and they draw the following conclusions on the nature of assemblages:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88, emphasis in original).

Assemblages are both material and expressive¹⁴. They are comprised of relations between bodies (material artifacts), and between the movements of these bodies, as well as the interrelationships between bodies and movements. These relations of artifacts and movements are expressive, and what is being expressed cannot be traced back to one individual point of origin but is rather always collective. At the same time, these assemblages are never solidified or stabilized; rather, they are fields of forces moving in different directions, some tearing apart, others bringing together.

Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 503-504) distinguish assemblages from strata – solidified and patterned sets of expressive and material relations, or in their own words, “coded milieus and formed substances” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 502). Like strata, assemblages are territorial but unlike the strata they are transformative (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 503-504). Although

¹⁴ Deleuze’s concept of expression is derived from his reading of Spinoza (Deleuze, 1992). For Spinoza, God is a “Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence” (Spinoza, 2001, p. 3). As Deleuze explains, expression is a triad of substance, attributes and essence, where “[s]ubstance expresses itself, attributes are expressions, and essence is expressed” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 27). We can here see one of the spurs of Deleuze and Guattari’s magic formula “PLURALISM = MONISM” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 20-21, emphasis in original). The world is on the one hand an undifferentiated substance, expressing its essence. At the same time, each expression (attribute) is unique and singular. Expressions are as such eternally new variations of substance, always appearing in new attributes. Hence, while it is one and the same substance (God) that is being expressed, each expression will always be different from the next. Expressions are as such productive, rather than representative, as each expressed essence is a different expression (attribute) of substance.

assemblages are localized, they are never stable; rather, they constantly change and they enact change. Assemblages are always singular and cannot be classified into any ontological categories (de Landa, 2006, p. 28). As such, the internal relations comprising the assemblage are constantly rearranged, and at the same time, the assemblage constantly enters relations with other acts and artifacts, which again are being affected through these relations.¹⁵

Methodological challenges and approaches

My focus in this dissertation is on blood images as one particular form of cinematic images. To approach blood images as assemblages, the next question to be answered is how such assemblages can be studied. Before discussing the specifics of blood images, it is first necessary to formulate how Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concept of assemblages can be approached empirically. I will here turn to Bruno Latour, and his version of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a methodological toolbox well-suited to deal with such fluid networks of heterogeneous relations. ANT breaks fundamentally with representational thinking. As stated by Latour at the very outset of his *Irreductions*¹⁶, "[n]othing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else" (Latour, 1988, p. 158). Latour names this position his "principle of irreducibility" (Latour, 1988, p. 158). What exist, Latour argues, are unique "trails" – trails of strength and trails of weakness (Latour, 1988, p. 158). What can explain the characteristics of a thing or a phenomenon is its trails, its networks of connections, of various strengths, to other things or phenomena. In ANT all characteristics and capabilities of an entity are described as effects of networks of relations. No thing can be said to inherently belong to, or represent, a more general or abstract

¹⁵ Manuel de Landa, in his book *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (2006), sets out to use Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage as the foundation for a new approach to an ontology of the social. Assemblages, de Landa argues, are opposed to both totalities and essences, and make up the shifting sets of relations constituting all social entities and processes, across scales.

¹⁶ *Irreductions*, part two of Latour's book *The Pasteurization of France* (1988), is the earliest and most systematic philosophical treatise on the ontological position of Latour and ANT.

category. Rather, every thing is unique, and uniquely constituted. As Latour explains, “everything happens only once, and at one place” (Latour, 1988, p. 162). Identity and sameness are not given but rather are the outcome of continuous processes of maintenance; identity is always “constructed at a great expense” (Latour, 1988, p. 162). This fundamental position of singularity stresses how nothing can be explained by pointing to a category it can be said to represent. Rather, what explains a thing or a phenomenon is its unique relations to other things or phenomena, and when things appear identical, the challenge is how to trace the specific constructive activities and relations that make these things reproduce their formations. The question is one of patterns of relations, not of forms or categories.

ANT holds that this is true for any material entity, for human subjects and immobile objects alike. An entity takes on qualities through the network of relations it is entangled within, and it is only through this network that effects can be produced. Each part of the network that contributes to producing effects can be labelled as an *actant*.¹⁷ An actant can be human or non-human. Since ANT rejects such a thing as inherent qualities, there are no a priori differences between humans and non-humans, as both have the capacity to join networks that produce effects. Any differences are themselves relational effects.

As all qualities and effects are distributed across networks with no inherent order or distinct point of origin, Latour, like Deleuze and Guattari, understands multiplicity as a matter of ontology, as a property of things, not as a multiplicity of epistemological perspectives. It is not one and the same thing that can be interpreted in multiple different ways but rather reality itself that is always plural (Latour, 2005, p. 116). Or, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, it is not truth that is

¹⁷ Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour define an actant as: “Whatever acts or shifts actions, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed” (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 259).

relative, but rather the relative itself that is true (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 130; also see Deleuze, 1993, p. 20). For Latour and Deleuze and Guattari alike, no such phenomenon exists as a given or stable entity. Rather, everything is assembled through ever-shifting sets of relations, and the constellations that result from these are themselves transformative.

For Latour, the question that follows is not how something can be made sense of but rather how its constellations can be traced empirically. Latour explicitly refrains from interpretation, as he sees his project as fundamentally descriptive and empirical (Latour, 2005, p. 61, pp. 136-140). In this regard, despite finding Latour's actor-network model very useful as a methodology, I still prefer to use the concept of the assemblage in order to describe the constitution, functions and effects of blood in cinematic images. What the concept of the assemblage adds to Latour's understanding of the network is an emphasis on the expressive potentials of these sets of relations. While Latour brilliantly addresses how networks are constituted, maintained and rearranged, he is less concerned with expressive potentials. I will thus seek to maintain Latour's close empirical focus on the constitution of heterogeneous networks of relations, while at the same time seek to locate and trace the expressive potentials of these assemblages.

In this regard, a note should be made regarding what distinguishes Latour's position from the philosophical line that runs through Bergson, Deleuze, and Massumi. Like these scholars, Latour emphasizes the ontology of relations; the in-between is as real as that which it connects (see Latour, 1998). However, the relations Latour focuses on are mainly understood in spatial terms, as things are connected through heterogeneous networks. He is less concerned with relations understood temporally, like in the way Massumi, following Bergson and Deleuze, stresses the series of singular states a body undergoes as it moves and is transformed (Massumi, 2002). Affects and eruptions, what have yet to be folded into

the existing assemblages, are less central to Latour's theory. In Deleuzian terms, Latour's focus is on the actual, while the virtual remains outside of his agenda. His focus is not on movement as such but rather with how networks are assembled; with how things come to be, rather than with becoming.¹⁸ He emphasizes the points in a network that make something change, and the relations between these points; but he does not to the same extent stress transformation and movement as qualities in their own right.

What needs to be added to an actor-network methodology, for the purpose of studying assemblages in cinematic images, is an effort to pay close attention to potentiality and processes of actualization, what images *can* do and how they are actualized as they connect with strata and other assemblages. This task is analytical as well as empirical, as it entails a close focus on what images potentially can express, and how they can connect with their audiences – as well as the outcomes of these connections. A speculative element is thus introduced – an element I consider necessary in any analysis of expressive potentials. It should be stressed that this does not mean that just anything can be read into an image; rather, the key point is to explore potentials yet to be actualized – as well as to trace what has already been actualized, and which factors and processes contributed to this. As images are actualized, they become something different than their virtual potentials.¹⁹ What happens as images enter new relations with other images, or with audiences, is not determined by any pre-existing image. Rather, as soon as an image enters a

¹⁸ Graham Harman (2009) draws a fundamental distinction between Latour and Deleuze in this regard. For Harman, Deleuze is a philosopher of becoming while Latour is a philosopher of objects. While I share Harman's understanding that Deleuze and Latour take different directions on this ontological question, I would argue that he overstates the implications of this difference. Harman sees Latour as a philosopher of distinct, singular objects – something Harman aligns with his own object-oriented philosophy. However, Harman's reading is here highly selective and systematically downplays Latour's emphasis on relationality and the fundamental interconnectedness and transparency of all things. A focus on time and process is absent from Harman's uniquely spatial model of autonomous objects.

¹⁹ As Deleuze explains in his book on Bergson, processes of actualization are primarily defined by difference, as the virtual itself is differentiated as it is being actualized (Deleuze, 1991a, p. 97).

relation, it cannot be determined how new assemblages of relations will evolve. Image analysis is thus an ongoing process, where new assemblages are located and new potentials traced.

My methodological approach can, following Bruno Latour, be described as tracing “a trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements” (Latour, 2005, p. 5, emphasis in original). In cinematic images blood is performed through such trails of association, constituted by a multitude of factors, including special effects, human actors, film stock, cameras and lenses, projectors, and numerous other elements. Blood images form assemblages together with other cinematic images and these assemblages enter relations with other elements in chains of distribution and exhibition, before they can connect with their audiences, which again are constituted through multiple sets of relations. Any effects of these images are thus distributed across a wide array of heterogeneous elements and transient relations. Thus, my study will seek to map the complex trails of associations that together perform the blood images, as well as the potentials of these images to affect their audiences. As I will argue, when blood took on new roles in American motion pictures from the late 1950s onwards, this can be traced along a series of events involving Hollywood studios, independent filmmakers and distributors, film exhibitors, audience demographics and economic shifts in American society, to name just a few.

This empirical scope means that my study draws upon a wide array of materials and sources, to document the history and operations of blood images as ever-shifting assemblages. My study will start out in a descriptive vein in order to trace the mediators that contributed to the changes in how blood was deployed in American motion pictures. A “mediator” according to Latour, transforms, translates or distorts the meanings or elements of what they are carrying (Latour, 2005, p. 39). Mediators thus make a difference. As Latour (2005, p. 39, p. 59, p. 217) stresses, mediators are not to be conflated with causes. In an explanation of cause and effect

some mechanism can be deduced where a cause have a predictable effect. Causal models thus reduce complex relationships to simpler mechanisms that in retrospect appear to provide comprehensive explanations of whatever one wishes to analyze. Examples of such explanations could be claims such as, “blood became more present in American cinema during the 1960s because of the war in Vietnam” or “exposure to media violence causes violent behavior.” The problem with such causal claims or explanations is not that they necessarily are completely wrong. Rather, the problem is that they tend to be reductive and retrospective when complex empirical phenomena are presented as the outcome of given causes.

Latour’s alternative is to “replace as many causes as possible by a series of actors” (Latour, 2005, p. 59). To qualify as an actor, something has to make a difference; some mediation needs to take place. Indeed, as Latour argues, the term actor might here give the wrong connotations, as “it always designates a source of initiative or a starting point” (Latour, 2005, p. 216). Instead Latour proposes to talk of mediators as “individualized events” connected to other individualized events (Latour, 2005, p. 216). Latour’s interest lies in “mediators *making* other mediators *do things*” (Latour, 2005, p. 217, emphasis in original), and as he further stresses, “making do” is something else than “causing.” Rather than constituting points of determination, mediators are fundamentally relational and singular. Actions and phenomena are seen as distributed events, which cannot be traced back to any one source or cause.

In this study I will not make any attempt at tracing the emergence of new blood images back to any determinate ‘causes.’ Rather, my method is to engage rich descriptions that unfold trails of associations and delineate mediators and actors that have played a part in this transformation. These descriptions can never be complete. There’s always more to say; new connections can be made and trails can be followed even further. Of necessity, my study has a beginning and an end, and only covers a

limited amount of material. So let me briefly explain some key choices that have shaped this study. The study itself took shape through my engagements with the concrete films described below, as well as a wide array of materials associated with these films and their production histories, including biographies, fan literature and web sites, as well as academic sources.

As explained above, this dissertation starts out from the observation that blood took on new roles and functions in American cinema from the late 1950s onwards. More specifically in terms of the corpus of films in this study, starting from well-documented landmark movies such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Blood Feast*, I sought out connections to other films. I further looked for traces in literature on film violence, film history, special effects and make-up, and more general accounts of cultural history, as well as exploring websites such as *The Internet Movie Database* (www.imdb.com) and of course watching as many films as I could get my hands on from this era. I thus ended up with a selection of films, from *The Return of Dracula* in 1958 to *The Wild Bunch* in 1969, which constituted my main corpus. As indicated above, these films can be located within very different systems of movie production, distribution, and exhibition. But they are characterized by their remarkable and innovative use of blood, and as such both can be seen as transitional markers in American cinema. In *The Return of Dracula*, bright red blood was inserted into a black-and-white film, as a sensational shock effect (Johnson, 1996; Weaver, 1991). These images indicate, I will argue, a transitional moment when the narrative flow of a film is interrupted by blood images serving an explicitly non-diegetic function. This furthermore locates this film in the intersection between films of the classical Hollywood era and the new breed of sensational exploitation films that emerged in the mid/late-1950s. A number of such low-budget sensational horror movies emerged in the US in the late 1950s, including titles such as *I was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *The Blob* (1958), *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), and *The Hideous*

Sun Demon (1959). However, unlike these films, *The Return of Dracula*, like *The Tingler*, explicitly made use of blood as a central element of audience attraction.

While *The Return of Dracula* is hardly remembered today, *The Wild Bunch*, on the other hand, is well-recognized as a transitional marker, located in-between classical and postmodern Hollywood, and a key achievement in the stylistic rendition of film violence (Prince, 1998, p. 2). *The Wild Bunch's* rapid editing, slow-motion inserts, and graphic display of the impact of bullet hits on the human body provided templates for numerous later filmmakers (see e.g., Cook, 1999; Prince, 1998; 1999a). Besides these two films, demarcating the beginning and end of my historical account, I devote most attention to key films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Chapter Four) and exploitation director Herschell Gordon Lewis' gore movies *Blood Feast*, *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964) and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965) (Chapter Two), which all occupy a central place in the literature on film violence. As mentioned earlier, while *Blood Feast* and its successors are recognized as the first ever gore or splatter movies (Crane, 2004; Dixon, 2010; McCarty, 1984), *Bonnie and Clyde* is recognized for introducing explicit bloodshed and violence as focal points in a mainstream Hollywood production (Prince, 2003; Sobchack, 2000). Besides these landmark films I more briefly discuss other films that in one way or another made use of blood in innovative ways or exemplified more general developments in the display of blood. These films include Alfred Hitchcock's sensational shocker *Psycho*, as well as his next two films, *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964) which made use of blood in rather different ways. At the same time, films such as *Hush ... Hush*, *Sweet Charlotte* (1964) and *The Killers* (1964) exemplify how films in this period challenged the Production Code and pushed the borders for explicit portrayals of violence. In 1966, Arthur Penn directed *The Chase*, a remarkably violent film that I will argue sets up a contrast with the aestheticized bloodshed of *Bonnie and Clyde*, which Penn directed the following year. Besides *Bonnie and Clyde*, 1967 saw the release of several other

major films that gained attention through violent imagery, most notably *The Dirty Dozen*, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, and *Point Blank* which I will all discuss briefly.

Besides discussing blood images in individual films, my main focus has been on the film industry, and I have sought to unravel as many mediators as possible in terms of how changes in the American motion picture industry contributed to the emergence of new blood images in the late 1950s (Chapter One). In discussing individual films I have likewise sought to trace mediating elements that helped constitute the form these films eventually came to take (Chapters Two, Four, and Five).

To permit a focused examination of the operations of blood images, I have decided to concentrate exclusively on American motion pictures, and only refer to international cinema when concrete associations can be traced to the American film industry. Including international cinema would introduce a wide range of factors including different cultural traditions, aesthetics, film production systems, etc. It would have been insightful to investigate the emergence, forms and operations of blood images also in other national film systems, and the fact that I do not is an obvious limitation of my study. On the other hand, focusing on one national film industry only has allowed me to dig deeper into the materials and include a more detailed analysis of a wider range of data, including relations to cultural and social formations and specific historical developments of aspects of the American film industry. Furthermore, the international character of the American film industry makes the study relevant also in other contexts. Most of the films discussed have travelled widely internationally and communicate with audiences across the world. As a non-American I had seen a good share of the films discussed in this thesis long before moving to North America. Films like *Psycho*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *The Wild Bunch* were readily available in subtitled versions as I grew up in Norway, be it on

television, on video tape or DVD, or through screenings by cinematheques or film societies.

Needless to say, my primary data have been the films themselves. Almost all films discussed have been watched on DVD, many of them numerous times. In some cases I have watched films in theatres or on the TCM (Turner Classic Movies) television channel. I have consistently strived to watch films in their original formats and screening times, and have noted in the text the instances where there are discrepancies between different versions of a film (e.g., *The Wild Bunch*).

As my study also includes these films' production histories, as well as their reception, numerous secondary sources have also been utilized. Besides academic literature in film and cultural history, studies of specific films or directors, and literature on topics such as film violence or special effects, I have also made use of a number of more 'popular' sources such as biographies, film journalism, and interviews. Furthermore, in the fall of 2009 I spent one month doing archival research at the Margaret Herrick Library²⁰ in Los Angeles. Here I did a closer study of correspondence, production journals, preview reports, etc., for several of the films covered in this thesis. Particularly, I here found the extensive papers on Alfred Hitchcock and on Sam Peckinpah in the in the library's special collections to be most useful. All uses of archival materials are noted in the text.

It is important to note that my focus on affective potentials and expressions frames my study quite differently from most actor-network oriented research. A research project that analyzes affect, or affect-related phenomena, will have to face specific challenges, in order to say something concrete about affective potentials and experiences. In discussing various films I will not so much analyze their content as I will seek to engage with the films and map out potential as well as actual encounters with viewers and audiences. Again, my approach is here exploratory. To a certain

²⁰ <http://www.oscars.org/library/index.html>

extent I rely upon my personal encounters and reactions to these films, mainly in order to illustrate certain potentials of the films and images discussed. These personal responses are not intended to correspond to how the films were received by their original audiences. All of the films presented in this thesis were made for the big screen (be it drive-ins or theatres), and there is no way for me to replicate the experience of what it would be like to see these films when they were initially screened. Watching these films, in most cases at home alone in front of the television screen, several decades after the films were first released creates an obstacle in terms of drawing parallels or comparisons between my experiences and the experiences of the films' original audiences. This is a gap I acknowledge and which I in various ways have tried to work around. While this dissertation cannot be categorized in terms of audience studies or reception studies,²¹ I draw upon historical materials in order to trace the films' critical responses and reception histories, and bring forward textual sources that illustrate initial, as well as later, audience responses to these films. Again, I will here stress that my aim is not to paint a complete picture, or to make generalizable claims as to how these films evoke certain responses but rather to map various potentials and encounters, in different cultural and historical settings, and as part of different socio-material networks.

Following Deleuze's Bergsonian image theory, I argue that no image, and no film, can ever be perceived the same way twice. Image perceptions result in new images being produced, each different from the next. As perception is a process of subtraction, interwoven with the recollection of memory, the potentials of cinematic images will always be greater than what is perceived in any one instance. Furthermore, no two processes of perception will unfold in the exact same manner. When images encounter embodied viewers, they become differentiated. Different

²¹ See Stacey (1994) and Staiger (2000) for examples of historically oriented studies of film spectatorship and reception.

elements will be subtracted in each process, and different memories will be recollected. In this process the recollected memories are not strictly individual. As Laura U. Marks argues, “[p]erception is never a purely individual act but also an engagement with the social and with cultural memory” (Marks, 2000, p. 62). Hence, perception never occurs in isolation but will always be entangled with social and cultural formations that partake in shaping what will be perceived. Historical, social, and cultural memories shape and condition the response of a viewer, as all audiences are themselves part of specific networks and collectives that are continuously undergoing transformations.

My own responses and experiences are not meant as a corrective to other responses and interpretations, nor the other way around. Rather, by including my own responses, my analysis aims to weave together a tapestry of potential responses to these films and images. If we take seriously Steven Shaviro’s claim that films are “*machines for generating affect*” (Shaviro, 2010, p. 3, emphasis in original), a question that follows is how to map the effects of this productive activity. No map can here ever be complete, as films and images will continue to live on, generating new affects, in new encounters, in new settings. The responses of myself and other contemporary viewers will always differ from those of the films’ initial audiences, and these differences can themselves often be worth exploring further. Throughout the text I try to bring forward the discrepancies, as well as possible points of conjuncture, between the various responses evoked by these films. Again, my quest is to expand the focus, bring forward new connections, and look for differences between how images operate in different encounters. Some of the films discussed I like and enjoy, others less so. In the text I do not set out to hide these personal preferences but rather attempt to explore what it is in the operations of the films and images that make me respond in certain ways. At a methodological level, in my descriptions of the films, I try to evoke these experiential dimensions, in order

to illustrate how the films operate in terms of affect. In this regard, rather than seeking a critical distance, I at times try to re-enact the experience of watching the films.

To conclude this section, in sum, my aim is an empirically grounded study of affect and how it works through concrete processes. My focus is on the actualizations of affect as this relates to how specific images operate in various concrete settings, as well as on the virtual potentials of these images for affecting their viewers. In a certain sense, my study can in this regard be seen to take up the challenge to cultural studies raised by Brian Massumi in the concluding pages of *Parables for the Virtual* (2002). Massumi here points to the bidirectional process line that runs from relationality to expressed quality, and back. This process line, Massumi argues, is concerned with singularity and specificity, not with generalizable particularities (Massumi, 2002, pp. 252-253). Hence, the challenge Massumi raises is how to deal with change and unique processes, without resorting to generalizable models or explanations. Taking up this challenge, my agenda in this dissertation is to seek potentials for change and differentiation, in a study that seeks out the uniqueness of each image, as well as each process of perception, and that traces affects as they are being actualized, while at the same time mapping the patterns and formations that are being made and remade through these processes.

Overview of thesis structure

The thesis has five main chapters. The first chapter, *Exploitations and Attractions in American Cinema: Entering the 1960s*, sets the stage historically and conceptually. In this chapter I give an overview of historical developments in the American motion picture industry during the 1950s and into the 1960s, in order to trace the events leading to the appearance of new forms of blood images. This period marked the end of the era of "classical Hollywood cinema" (Bordwell, Staiger

& Thompson, 1985; Schatz, 1988), and allowed for new and diverse forms of cinematic expression. Particularly, here I explore the oft-neglected history of American exploitation cinema, which in its classical form also came to an end during the 1950s (Schaefer, 1999). While Hollywood in its classical era predominantly presented film as a storytelling medium, the classical exploitation movies were centered on the exposure of sensational "facts" (Schaefer, 1999). This distinction can be described by Tom Gunning's concepts of "cinema of attractions" and "cinema of narrative integration" (Gunning, 1993; 2006a; 2006b). Whereas studio A and B features followed a format of narrative integration (which to a greater or lesser extent included elements of attraction), the exploitation pictures, in the tradition of the carnival or travelling sideshow, were fundamentally a medium of attraction, with far less emphasis on narrative integration. However, in the 1950s these systems of clearly separated A, B, and exploitation movies break down and are reconfigured. New low-budget forms of exploitation and genre pictures emerge, where sensational attractions are integrated within fairly generic narratives and plots. This is the era of monsters, mad scientists, and creatures from outer space; and furthermore, this is where blood appears as an element of attraction. Late 1950s movies such as *The Return of Dracula* (1958) and *The Tingler* (1959) feature images of blood as shock effects. In these films blood serves no clear narrative function but rather appeals directly to the viewer in an exhibitionistic manner. It operates in terms of affect.

These affective potentials of blood images are a central theme of my second chapter, *Seeing Red, Acting Dead: Blood and guts in the early gore films of Herschell Gordon Lewis*. In this chapter I discuss in detail the trilogy *Blood Feast* (1963), *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964), and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965), directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis and produced by David F. Friedman. Heralded as the first ever gore or splatter film (McCarty, 1984; Crane, 2004), *Blood Feast* was a novelty when in 1963 it presented explicit bloodshed as its main audience attraction. The film followed a

rather crude format, displaying its horrific attractions within a loosely assembled and almost redundant narrative. However, *Two Thousand Maniacs* and *Color Me Blood Red* go much further in integrating the bloodshed within the films' narrative structure and formations of signification. I will thus discuss how the blood imagery in these films, and *Color Me Blood Red* especially, provide for productive discords and intersections between affect and discourse, and between attraction and narrative integration.

Following these historical and empirical investigations, in Chapter Three, *Blood Assemblages*, I theoretically conceptualize blood. Here I will make an argument for seeing blood images as assemblages. By this I mean that blood is always a multiplicity, performed through ever-shifting networks of relations, and the role and performance of blood in (cinematic) images is itself a relational construct that can never be determined once and for all. I argue that blood in cinematic images can be seen as an *actor*, in the dual meaning of this term. On the one hand, blood is an actor in the sense that it performs a role, like a human actor in a film or a play, while on the other hand, it is an actor in the sense that it has agency, it acts, and makes things happen. Blood makes a difference in an image, although what exactly this difference is, will differ from one image and one process of perception to the next image and the next process of perception.

This model is elaborated over the final two chapters where I explore how the blood assemblage is enacted in various Hollywood productions of the 1960s. Chapter Four, *Blood in the 1960s: Bonnie and Clyde*, tracks the evolution of the blood assemblage from *Psycho* in 1960 to *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967. I here trace the specific role of the blood assemblage in a number of films from the 1960s, and explore how these blood images operate in the intersections between affective intensities and discursive stratifications. This historical outline leads to an elaborate discussion of *Bonnie and Clyde*, the film that arguably brought violence to the

forefront in Hollywood cinema (Prince, 2003; Sobchack, 2000). I argue that the stylized and aestheticized bloodshed in *Bonnie and Clyde* differs from the role played by blood in director Arthur Penn's previous film, *The Chase* (1966). These two films, I argue, set up a contrast between blood images, exemplified by *The Chase*, that evoke affective responses that are immediately reinvested and integrated within a film's narrative, and images, exemplified by *Bonnie and Clyde*, that offer greater affective flexibility and openness with regards to how audiences respond to and make sense of these experiences.

This contrast is explored further in Chapter Five, *Blood and Chaos in The Wild Bunch*, where I discuss Sam Peckinpah's 1969 western, which upon its release created an uproar for its massive bloodshed and graphic portrayal of violence. *The Wild Bunch*, I argue, can be seen as a film fundamentally centered on violent intensities in search of meaning. Still, the film never provides any clear meaning or resolution, and is not so much a film *about* violence as it is a film that is *experienced as* violence. I here engage in an extended discussion around the topic of violence in the media and take film scholar Stephen Prince to task. I argue his work exemplifies the limitations of addressing film violence in terms of representation. In my argument against Prince I make the counter position that the question is not so much *if* an image is violent but rather *how* it operates in terms of violence. My argument is that all images are violent, only differently so, and that blood can act as modulator of the violent intensities of images.

My conclusion brings together the historical outline that has been traced throughout the thesis, and makes the case that the 1960s marked a period of diversification regarding how blood was displayed in American cinema. Blood gradually became common-fare as a cinematic attraction but this did not happen in a uniform and ordered manner. Rather, blood took on very different roles in various films, with different affective potentials. I conclude by outlining how this study,

although presenting a singular historical case study, provides conceptual and methodological tools for further research on the affective potentials of film and visual images.

Chapter 1: Exploitations and Attractions in American Cinema: Entering the 1960s

The first two chapters of this dissertation, *Exploitations and Attractions in American Cinema: Entering the 1960s* and *Seeing Red, Acting Dead: Blood and guts in the early gore films of Herschell Gordon Lewis* focus on the oft-ignored topic of exploitation cinema. This cinematic tradition is fundamentally centered on the display of sensational attractions, and in its classical form stood markedly apart from the mainstream of American film production, which approached cinema much more as a medium of storytelling. My argument is that when the previously distinct systems of exploitation cinema and narrative cinema are reassembled in the 1950s, sensational attractions, such as blood, increasingly appear integrated within a narrative feature format. In this first chapter I give a historical outline of exploitation cinema and how changes in the American film industry during the 1950s made way for the integration of new forms of attractions within a format of narrative genre pictures. My next chapter will explore how blood became the centre of attraction in the new exploitation genre of gore or splatter movies that appeared in the 1960s, starting with *Blood Feast* in 1963.

The 1950s are often described as the end of the era of classical Hollywood cinema (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985; Schatz, 1988).²² The standardized

²² In her discussion of the term "classical cinema" Miriam Bratu Hansen (2000, pp. 335-336) distinguishes between three phases in the use of this term to describe Hollywood films of the studio era. The term initially gained prominence by French film makers, writers and critics to describe the style of Hollywood studio productions. This position is epitomized by Andre Bazin's well-known description of the style of classical Hollywood films as the perfection of the studio system. This positive evaluation of the "classical cinema" was then undermined by the critical turns in film theory 1968 onwards. Following Althusser and Lacan, classical Hollywood cinema came to be analyzed as an ideological form of representation, masking and reproducing hierarchies of domination. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's 1985 publication *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, represents a later turn away from normative evaluations towards an attempt at a neutral description of the interrelationship between mode of production and cinematic style in Hollywood films of the studio era from approximately 1917 to around 1960. The theoretical foundation of this later orientation leans towards formalism and cognitivism in an attempt to describe and formulate

modes of production and cinematic style, characteristic of the major film studios, were challenged by a wide number of factors contributing to far-reaching changes across the American movie industry. Besides the implications for the production of films by the Hollywood studios, these changes also affected the production of independent low-budget films from the mid/late 1950s onwards. Independently produced exploitation cinema previously had operated separately from the mainstream film industry. However, in the 1950s the earlier clear-cut borders between independent exploitation features and the A and B productions of Hollywood studios dissolved. As I will explain, this opened up opportunities for the production of new forms of low-budget exploitation films that would eventually venture into more daring modes of fiction cinema. These films differed from classical Hollywood cinema in that there was a stronger emphasis on sensational attractions relative to narrative and character development. Together with new tendencies within Hollywood studio productions, these films opened a path towards a “cinema of sensations” that according to Paul Monaco (2001) characterized American cinema in the 1960s. In this chapter I explore these shifts and tendencies in the American movie industry, with an emphasis on the implications for low-budget and exploitation films. I will begin by defining exploitation cinema and giving an overview of its history after which I will trace the shifting relations between exploitation and mainstream cinema during the 1950s. This is followed by an exploration of the new modes of low-budget cinema that emerged from these shifting relations in the late 1950s and early 1960s where films increasingly began to integrate sensational elements, often in the form of sex or violence, into their narratives. Drawing upon Tom Gunning’s distinction between a “cinema of attraction” and a “cinema of narrative integration” (Gunning, 2006a; 2006b; 1993), I argue that blood in this new terrain emerged as a cinematic

the principles that Hollywood studio films deploy in order to construct a narrative and diegesis that succeed in controlling the responses of the viewer.

attraction, taking on roles that differed from its earlier deployment as an element of plot and character development that were integral to a film's narrative.

Exploitation defined

To start off, I will define exploitation conceptually and also as a specific form of cinema before describing how exploitation as a cinematic tradition stood apart from the Hollywood system and eventually contributed to the emergence of sensational blood images in American feature films. In an analysis of exploitation as a *concept* as it is used by the motion picture industry as well as in film literature, Thomas Doherty claims that it has "three distinct and sometimes overlapping meanings" (Doherty, 2002, p. 2). In the first definition, "exploitation" is a promotional strategy for drawing audiences into a movie theater, that in principle can be applied to any kind of film and which does not fundamentally differ from promotion strategies and advertising campaigns used today. This definition also makes the movie itself an object that is something to be exploited. The second definition, on the other hand, sees the movie as a subject that addresses its audience in an exploitative manner. In this definition Doherty argues that exploitation is a strategy of communication rather than of marketing, where the term "refers to the dialogue a movie establishes with its viewers" (Doherty, 2002, p. 5). While the first definition sees the film being exploited by or through its advertising campaign, the second definition sees the audience being exploited by the film. Doherty argues that these first two meanings of the concept, understood as a strategy of either promotion or communication, have been part of the American motion picture industry from its very beginnings. However, the third definition "as a pejorative description for a special *kind* of motion picture ('the exploitation film') is more recent" (Doherty, 2002, p. 6, emphasis in original). Doherty points to a 1946 article in *Variety* where "exploitation pictures" are referred to as "films with some

timely or currently controversial subject which can be exploited, capitalized on, in publicity and advertising" (quoted in Doherty, 2002, p. 6; also see Gray, 2004, p. 48). In a somewhat tautological mode, exploitation here refers to controversial characteristics that enable a film to be promoted in an exploitative manner. Doherty argues that at this point in time "'exploitation picture' seems to have had no negative connotations but was used simply to refer to a timely picture with a clear promotional tie-in" (Doherty, 2002, p. 6). However, by the mid-50s this had changed and the term had pejorative associations and an "exploitation film was characterized as favoring "the bizarre, the licentious, and the sensational" (Doherty, 2002, p. 7). The subject matter of an exploitation picture now had to be both timely and sensational (Doherty, 2002, pp. 6-7), grabbing hot topics of the day and giving them a sensational spin. It is this meaning of the term, in line with the third definition presented above, that describes a particular type of film, which is the foundation for the current understanding of exploitation both within the film industry as well as within the academic field of film studies today. This understanding of exploitation also became established among filmmakers themselves from the 1950s onwards. For instance, Roger Corman, the perhaps most famous 'exploitation' filmmaker, underlines the timely and sensational aspect of exploitation and claims these "films were so made because you made a film about something wild with a great deal of action, a little sex, and possibly some sort of strange gimmick; they often came out of the day's headlines" (Corman & Jerome, 1990, p. 34). Exploitation veteran David F. Friedman more straightforwardly defines exploitation as "a movie about subject matters forbidden to mainstream filmmakers. Any subject is acceptable as long as it's in bad taste" (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 10). Elsewhere Friedman explains that "the technical definition of exploitation movies is cheaply made pictures distributed by roadshowmen [see below] or by local independents called states'-righters" (Chute, 1986, p. 85).

Classical exploitation cinema

While the characteristics of exploitation films became identifiable in the 1950s, exploitation as a specific kind of motion picture did not originate in this decade. In his historical study of exploitation cinema, Eric Schaefer describes the classical exploitation film as a motion picture category that found its form during the 1920s and eventually faded away during the 1950s. This era of "classical exploitation film" co-existed with the dominant classical Hollywood cinema of this period and the transformation it underwent during the 1950s and early 1960s worked closely in tandem with changes in mainstream film production (Schaefer, 1999, p. 8).

Schaefer points out five common features generally adhered to by classical exploitation cinema. First, an exploitation picture has as its primary subject some "forbidden" topic (Schaefer, 1999, p. 5). Next, the "classical exploitation films were made cheaply, with extremely low production values, by small independent firms" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 5). Third, these films had independent distribution, and fourth, "were generally exhibited in theaters not affiliated with the majors" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 6). Finally, exploitation films were released in a considerably smaller number of prints than the mainstream pictures (Schaefer, 1999, p. 6). Due to the small number of prints the films could cover only a very limited geographical area at any given time. Often, in the practice known as 'roadshowing,' the distributors quite literally went on the road along with their films, following the prints on their journey from theater to theater and often also advertising the film locally and/or providing entertainment and promotional gimmicks in order to create a spectacle surrounding the films' screenings. In many cases, like with *Mom and Dad* (1945), a film produced and distributed by the notorious exploitation promoter Kroger Babb, the screening was accompanied by activities such as 'lectures,' book sales, and so on, generating extra income as well as promoting the picture (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 132-134). Another effect of this mode of distribution was the prolonged shelf life of these films,

as the films literally went on tour year after year, which meant that several of these 'classic' exploitation films stayed in distribution for several decades.

Over-the-top campaigns, offering sensational sights and unique experiences, distinguished exploitation films from mainstream movies and especially targeted "a steady clientele of thrill seekers and single men" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 104). The classical exploitation film itself was often only one of many items in larger carnivalesque exhibition events. Thus the audience experience of witnessing an exploitation roadshow differed dramatically from attending a regular mainstream double bill.²³ As Schaefer explains, "[t]he act of seeing a film during the heyday of the exploitation roadshow was like attending the theater, the carnival, and the lecture hall. Exhibition of exploitation films was far from orderly. Films stopped and started for lectures and book pitches. Depending on the type of exploitation movie being shown, a range of 'unacceptable' responses could emanate from the audience, including hooting, groans, fainting, vomiting, and more" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 122). Indeed, as mentioned, the exhibition and marketing of exploitation films were in many ways more reminiscent of the sideshow or traveling carnival than of classical Hollywood (Sanjek, 2003, p. 253). Furthermore, exploitation films were in most cases shown exclusively to an adult audience. An adults-only policy served to increase the appearance of responsibility that the exploitation distributors and exhibitors strove to maintain, while at the same time the policy underlined the distinction between mainstream movies available to all ages and the more forbidden (and thus alluring) fare offered by exploitation films (Schaefer, 1999, p. 124).

Following Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's (1985) model for the classical Hollywood mode of production, Schaefer (1999, p. 43) examines classical

²³ Schaefer makes the argument that Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the "carnavalesque" is "particularly suited to any examination of exploitation film" and furthermore makes the case that these elements of the carnivalesque characterize not merely the exploitation films themselves but also, and perhaps even more so, the exhibition of these films (Schaefer, 1999, p. 122, also see n48, p. 407).

exploitation production in terms of their labor force, their means of production, and their financing. Not surprisingly, exploitation pictures come across as inferior in all of these categories. Low-skilled and often unknown labor both behind and in front of the camera, cheap and primitive equipment, sets and production design, short production schedules, and very low budgets – were all characteristics of the exploitation movie. The distinctive and low-end quality of production for the classical exploitation film did not change much in this period. Thus, both in terms of spectacular exhibition events and as a distinct mode of production and aesthetic style, the exploitation films differed from Hollywood cinema – a distinction that was obvious to these films' original audiences.

Schaefer further describes four production strategies he sees as unique to exploitation films: recycling techniques, padding, the use of square-ups, and hot and cold versions (Schaefer, 1999, p. 56). Recycling techniques comprise the reuse of footage, characters, and plots across movies or lifted from other sources. For instance, the sex hygiene film *Because of Eve* (1948) is built around three educational short films that are loosely integrated into the narrative of the film. In addition, the film recycles newsreel footage from World War II, which is used to illustrate the war experience of one of the film's characters. Hence, the end result is a film with wildly divergent cinematic styles. Also, whole films could be recycled through repeated re-releases of the same film, often under new titles (Schaefer, 1999, p. 59). Recycling could also involve using old films as stock materials for new ones; for instance, it was not uncommon to make compilation movies comprised of scenes from other films or completely re-edited versions of pre-existing films (Schaefer, 1999, p. 61).

"Padding" is a term that refers to the addition of material to a film in order to expand its length (Schaefer, 1999, p. 68). These extra shots or scenes were most often only loosely, if at all, integrated into the narrative of the film; these scenes

were often in the form of musical numbers, performance acts, sexual titillations, or other images that often added to the elements of spectacle associated with exploitation films.

There are two different definitions for the term “square-up” that are applied to classical exploitation films. In its original form the square-up was an introductory statement regarding the educational or informational value of the film to be shown.²⁴ The film could thus claim to combat the moral or social ills it was about to put on display (Schaefer, 1999, p. 69). The square-up served as a means to provide some redeeming value to the film’s otherwise controversial nature – or at least an illusion that it had some redeeming value, as a justification was needed to screen these films. The exploration of subject matters such as, for instance, child-birth, prostitution, or the use of illegal drugs in exploitation pictures was justified through the use of square-ups. Besides serving as a means to justify the films’ topics, the square-up could also serve other purposes, for instance, to provide warnings about the shocking nature of the scenes to follow, which functioned to further incite audience anticipation. Furthermore, the square-up was a means to provide the films with a claim to authenticity, indicating that what the images provided were not mere fiction but actual slices of “real life” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 71).

The second definition of the square-up relates to exhibition practices, and the need to keep paying customers satisfied (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990). In situations where the audience could become unruly or aggressive after a show that failed to live up to its advertised promises – which often far exceeded the actual content – the

²⁴ This technique was also occasionally deployed by more mainstream productions in order to redeem the otherwise controversial nature of a film. For instance, the 1931 Warner gangster picture *The Public Enemy* opens with a title card making the claim that the ambition of the film was to give an honest depiction, not a glorification, of the life of criminals. Likewise, in 1955 an opening statement for the MGM movie *Blackboard Jungle* made the claim that the movie was produced in the spirit of raising public awareness on juvenile delinquency (see Tropiano, 2009, p. 148, p. 152). Another example can be found in the first feature film directed by Robert Altman, *The Delinquents* (1957), which both opens and closes with a voice-over declaring the film as a warning against the evils of juvenile delinquency.

exhibitor could display a "square-up reel" to contain the crowd. These extra 'freebies' would typically be short clips of a sexual nature, like nudist films or burlesque shows, displaying full or partial nudity, although not explicit sexual acts (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 72-73).

The final production strategy identified by Schaefer is the practice of "hot and cold versions," where various alternative versions could exist of the same title (Schaefer, 1999, p. 73). As censorship regulations differed between states and local communities (see Chapter Four), the "hot" prints containing relatively more risqué and explicit material could be shown in less regulated areas, while the "cold" versions, where such materials were edited out or replaced, could be shown in areas where regulations were stricter.

Exploitation cinema versus B movies

Exploitation films are often grouped together with the traditional B movies. However, as stressed by Schaefer (1999, pp. 49-50), exploitation pictures differed not only from the Hollywood A movies but also from the B films from the classic Hollywood era. In this section I explain how these films were part of distinct systems of production with different economic structures as well as standards for production, distribution, and exhibition. I then describe how these separate systems began to collapse in the 1950s and how this made way for new low-budget independent productions that to a much larger extent than the earlier B movies had to rely upon sensational attractions in order to find an audience.

As filmmaker Roger Corman emphasizes, the classical B movie was already a phenomenon of the past by the time he entered the film scene in the mid-1950s (Corman & Jerome, 1990, pp. 36-37). Unlike the independently produced exploitation movies with which Corman associates himself, the Bs were a product of the Hollywood system; these movies were made quickly and inexpensively to provide

filler materials for double-bill bookings (Schaefer, 1999, p. 50; Corman & Jerome, 1990, p. 36; Flynn & McCarthy, 1975). The double bill was the standard for movie exhibition from the early 1930s until around 1950, as audiences came to expect a full-evening's worth of entertainment for their money, with a program of two features as well as additional shorts or newsreels, filling a time-slot of three hours or more. While an A movie, being superior in terms of production value and big name stars, was the main attraction of a double bill, a B movie was designed to fill the 'bottom-half' of the bill (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, pp. 14-15).

Within the Hollywood studios there was a clear separation between A and B productions in terms of budgets and shooting schedules as well as the running time of the movies (Schaefer, 1999, p. 50). However, the incentives for major studios to produce their own B features to fill slots in their exhibition programs were diminishing, especially from the 1940s onwards, "when rising production costs led the majors to abandon program pictures altogether" (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 17). Besides rising costs of production, profits gained from B features were already modest at best, as these films, unlike the A features, did not earn a share of the box office income but rather played for a flat rental fee (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 17).

Outside of the studio system, a number of small-scale production companies, like Monogram and Republic, specialized in B pictures and undercut the majors in terms of budget and production schedules (Schaefer, 1999, p. 50; Flynn, 1975; Flynn & McCarthy, 1975). These production companies would provide a steady supply of bottom-half double bill fodder and through miniscule budgets combined with guaranteed exhibition slots and rental income these movies were able to earn a small profit with relatively little risk (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, pp. 16-17).²⁵ These

²⁵ Flynn and McCarthy report that Monogram made an average profit per film of just \$1,932.12 for the period from 1940 to 1948. However, the studio hit hard times in 1949 when it made a total loss of over \$1,100,000 (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, pp. 24-25).

minor operators thus “stepped in to garner the minuscule profits the majors shunned” (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 17).

The line between B pictures and major productions at times could still become blurred as the minor production companies would occasionally offer more prestigious fare in between their run-of-the mill genre films. This became especially evident towards the end of the classical Hollywood era with more extravagant Republic pictures such as *Rio Grande* (1950) and *The Quiet Man* (1952) both directed by John Ford, *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948) by Fritz Lang, *Macbeth* (1948) by Orson Welles, or *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) by Allan Dwan (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 30). While Republic was the ‘high-end’ B production company, shoestring companies like Production Releasing Corporation (PRC) occupied the other end of the scale, only a notch above the exploitation filmmakers in terms of production quality (Schaefer, 1999, p. 50-51; Dixon, 2010, p. 55).

The production practices of these B studios could resemble the exploitation operators in terms of how they “displayed endless imagination in their budget-cutting techniques. Inexpensive—and often inexpressive—acting, minimal sets, hack scripts, truncated shooting schedules, all were standard practices” (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 22). Also practices such as recycling of (stock) footage and a minimal use of retakes were common (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 23). Nonetheless, even these productions were extravagant compared with exploitation pictures, whose total budget could typically come in around \$10,000 (Schaefer, 1999, p. 51).²⁶

In sum, this three-tier division between A studio films, studio and independent B films, and independent exploitation films, was evident throughout the era of classical Hollywood (and classical exploitation). These three categories were

²⁶ Schaefer (1999, p. 51) reports the budget of *Mom and Dad*, perhaps the most successful of the classical exploitation films, to be around \$65,000, while other ‘high-end’ exploitation films like *The Birth of a Baby* (1937) and *Child Bride* (1941), came in for \$43,000 and \$24,000 respectively. However, most exploitation films were produced at a far lower cost – often less than \$10,000.

separated in terms of budget, production schedule, use of sets and personnel behind and in front of the camera, and so on. Thus, each category had a look and style distinct from the others. Besides differences in production value, the films also differed in content. While the A movies and the B movies relied on fictional narratives, as discussed above, the exploitation films heavily relied on factual content and the sensational exposure of shocking 'truths.'²⁷ Also, the films differed in terms of marketing, distribution, and exhibition. While the main function of the A feature was to attract audiences, the B feature was destined to fill a slot on the bill and was not given its own marketing. Exploitation films, on the other hand, were channeled through separate chains of distribution and exhibition. Unlike the B movies, exploitation films had to be marketed in their own right; they had to create enough of a buzz to attract audiences into the theaters. However, as I will explain below, this three-tier division disintegrated in the 1950s, when the era of classical Hollywood cinema came to an end.

The 1950s: crisis and shifts

In his analysis of the shifts in the American movie industry during the 1950s, Thomas Doherty points to how economic, political and cultural factors all contributed to the financial downturn of classical Hollywood (Doherty, 2002, p. 16), and how the "new" exploitation films that emerged during the 1950s can be attributed mainly "to the economic disorders then afflicting Hollywood" (Doherty, 2002, p. 14).

As Doherty explains, within the classical Hollywood system movie production was largely "a rationalized, assembly-line business supplying a more or less standardized product to an enthusiastic and reliable audience. Studios and individual movies competed, but moviegoing itself was guaranteed" (Doherty, 2002, p. 15; also see Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985; Schatz, 1988). A stable audience was

²⁷ Schaefer thus claims that the legacy of classical exploitation "lives on in trash talk shows, disease-of-the-week movies, and tabloid TV" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 341).

waiting, ready to spend their money; the question was mainly which theater and which movie would harvest the profits. However, for reasons that I will document below, this situation changed drastically during the 1950s, with fatal consequences for the old studio system.

The 1948 US Supreme Court decision known as the *Paramount Decree* brought to an end the system of vertical integration where the studios had been in charge of production, distribution, and exhibition of their movies (Doherty, 2002, pp. 16-17; Monaco, 2001, p. 9; Sklar, 1975, pp. 272-274, Schatz, 1988). The earlier practice in which studios would operate their own theatres, booking their own productions, was deemed to be a violation of anti-trust legislation, and as a result the studios were required to divest of their exhibition venues. In principle, distributors now had to compete with each other to secure exhibition slots for their films. Severing exhibition from the production and distribution meant that the studios were no longer guaranteed a venue to book their films. This raised the stakes in terms of financial risk for movie productions.

The Hollywood production model was also under challenge from the lower costs associated with movie production outside the studio lots. When foreign governments implemented policies such as restrictions on film imports and subsidies to national film industries, Hollywood moviemakers increasingly located productions abroad in order to circumvent these measures (Doherty, 2002. p. 17; Monaco, 2001, pp. 11-15; Sklar, 1975, pp. 275-276). In addition, foreign locations could often provide cheap labor and exotic scenery (Doherty, 2002. p. 17), increasing the appeal of moving productions out of Hollywood. Also domestically, films were increasingly shot on location, resulting in studio lots becoming vacant and thus often sold off (Monaco, 2001, p. 15).

Further, legal and financial tides worked against the old studio system; as "Hollywood lawyers and agents realized that capital gains were taxed at a lower rate

than salaries, they urged their high-priced clients to back private production companies and reap the benefits of corporate profit sharing rather than take a studio salary" (Doherty, 2002. p. 17; also see Sklar, 1975, p. 282; Schatz, 1988). Major producers, directors and actors alike, left their studio jobs to form more lucrative independent production companies. Thus, while "independents accounted for only 1 percent of Hollywood output in 1951; in 1958, their share had risen to at least 50 percent" (Doherty, 2002, p. 18).

In terms of politics, Doherty (2002, pp. 18-19) makes the argument that the American movie industry was creatively curtailed by the fervor of anti-communist campaigns during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The intensified scrutiny of agents such as the House of Un-American Activities Committee and the American Legion and the ensuing blacklist self-imposed by the Hollywood studios effectively banned communist party members and sympathizers from studio employment. Further, as even an accusation of communist sympathies could wreck a Hollywood career, a system of "clearance" was established, where Hollywood operators could cleanse themselves of illicit political allegiances by seeking approval of conservative colleagues and clearly distance themselves from any radical or even liberal stances or associations (Sklar, 1975, p. 275). It goes without saying that this climate impacted and limited the range of permissible initiatives within Hollywood, aesthetically as well as politically.²⁸ While the American film industry has always

²⁸ Robert Sklar sums up the subduing of American movies in this new political climate in the following manner: "For the first half-century of American movies the industry had a fascinating and curious relationship with the American public. It had always stood slightly aslant the mainstream of American cultural values and expressions, seeking to hold its working-class audience while making movies attractive to middle-class tastes, and therefore never quite in step with other forms of cultural communication. Movies were always less courageous than some organs of information and entertainment, but they were more iconoclastic than most, offering a version of American behavior and values more risqué, violent, comic and fantastic than the standard interpretation of traditional cultural elites. It was this trait that gave movies their popularity and their mythmaking power. And it was this trait that the anti-Communist crusade destroyed. Creative work at its best could indeed not be carried on in an atmosphere of fear, and Hollywood was suffused with

operated within fairly strict (self-imposed and external) limitations in terms of content and aesthetic modes of expression, these tendencies escalated during the Communist hysteria in the early stages of the cold war. By imposing an employment blacklist the studios followed an established pattern of Hollywood self-regulation as a countermeasure to external interferences (see Chapter Four).

Towards the end of the 1950s the era of classical Hollywood gradually came apart, and thus also the era of the traditional B picture and the classical exploitation films came to an end. This dismantling of previously distinct systems of movie production allowed for reconfigurations in terms of cinematic styles and modes of expression. New hybrid forms of production emerged, where the divisions between exploitation and mainstream features became less clearly defined. As I will argue below, these new low-budget movies followed a format of standardized genre movies reminiscent of the earlier B pictures, while at the same time relying upon sensational and easily exploitable elements – such as blood – in order to set the films apart from their competitors. However, first I will address how changes elsewhere in American society affected the film industry in the 1950s, and how Hollywood came to explore new formats in order to sustain a dwindling audience.

Shifting demographics and the era of television

General movie attendance suffered a drastic decline in the 1950s (Monaco, 2001; Sklar, 1975). The years following World War II saw sweeping demographic shifts in American society. Young adults, across all social strata, married at an earlier age and had more children than any other generation in the 20th century (May, 1999, p. ix, p. 14). This shift was associated with a move to the newly emerging suburbs,

fear. It dared not make any movie that might arouse the ire of anyone" (Sklar, 1975, pp. 267-268).

and an increase in consumption of consumer goods.²⁹ However, this rise in more affluent suburban lifestyles was a privilege restricted to the expanding white middle-class,³⁰ excluding the poor and, especially, the black population (May, 1999). The baby boom and the economic upswing worked against Hollywood in the 1950s as newly settled families shied away from downtown theaters and sought their entertainment elsewhere, which increasingly came to be in the comfort of their own homes. As Doherty argues, “[t]he great exodus to the suburbs permanently altered the leisure habits of Hollywood’s once-faithful audience, as millions of couples settled down to raise families and purchase expensive consumer goods” (Doherty, 2002, p. 19).

Home entertainment was itself being redefined during the post-war years, especially as the popularity of the radio was supplanted by the advent of television – “[t]he new medium [that] forever ended the cultural hegemony of the movies” (Doherty, 2002, p. 19). During the 1950s the television set became an integrated part of most American households,³¹ filling a substantial part of available leisure time, and “achieved ascendancy over the movies with such dazzling speed that it had already upended the cultural hierarchy by the time Hollywood began to respond in earnest to its challenge” (Doherty, 2002, p. 20). Together, the shift in demographics, with young parents moving to the suburbs raising their baby-boomer children, and the increased appeal and availability of freely transmitted entertainment through

²⁹ As Elaine Tyler May explains, the first five years following WW2 saw a 60 percent increase in overall consumer spending, while the spending on furnishings and appliances for the household rose by as much as 240 percent (May, 1999, p. 147).

³⁰ As May (1999, p. 20) argues, both the middle-class and the ‘white’ population expanded as social categories. The population movements from urban ethnic neighborhoods into the suburbs included new social groups into the middle-class. In addition, this shift expanded the ‘white’ American demographic as previously ethnically segregated groups such as for instance Jews and Italians now came to be included in the homogenously ‘white’ suburban culture.

³¹ May (1999, p. 148, p. 153) reports that 11.6 million television sets were sold in the US during the first four years following WW2, and by the 1950s annual television sales were reaching numbers above five million (also see Belton, 1992, p. 73).

broadcast media in the private home worked towards making a trip to the movie-theater a less likely choice for everyday entertainment.

For Hollywood, “[t]here were two ways movies could outflank television: (1) do what television could not do in the way of spectacle (form) or (2) do what television could not do in the way of controversial images or narrative (content). In short, ‘make ‘em big or make ‘em provocative’” (Doherty, 2002, p. 20). Thus, ironically enough, “[d]uring a decade painted as conservative and conformist, the motion picture industry, with a vigor born of desperation, became more technically innovative, economically adventuresome, and aesthetically daring than at any time in its history” (Doherty, 2002, p. 20). This perspective is countered by the alternative view, illustrated by Paul Monaco who makes the claim that

Rather than leading American film toward more adventurous risk-taking, the demise of the studio system actually meant that in most cases hits could no longer be counted on to cover the losses of box-office failures. A picture-by-picture production system can be recognized, in hindsight, as pointing inevitably toward less room for experimentation and high-risk production and leading to greater emphasis on projects that stayed closer to tested formulas. Studios held control over creativity in the studio system, but nearly all movies were made under an economic ‘big tent’ that provided at least some protection for losses on individual films (Monaco, 2001, pp. 26-27; also see Schatz, 1988).

Thus, a rather paradoxical situation emerges where the breakdown of the classical studio model leads to increased experimentation by the studios in order to test new waters, while at the same time new financing models lead to a situation where each feature now has to stand on its own economically as losses and gains are counted on a one-by-one basis rather than distributed across a wide array of films. What follows from this was an imperative towards experimentation driven solely by commercial terms while new ways to lure audiences into theatres were being tested.

Sensational and easily exploitable elements were added to well-established modes of narrative and cinematic style.

In terms of spectacle, Hollywood experimented with a number of technological advances and gimmicks in order to differentiate their product from the entertainment offered by television. New technologies and devices for film production and screening had already been around for some years but it was not until the 1950s that these were fully implemented. Doherty mentions Cinerama, 3-D, and CinemaScope as more high-end examples of such technological inventions, of which only the latter was to have a lasting impact (Doherty, 2002, pp. 21-22; also see Sklar, 1975, pp. 283-285; Belton, 1992). More low-end gimmicks such as *Psychorama* (insertion of subliminal images) and *AromaRama* (smell), or the William Castle inventions *Percepto* (electrical vibrators in theater seats), *Emergo* (glowing skeletons floating about in the theater) and *Illusion-O* (cardboard glasses through which audience members could make ghosts appear and disappear onscreen), and many others, were occasionally successful for individual films but were not integrated into later movie productions (Doherty, 2002, p. 23; Hawkins, 2000, pp. 75-76; Kendrick, 1991, p. 230; Castle, 1992; Schechter & Everitt, 1980, p. 58).

Gimmicks aside, the restructuring of the motion picture industry during the 1950s had wider implications for movie production, as “[t]o a greater degree than ever before, the industry channeled vast sums of money into fewer and fewer projects” (Doherty, 2002, p. 24). Technological advances increased production costs, and as a result of the Paramount Decree movies were now distributed and sold to exhibitors individually rather than as part of packages. Also, American films were increasingly targeted towards an international market as the box office returns from the foreign market from the 1950s onwards came to surpass domestic returns (Doherty, 2002, p. 24; Monaco, 2001, p. 10).

These changes all paved the way for the blockbuster – the expensive, technologically advanced production packed with stars and action, all tied together by an easily recognizable and understandable plot.³² However, this turn towards the blockbuster led to a substantially lower number of films being produced annually, with severe consequences for the B pictures (Doherty, 2002, p. 24). Both of the key functions of the Hollywood B picture – reducing overall overhead costs by keeping stages, employees and equipment busy, and filling the slot underneath an A feature on a double bill – evaporated with the changes in movie production, distribution and exhibition during the 1950s (Doherty, 2002, p. 25). With the gradual disappearance of the double bill and the end of the production-line model of movie production, B movies were no longer deemed as commercially worthwhile for the major studios to produce. The disappearance of the traditional B movie was further helped along by new serial television productions, especially since personnel and stylistic features previously associated with B movies now found their way onto the small screen (Sklar, 1975, p. 282).

“New” exploitation cinema

As Hollywood increasingly produced upscale grandiose blockbusters and reduced the overall number of their productions, the independents had the advantage of being able to keep the budgets of their films substantially lower than the studios' own 'low-budget' productions (Heffernan, 2004, p. 92). In this emerging terrain of independent productions, divisions between the Bs and the exploitation films became blurry, and both the B movies and the exploitation films in their classical form began to dissolve.

³² Examples of 1950s blockbusters include religious epics such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959), adventure dramas such as *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), and musicals like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Gigi* (1958).

Schaefer argues that the era of classical exploitation film was coming to an end in the late 1950s as it became increasingly “difficult to make the distinction between exploitation and mainstream product” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 326). He outlines several factors contributing to the demise of classical exploitation: “the deaths and retirement of the original exploiteers; the incorporation of exploitation themes into mainstream films; changes in self-regulation within Hollywood and censorship on the state and municipal levels; the emergence of teenpics and the foreign ‘art’ cinema in the United States” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 326). The imports pushed boundaries of what was acceptable but also for what audiences came to expect. Elaborating on the impact of imports such as *And God Created Woman* (1956), David F. Friedman explains:

Our shows were beginning to show their age. Customers were being offered more skin on screen than ever before, movies where the showgoer didn't have to endure some 'professor's' preachment and dire warnings of the perils of promiscuity, then be incited to pop for a buck or two for some thin little biology home-study books (Friedman & de Nevi, 1990, p. 214).

The old-school exploitation films came to appear increasingly outdated and overtly 'educational.' The classical exploitation film had become a dinosaur, no longer capable of surviving in the new era of movie production. These films gradually faded away as the old exploitation producers and distributors went out of business.

Likewise, B production companies like Republic and Monogram disbanded in the mid-1950s as these operators found it hard to garner profits from their productions in the new financial climate. In their place emerged “a new wave of B-cum-exploitation outfits” (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 19) whose productions differed in several ways from the traditional B genre movies as well as from the classical exploitation films. Thomas Doherty outlines three typical elements of the production strategy of the new breed of exploitation cinema that emerged in the 1950s: the

films had a “controversial, bizarre, or timely subject matter amenable to wild promotion;” they had “a substandard budget;” and catered to “a teenage audience” (Doherty, 2002, p. 7). Doherty further argues that “these three elements—controversial content, bare-bones budgets, and demographic targeting—remain characteristic of any exploitation movie” (Doherty, 2002, p. 10) in the manner the term has been commonly understood in the motion picture industry since around 1955-56 when the ‘new’ exploitation cinema found its form (Doherty, 2002, p. 7).

An indication of this new climate is the metamorphosis of Monogram into Allied Artists in 1953 (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 34; Strawn, 1975, pp. 272-273). Moving away from traditional B fare, Allied Artists over the next decade “cranked out an erratic mixture of sci-fi, horror, and teenpix, including several Roger Corman, Albert Zugsmith, and Sam Katzman efforts” (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 34). The main independent company that fit this new mould was American International Pictures (AIP),³³ run by Samuel Z. Arkoff and James Nicholson, whose long line of productions from the mid-1950s through the end of the 1960s typified the blurring of lines between exploitation and narrative cinema.³⁴

Unlike the classical B movies, these new independent films did not target the bottom half of a double bill and often circulated in different chains of distribution than the studio productions (Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, pp. 34-35). Furthermore, changes in movie exhibition practices led to a new demand for low-budget cinema appealing to a younger audience. The decline in movie attendance and the move to the suburbs in the post-war years led to the closure of a wide number of neighborhood theaters in urban areas.³⁵ As Doherty explains, unlike the large downtown movie palaces, the remaining neighborhood theaters could not survive on

³³ The company was founded in 1954 under the name American Releasing Company but in 1956 changed its name to American International Pictures (McGee, 1996).

³⁴ See McGee (1996) for an extended history of AIP.

³⁵ Sklar (1975, p. 274) reports that more than 4,000 indoor theatres closed down between 1946 and 1956.

blockbusters alone as the smaller theaters catered to the limited audiences in local communities, and thus “required a steady supply of changing features” (Doherty, 2002, p. 25). As Kevin Heffernan explains, for the smaller theaters “[l]ow-budget genre films were important to the survival [...]. A steady supply of product throughout the year was critical to these theatres: even a marginal or unsuccessful box-office performance kept the doors of the theater open and enabled the snack bar to help finance the operation’s mortgage and payroll” (Heffernan, 2004, p. 66). This opened a space for the new generation of exploitation pictures to fill the gaps in the exhibition (and production) schedule left open by the decreasing outlet of the majors in terms of volume.

New low-budget operators explicitly catered to the teenage audience – the demographic that now came to comprise the main movie-going public (Doherty, 2002; Flynn & McCarthy, 1975, p. 42; Corman & Jerome, 1990, p. 42; Hoberman & Rosenbaum, 1991, pp. 115-116). Prior to the 1950s, teenagers were rarely targeted as a separate demographic with their own characteristic patterns of consumption and cultural activities that set them apart from adults as well as children. However, in the 1950s not only movies but also other media forms such as music (e.g., rock ‘n’ roll) and comic books (e.g., EC Comics publications such as *Tales from the Crypt* and *Mad Magazine*), saw a proliferation of cultural expressions catering especially to a teenage audience, often positioning itself in opposition to ‘adult’ tastes and values.

As parents and children increasingly came to spend their time within the seclusion of the private home, teenagers sought their entertainment elsewhere. Going to the movies provided the newly emerging demographic of teenagers with one of the few arenas they could, at least to a certain degree, claim as their own. While previously film-going was to a larger extent an activity that involved the whole family, teenagers during the 1950s increasingly explored movie theaters on their own, with friends and dates, free from parental supervision (Doherty, 2002). The

films themselves were often of less importance to the teenage audience. Movie theatres and drive-ins provided opportunities to hang out with friends and dates, and thus movie-going typically served more as a social event than a cultural experience, as attention would often be directed elsewhere than towards the screen. Movies catering especially to an adolescent audience became a special focus as exhibitors sought to explore the emerging teenage market. Doherty (2002) outlines categories such as rock 'n' roll pictures, juvenile delinquency films, horror, as well as what he labels "clean teenpics" as genres that sought to exploit the urges of a 1950s teenage audience.

Drive-in cinemas³⁶ and urban neighborhood theaters increasingly turned towards a younger audience looking for a fun night out. This further helped along a temporary resurrection of the double bill, as this format catered to teenagers looking to spend time away from home. However, "[u]nlike classic Hollywood's double bills, which served up a short, cheap B movie for dessert after the main-course A-production, the teenpic double bill paired two films similar in budget, length, and kind" (Doherty, 2002, p. 91).³⁷ Also, double bills increased concession stand sales, generating substantial profits for exhibitors (Doherty, 2002, p. 92). Drive-in operators especially found the double bill lucrative, attracting teenagers to spend a whole night out at their premises. Besides movies and concession stands, drive-ins would often offer other attractions and activities,³⁸ making them a popular

³⁶ The number of drive-ins increased drastically in the postwar years, and went together with a rise in automobile sales and the growth of the suburbs. Cheap vacant land could be turned into a profitable business with small investments and risks involved. The number of drive-ins would rise from 554 in 1947 to 4700 in 1958 (Belton, 1992, p. 76).

³⁷ From 1956 onwards, AIP started teaming up their pictures into double feature packages, which were offered to the exhibitors at a percentage price lower than the cost of a single major movie. Mark Thomas McGee reports that this was a strategic move by Arkoff and Nicholson in order to secure percentage rates rather than flat rental fees on their movies (McGee, 1996, p. 42). The company switched from double bills to single releases in the early 1960s.

³⁸ Besides concession stands, which often were a greater source of profit than the box-office turnover, more sophisticated drive-ins would during their heyday offer a number of other

destination for teenagers seeking entertainment and spaces for social interaction. Double bills were also well suited to teenage dating rituals in the 1950s,³⁹ prolonging the time a young couple could spend together before having to return to their respective homes (Doherty, 2002, p. 92, p. 124; Heffernan, 2004, p. 68). This was reflected in the double bill programming where one film that targeted the female market was often featured along with another catering to the male demographic (Doherty, 2002, p. 91). Drive-ins served as arenas for young audiences seeking thrills and unsupervised social gatherings, and unlike the charade of educational and redeeming merits characteristic of the screenings of classical exploitation films the drive-ins could offer pure and simple hedonism, free of any moralistic pretense.⁴⁰ The rowdy atmosphere typical of the drive-in made it difficult for the film's narrative and character development to capture the audience's attention; instead, hilarious and spectacular images were what stirred the interest of the audience while at the same time complementing other ongoing activities. Hence, the distracted and fleeting viewing practices in the drive-ins were in many respects closer to what media scholars have described as characteristics of television audiences (see e.g., Ellis, 1992). In this respect, the difference between the teenagers at the drive-ins and movie theatres and the family audiences in front of the television sets at home was characterized more by social setting than by practices of viewing.

The products desired by drive-ins and neighborhood theaters were movies that were cheap and sensational. Like the earlier exploitation films, they were produced quickly and inexpensively, with little concern for extravagant production

facilities, including dancing, playgrounds, golf and other sport facilities in order to attract an expanding audience (see Taylor, 2002; Belton, 1992, p. 78).

³⁹ May (1999, p. 88, p. 105) makes the case that dating first emerged in the 1920s and by the 1950s this ritual was an integral part of American youth culture.

⁴⁰ As David F. Friedman explains, drive-ins provided younger audiences with opportunities to "attend 'forbidden films' anonymously, not concerned that a teacher, minister, parent, or relative might spot a showgoer standing in line outside a four-wall house" (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 89).

values or intricate plots. Intriguing titles,⁴¹ original catch-phrases, and dazzling posters were essential ingredients in this new form of exploitation, where films had to be marketed aggressively in order to lure audiences into the theaters and drive-ins. This practice can be seen in the trailers for these films, which increasingly were utilized to exploit any element that might potentially appeal to the target audience. Indeed, in many cases the trailers far surpassed the actual films in terms of production and entertainment value as the condensed montage format intensified a film's sensational elements while at the same time leaving aside the often boring materials filling most of the screen time (Colavito, 2003). As such, with these new exploitation movies the advertisement campaign could often be as, or even more, important as the film itself. This was reflected in production practices as well. For instance, AIP would often come up with a title, or even a poster, before a script had materialized, much less the actual production. As Sam Arkoff explains with regard to Roger Corman's films for AIP, the production company would often approach the director with a project, title, or a poster, and Corman would then come up with a story and direct the movie (Corman & Jerome, 1990, p. 26; also see McGee, 1996, p. 54).

Pushing boundaries

Besides the turn towards 'going big' in terms of technological advancements, Hollywood moviemakers from the 1950s onwards also tried to outflank television in terms of content and controversy – as mentioned above, by showing what the TV screen could not put on display. Increasingly films started challenging the authority of the Production Code, and “[i]n confluence with wider changes in American culture and motivated by a keen sense of self-preservation, the motion picture industry moved gingerly into zones it had traditionally left untouched” (Doherty, 2002, p. 26).

⁴¹ Examples include titles such as *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), *The Beast with a Million Eyes* (1955), and *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957).

Although Hollywood was still operating within rather tight restrictions with regard to acceptable content, daring and controversial topics increasingly found their way into movies from the mid-50s onwards.⁴²

As these shifts happened within Hollywood, the low-budget production companies initially followed a rather careful and conservative pattern, as “[t]he ‘formula pic’ peddled by the low-budget producers and played mainly in the smaller houses was a scion of the B picture and, in appearance, all but indistinguishable from its parent” (Doherty, 2002, p. 29). As Schaefer argues, most of these productions were similar to classical exploitation films in terms of advertising more than what they could actually deliver, while “[t]he films themselves were narratives in the strict Hollywood cinema mode, eschewing the educational or titillating spectacle that had differentiated classical exploitation from Hollywood product” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 331). However, the differences between the various operators in the ‘new’ exploitation field could be vast. In the early 1960s, as AIP and directors/producers like Roger Corman and William Castle increased the budgets and production values of their films, room was made for new operators in the micro-budget league.⁴³ Thus, while AIP and Roger Corman veered towards the traditional B format, concentrating on escapist and adventurous science fiction and horror movies, other, ultra low-budget operators such as Herschell Gordon Lewis, Doris Wishman and Ray Dennis Steckler moved towards a more explicit exploitation format. These independent

⁴² Doherty (2002, p. 27) mentions films like *The Moon is Blue* (1953), *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955), *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), *Bigger Than Life* (1956), *Bachelor Party* (1957), *Baby Doll* (1956), *Storm Center* (1956) and *God’s Little Acre* (1958) as examples of Hollywood productions exploring new and contested territories. Later films like *Peyton Place* (1957), *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* (1959), and *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), would venture even further towards controversial subject matters. Topics explored in these films include non-marital sexual relations, homosexuality, underage brides, mental illness, and drug abuse.

⁴³ As Heffernan explains: “[i]n December 1959, Arkoff announced AIP’s plans to release fewer films with higher budgets as part of the company’s attempts to become the industry’s ‘ninth major.’ AIP’s *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), the second film in the Corman Poe cycle after *House of Usher* (1960), represents the studio’s new approach to distribution and more upscale films in color and widescreen” (Heffernan, 2004, p. 106). Later in the 1960s and the early 1970s, Corman, along with Castle and Russ Meyer, enjoyed/endured spells working for major studios, with mixed success.

operators had no backing from production companies and their films were usually financed on a one-by-one basis, relying upon personal funds and/or private investors. Furthermore, while the films of AIP stayed far away from controversial content and would not explore any taboo topics until after they had already been covered by the major studios (McGee, 1996, p. 139), the new breed of independent operators were deliberately at the forefront in exploring daring and controversial materials, making up for their miniscule budgets with lax displays of 'skin and sin.'

A major difference between 'classical' and 'new' exploitation is the emphasis on narrative and diegesis. The need to create a diegetic universe and a more or less plausible fictional storyline replaces the earlier emphasis on shocking truths. New hybrid genres emerged, drawing on elements of sensationalism and titillation yet still within the format of a fairly traditional plot and storyline. Sex, not surprisingly, was the first and perhaps most important area to be explored, through the new sub-genre that came to be known as "sexploitation" (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 337-339). Starting from Russ Meyer's 1959 production *The Immoral Mr. Teas*, fictional features emphasizing sexual content and partial nudity became a popular path for low-budget filmmakers to follow. The 'nudie-cuties,' as these early sexploitation comedies were called, had a brief but successful span in the early 1960s, before being replaced by darker and seedier sexploitation subgenres like 'roughies' or 'kinkies,' introducing films with atmospheres that were more violent and disturbing. These films predated the advent of explicit hardcore pornography in the early 1970s.⁴⁴

The "sexploitation" boom went together with the burgeoning art film scene and the more prevalent sexual imagery often found in foreign (mainly European) film imports. As Schaefer explains, "the line between art cinema and exploitation was often a thin one" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 331) as these films increasingly were exhibited

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the shift from sexploitation to hardcore pornography feature films, see Schaefer (2002).

in the same venues, catering to audiences seeking other experiences than those offered by mainstream Hollywood. As David F. Friedman more bluntly explains,

In the postwar decade, a large segment of American moviegoers began seeking and patronizing films more realistic and more daring than the pabulum product prescribed by the industry's moral watchdogs [...] some six hundred intimate, band-box 'art-theaters' opened in upscale major city neighborhoods, suburbs, and college towns, exhibiting foreign-made, subtitled films, documentaries, and old American movie classics [...] [T]here were two distinct marketplaces where more-candid-than-mainstream movies could be profitably proffered, one for the select, sophisticated white-wine-and-canapés crowd, the other, and much larger one, for the less discriminating, cold-beer-and-greaseburger gang. As diverse as the two audiences were, both were intent, oddly enough, on viewing pictures in which human female epidermis was exposed. The more skin to be seen, the more patrons lined up to see it. Weary of morally safe, but intellectually immature, motion-picture entertainment, snob and slob alike sought the naked truth in their filmfare (Friedman & de Nevi, 1990, p. 100).

Thus, as Schaefer explains, “[b]y the early 1960s, the terms art theater and art film had become synonymous with nudity” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 336). Art cinema and new exploitation alike offered more daring alternatives to Hollywood and traditional B pictures, combining formal experimentation and explicit content. Differences between art films and exploitation films were further diminished by the often heavily re-edited versions of European movies imported in the US by exploitation distributors. By removing the ‘boring’ parts and upping the pace of a film, as well as often inserting some additional sexual material, these distributors catered to the exploitation crowd while at the same time drawing upon art house credentials (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 335-337).⁴⁵ Escaping the stigma often associated

⁴⁵ For instance, the Ingmar Bergman film *A Summer with Monika* (1953) was re-edited by Kroger Babb from its original running time of 95 minutes down to 62 minutes, before being distributed in the US under the title *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl* (Friedman & de Nevi, 1990, pp. 100-102). Thus two different versions of this film were distributed in the US, the

with exploitation films, these productions further increased their potential audience as they could run in the more 'respectable' art house theaters.

What the imports, along with the new teenage-targeted horror and science fiction as well as sexploitation films, demonstrated was that outlandish, exotic, and forbidden attractions could now be seen within narrative fiction cinema without the need for justifications based on truthfulness and educational merits. Monsters, killers, incredible creatures, and half-naked bodies could be presented on-screen, as long as the films did not explicitly violate any production codes or local censorship regulations. This more permissive and flexible climate allowed for the production of more daring material. A space was opened for the new exploiters to outdo their competitors in terms of explicit content, which in this context meant sex or violence, or combinations of both. As I will explain below, with reference to the conceptual framework of Tom Gunning, the new exploitation films became a cinema of attraction as well as a cinema of narrative integration.

Exploitation as a cinema of attractions

Schaefer claims that the classical exploitation movies' "reliance on spectacle as [their] organizing principle" together with their mode of production created "an experience for the spectator that can best be described as delirium" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 43). He explicitly links the centrality of spectacle in exploitation films to the "cinema of attractions," as defined by Tom Gunning (Schaefer, 1999, p. 38, p. 77).

In the 1980s, Gunning, both on his own (Gunning, 2006a; 1993) and in collaboration with Andre Gaudreault (Gaudreault & Gunning, 2006) developed the concept of cinema of attractions (or, as it is called in his joint article with Gaudreault, "systems of monstrative attractions"), in relation to particular emergent tendencies within early cinema. Prior to sometime around 1906, Gunning argues, the cinema of

original *A Summer with Monika* played art house theaters, while the edited *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl* catered to exploitation audiences (Schaefer, 1999. pp. 335-336).

attractions was the dominant format for motion pictures, before it eventually became subordinated to a cinema dominated by narrative. Gunning argues that early filmmakers like Lumiere and Melies saw cinema “less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 382). The relation to the viewer is here key; the cinema of attractions is characterized by “its ability to *show* something” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 382, emphasis in original). The cinema of attraction possesses a force flowing *from* the images *towards* the audience, drawing attention to itself regardless of narrative function. Thus rather than narrative integration and character identification, the elements of attraction display a direct appeal to the viewer in form of a spectacle or event which in and of itself grabs the viewer’s attention (Gunning, 2006a, p. 384). Gunning explicitly labels the cinema of attractions as exhibitionist, in contrast to “the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analyzed by Christian Metz” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 382; also see Gunning, 1993, p. 5). For Gunning, as an analytic concept, the cinema of attractions posed a different and more positive alternative to the negative project to unmask and critique ideology as well as “reactionary and regressive psychological states” (Gunning, 2006b, p. 32), in other words, the approach based on an alliance of semiotics, (post)structuralism, ideology critique, and Lacanian psychoanalysis that gained the predominant position in film studies from the late 1960s onwards through scholars such as Christian Metz (1974a; 1974b; 1982), Laura Mulvey (2001), Stephen Heath (1981), and Kaja Silverman (1983; 1988). Gunning stresses that he finds aspects of this critical project valuable but he is more skeptical of how this critique has “led to a lack of curiosity about the range of film practices throughout film history (in popular as well as avant-garde work) and the sorts of spectatorial activities they cued” (Gunning, 2006b, p. 32). Rather than excitement and curiosity, “[t]his monolithic description encouraged film students to hold a complacent sense of their own superiority in relation to the bulk of film practices” (Gunning, 2006b, p.

32). Hence, for Gunning the concept of attractions offers a way to explore how cinema engages and addresses audiences in a direct, exhibitionistic manner without framing an analysis as a negative critique or unmasking.

The cinema of attractions is less a monolithic model than an “other purpose” that needs to be “factored in” when studying early cinema and Gunning makes explicit that his “emphasis on display rather than storytelling” is not to be seen as the binary opposite of narrative (Gunning, 1993, p. 4). What follows from this perspective is an impetus towards exploring the dynamic relations between narrative material and non-narrative attractions (Gunning, 1993, p. 4). The cinema of attractions and the cinema of narrative integration are in practice inseparable (Elsaesser, 2006), yet analytically distinct. Gunning makes explicit that the cinema of attractions is not necessarily opposed to the fascination with storytelling central to cinema from D. W. Griffith onwards (Gunning, 2006a, p. 382). Although narrative gained a position of dominance, attractions did not disappear. Cinematic attractions can be found throughout the history of cinema, not only in avant-garde practices but also as a component in narrative films, most evident in genres like the musical (Gunning, 2006a, p. 382) or what Gunning labels the “tamed attractions” of the “Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 387). What characterizes these “tamed attractions” is the integration of the elements of attraction within the coherent whole of the film. The attractions here function as support of, rather than disruptions from, the film’s narrative structure. This synthesis of attractions and narrative integration within popular cinema serves to maintain a balance, to keep attractions subdued and calculated. Attractions thus are found *within* an integrated narrative, rather than as ruptures and breaks carrying the revolutionary possibilities of attractions Gunning sees advocated by the theoretical writings of Sergei Eisenstein and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (Gunning, 2006a, pp. 384-387).

What Gunning finds appealing about Eisenstein and Marinetti is their attempt at aligning avant-garde practices with an enthusiasm for mass culture. He argues that “it was precisely the exhibitionistic quality of turn-of-the-century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde – its freedom from the creation of a diegesis, its accent on direct stimulation” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 385). With the benefit of hindsight, Eisenstein and Marinetti’s more political aspirations behind their interest in the attractions of mass culture – “organizing popular energy for radical purpose” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 385) – may appear naïve and utopian, or even potentially dangerous, as with Marinetti’s fascism. Nonetheless, their lines of thought point to the aesthetic and political potentials of a cinema of attractions, as attractions are not contained within structures of ideology or hegemony. Attractions designate gaps in or in-between such strata of signification. However, Gunning seems to differ from Eisenstein in terms of what constitute attractions in cinema. For Eisenstein, the concept of attraction designates a

demonstrable fact (an action, an object, a phenomenon, a conscious combination, and so on) that is known and proven to exercise a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience and that, combined with others, possesses the characteristic of concentrating the audience’s emotions in any direction dictated by the production’s purpose (Eisenstein, 1988, p. 41).

Thus, Eisenstein sees attractions as “demonstrable” stimuli, from which a “known and proven” response is given.⁴⁶ In contrast, Gunning approaches attractions as open-ended and in principle non-determinable.

⁴⁶ In Eisenstein’s writings, these behaviorist tendencies went together with a utopian belief in the emancipatory and innovative potentials of the dialectical principles of montage. Robert Stam hence makes the claim that “[w]ithin Eisenstein’s inspired eclecticism, a technician, reductive approach – filmmaker as engineer, or as Pavlovian lab technician – coexisted with a quasi-mystical approach emphasizing ‘pathos’ and ‘ecstasy,’ an oceanic feeling of oneness with others and the world” (Stam, 2000, pp. 39-40).

What Eisenstein and Gunning have in common is an approach that formulates cinematic images as something distinct from a language or a system of signs. Rather, cinematic images (can) have effects that function as attractions – appealing directly to the viewer, without being mediated through chains of signification. Gunning explains the significance of his return to Eisenstein in terms of “a need to rediscover the Utopian promise the cinema offered” in the 1920s and 1930s when early “avant-garde thinkers and practitioners saw revolutionary possibilities (both political and aesthetic) in the novel ways cinema took hold of its spectator,” something he sees as a “contrast to the ideological critique of the cinematic apparatus that had dominated Film Theory post-1968” (Gunning, 2006b, p. 32). Thus, for Gunning, a cinema of attractions has theoretical, and indirectly also political, implications for film analysis.

The exhibitionist tendencies of the cinema of attractions are according to Schaefer “at the heart of exploitation” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 77). He stresses that it is through their focus upon “exhibitionistic confrontation rather than diegetic absorption” (Gunning, 2006a, p. 384) that classical exploitation producers managed to “differentiate their films from the mainstream” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 78). The divisions between fiction and non-fiction were “consistently erased” in the exploitation film; as these films repeatedly assured “that their audience would ‘See! See! See!’ Fiction and nonfiction merged in the classical exploitation film, and spectacle served as their organizing and unifying principle” (Schaefer, 1999, p. 79). This exhibitionistic address to the audience depends upon what Gunning in his comments on the cinema of attractions describes as “arousing and satisfying visual curiosity through a direct and acknowledged act of display” (Gunning, 1993, p. 6). In various ways, more or less integrated within some sort of narrative or message, the classical exploitation films attracted their audiences through their difference from the classical Hollywood films.

Gaps, and even contradictions, may occur between a film's elements of attraction and its ideological positioning. Exploitation cinema did not, for the most part, set out to be politically subversive; rather the imperative was to make a profit. The main logic followed by the producers of these films was the logic of capital. Furthermore, as Schaefer (1999, p. 134) argues, the classical exploitation films predominantly took a conservative stance on the social and moral issues portrayed. Nevertheless, the classical exploitation films could offer their audiences "a good deal of interpretative leeway as they approach these movies" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 94); and further, beyond matters of interpretation, these films could often attract their audiences in terms of evoking visceral responses and repulsions. Operating with miniscule production budgets, exploitation filmmakers could not outspend the majors in terms of attractions put on display. They had to surpass what the studios could offer, or rather, offer something completely different, but at a minimal cost. This often resulted in cinematic attractions whose uncontained and disruptive aspects potentially promoted experiences and sensations which could go in unexpected and uncalled for directions. Similarly, the 'new' exploitation films emerging from the late 1950s onwards, although often conservative and prejudiced in terms of content and ideology, could, often inadvertently, bring about attractions that operate in ways not contained within the films' narratives and ideological frameworks. Thus, the most interesting elements of these films are often to be found in their juxtaposition of narrative and attractions (see Chapter Two).

My own concern in this dissertation is not so much to categorize films in terms of historical periods or genres as it is to explore the relations between narrative and attraction as these are played out stylistically and thematically in and across American cinema from the late 1950s to the end of the 1960s. Rather than talking about a specific cinematic style or a fundamental shift of cinematic paradigms, I will explore the affinities and variations between *different* cinematic

elements simultaneously at work in and across a number of films, and the shifting constellations of these elements. In the remainder of this chapter I will thus look closer at how exhibitionistic elements of attractions surfaced in a number of films from the late 1950s and early 1960s, and discuss these elements in relation to the narrative integration in these films.

New attractions

The new breed of exploitation genre movies from the late 1950s onwards was characterized by a co-joining of elements of attraction with an emphasis on narrative integration. The monsters and mad scientists prevalent in these films functioned both as spectacles and as plot devices. Still, the films' rather standardized and predictable plots would often mainly serve as a means to string together spectacular images of hideous creatures and over-the-top characters. This trend was not specific to horror and science fiction genres but could be found across the new movies targeting teenage audiences. A typical example would be the beach party films of the early 1960s, such as AIP's *Beach Party* (1963), *Muscle Beach Party* (1964) and *Bikini Beach* (1964) (all directed by William Asher and starring Frankie Avalon as the main character), where the main audience appeal was established by song-and-dance numbers and swimwear-sporting teenagers, rather than by the films' not very original romantic comedy plots.⁴⁷

The move towards integrating a cinema of attractions with a narrative format was prevalent also in major film productions of the 1950s. In a detailed analysis, Kevin Heffernan explores the interplay between narrative integration and the cinema of attractions in the 1953 Warner horror movie *House of Wax*, the first 3-D feature to

⁴⁷ For a hilarious attempt at combining the beach party movie with the monster horror genre see *Sting of Death* (1965), directed by William Grefe. This film further exemplifies the common trend of mixing together new exploitation genres, and thus also adding together exploitative elements of attraction.

be released by a major studio (Heffernan, 2004, p. 24): “The Horror film,” Heffernan argues,

was particularly amenable to the bizarre effects that could be achieved through a foregrounding of 3-D and stereophonic sound. The stylistic and narrational norms of the horror genre proved particularly well suited to negotiating the conflicting demands between the cinema of attractions (‘3-D gimmicks,’ in the trade parlance of 1953) and the cinema of narrative integration (Heffernan, 2004, p. 24).

The film’s emphasis on shock and spectacle resulted in overwhelmingly negative reviews, yet still the film initially became a box-office hit (Heffernan, 2004, p. 34).⁴⁸ Likewise, Hollywood’s turn towards the blockbuster in the 1950s went together with a stronger emphasis on attractions relative to narrative. While the major studios in the 1950s moved towards a cinema of attractions in terms of technology (color, widescreen, etc.), special effects, and impressive settings, the independents moved towards a cinema of attractions in terms of content and visual spectacle – sex, violence and monsters. These productions could not afford to be at the forefront of technological development. As Heffernan explains,

Whereas studio films such as *House of Wax* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* [1954] had been promoted to showcase technological advances in movie presentation, later horror programmers from independents such as *The She Creature* (1956), *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *Macabre* (1957), *The Screaming Skull* (1958), and *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959) were publicized with an unusual emphasis on their topical or horrific content. These shrill come-ons were a direct consequence of the marginal or at least secondary role these films played in the exhibition marketplace (Heffernan, 2004, p. 64).

⁴⁸ As Heffernan (2004, p. 35) explains, the success of *House of Wax* turned out to be short lived since only a limited number of theatres were willing to invest in the expensive 3-D technology required to project the film.

Technology could be utilized also in more inexpensive versions, as exemplified by the success of the British Hammer horror movies – a trend that started with the success of *Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957.⁴⁹ Heffernan argues that “[l]ike the 3-D effects and period setting of *House of Wax*, the color in *Curse of Frankenstein* served the efforts of the filmmakers to give the film a high-end gloss in Hollywood’s ‘color-optional’ period of the late fifties and to add an extra emphasis to the unprecedented levels of onscreen gore that the film offered as its major attraction” (Heffernan, 2004, p. 48). With glossy gothic productions in vivid color, Hammer became hugely influential in the horror market, displaying spectacular scenes of blood and gore hitherto unseen in feature productions.⁵⁰ Hammer’s gory images – like the chopped off body parts and jars containing human eyes and brains in *Curse of Frankenstein*, or images of blood running down Dracula’s cheeks and his victims throats or gushing from the chests of vampires as stakes are driven through their hearts in *Horror of Dracula* (1958) – were soon to be replicated in American low-budget productions.

In the late 1950s blood increasingly took on a shock value in American feature films. Several films featured short sequences where the narrative flow of the films was intercepted by sensational blood images. This can perhaps most explicitly be seen in *The Return of Dracula* from 1958, a film directed by Paul Landres for the small independent production company Gramercy Pictures. In the late 1950s Gramercy produced four low-budget horror and science fiction films, all to be released by United Artists (Weaver, 1991). A vampire movie with a contemporary setting, *The Return of Dracula* is a stylish and competently produced film, budgeted

⁴⁹ The British film company Hammer enjoyed tremendous success in the US with their late 1950s productions that besides *Curse of Frankenstein* included titles such as *Horror of Dracula* (1958) and *The Mummy* (1959) as well as series of sequels initiated by titles such as *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958) and *The Brides of Dracula* (1960). For an account of the history of Hammer see McKay (2007).

⁵⁰ Other influential foreign horror titles from this period include *Diabolique* (1955), *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) and *Black Sunday* (1960).

at \$125,000, yet its commercial success was only moderate (Weaver, 1991).⁵¹ The film's storyline unfolds in a relatively conventional manner, and its elements of suspense and horror are largely evoked through atmosphere and suggestion, showing restraint in portrayals of violence and mutilation. This somber atmosphere and stylistic tone is broken in a scene where the undead victim of the vampire has a stake driven through her chest. As the stake is hammered into her heart, the film cuts to a close up of red blood gushing out of her chest, although all other images in the film are in black and white. The color insert is very brief but the contrast between the red blood and the surrounding black and white images evokes a vivid effect.

Paul Landres, the film's director, claims the effect was done for shock value: "Color was not in common use at that time, so what could be more shocking than to suddenly have the rich red color of blood practically come popping off the screen" (Weaver, 1991, p. 92). The technical challenges of this scene were associated not so much with the execution of the blood effect, as with the insertion of color images into a black-and-white film. The blood effect itself was accomplished by the film's producers, Arthur Gardner and Jules V. Levy, together with an insert crew. They filled a goat bladder with makeup blood, which Gardner held tight while Levy punctured it with a sharpened stake, making the blood burst and flow freely. It took three or four attempts to make the effect work (Weaver, 1991, pp. 89-90; Johnson, 1996, p. 197). The color footage was later inserted into the film prints, a process that came at a significant financial cost. As Landres explains, "[t]he original cost of the color film and the camera was the least of it. It got involved in negative cutting, the number of color prints that were made and, most important, cutting the color

⁵¹ The Gramercy producers later claimed that the limited commercial success of their 1950s horror and science fiction movies was due to the fact that United Artists at that time was unfamiliar with these genres, and simply did not know how to best distribute and promote the films. Thus, the producers claim, the films would most likely been better off if distributed by one of the smaller companies like AIP (Weaver, 1991, p. 92).

footage into all the theatrical prints. All I can say is that it was not inexpensive" (Weaver, 1991, pp. 91-92). Thus, the cost associated with this blood effect was mainly incurred in post-production, while the effect itself was cheaply made.

Although, technically speaking, a fairly simple special effect, as described above, the combination of the red blood and the images in black-and-white creates a startling effect in *The Return of Dracula*. This trick of inserting red blood into a black-and-white film reappeared in another film the following year, 1959, with William Castle's *The Tingler*. Like *The Return of Dracula*, *The Tingler* was a low-budget independent production, distributed by a major Hollywood company, this time Columbia. However, the two films differ significantly in style. While *The Return of Dracula* followed a traditional narrative format, only broken by a singular color insert of gushing blood, *The Tingler* was fundamentally centered on spectacular gimmicks. In this film, the narrative plays a secondary role, and predominantly serves as a connecting backdrop to a series of sensational attractions. Often these attractions came in an explicitly visceral form, most evidently with the film's *Percepto* gimmick, which offered physical sensations to audience members through vibrators installed in select seats in the theaters which were triggered at key moments in the film.

Vincent Price stars as Dr. Warren Chapin, a pathologist researching the effects of fear. Dr. Chapin discovers that the experience of fear triggers and feeds an organism residing in the spine. This organism, called the tingler, grows in size as we experience fear. The only way to stop the growth of the tingler inside your body is to scream out loud when fear occurs. William Castle himself appears on screen in a prelude to the film, explaining the existence of the tingler, and, of course, advising the film's audiences to scream out loud as a protection against the tingler.

In the film's most terrifying scene, a deaf and mute woman experiences a series of horrific sights, possibly a hallucination under the influence of LSD. As the scene unfolds, she flees into the bathroom when all of a sudden bright red blood

flows from the taps in the sink. She tries to escape but the door slams shut and when she turns towards the bathtub, she discovers that it is entirely filled with blood. A blood-drenched hand emerges from the tub, and reaches towards her. Unlike *The Return of Dracula*, where the blood insert only lasts for a brief moment, this sequence in *The Tingler* goes on for one full minute, and the terrifying atmosphere intensifies until the woman finally succumbs to the growth of her tingler. Unable to let out a scream, she drops down dead.

This blood scene in *The Tingler* was filmed entirely in color. In order to produce the contrast between the red liquid and the black-and-white surroundings, the entire set, with exception of the white porcelain sink and bathtub, was painted white/beige/grey, and the actress wore matching makeup, in order to resemble the tones of black-and-white film. The scene was then shot with the red blood as the only colored element within the frame. These color shots were then edited together with the black-and-white film, and as such the effect was created, where the red blood appears as the sole object of color within the film (Johnson, 1996, p. 198).

According to Heffernan, "horror films like *Curse of Frankenstein*, *The Tingler* (1959), *Psycho*, and *The Hypnotic Eye* [1960] began to stretch the permissible limits of violence and gore. The ascendancy of the cinema of attractions at the expense of the cinema of narrative integration was also to affect traditional aesthetic norms of narrative plausibility, character consistency, and verisimilitude of acting as well" (Heffernan, 2004, p. 68). Creating a believable diegetic universe often became a secondary imperative, and the films began to appeal to their audiences in an exhibitionistic rather than voyeuristic manner.

Cinematic attractions, according to Gunning, possess their own intensities (Gunning, 1993, p. 6). Through sudden bursts of presence attractions are displayed, like making a call "Here it is! Look at it!" (Gunning, 1993, p. 6). The distinction between narrative and attraction is not simply understood in terms of quantity, a

question of momentary versus more sustained image sequences but, more importantly, in terms of intensity and audience address. The moments of attraction do not merely function in terms of signification but also in terms of affect. In films like *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler* blood came to be displayed in a sensational manner. The blood does not serve a specific narrative function in either film; rather the blood images directly address the audience. However, the two films differ somewhat in this regard. *The Return of Dracula* operates as a generic narrative, apart from the singular moment of attraction when red blood bursts from a woman's chest as a stake is driven through her heart. The blood insert functions as a stand-alone attraction without breaking with the narrative flow of the film. This moment of attraction is not integrated within the narrative but nor does it in any way disrupt or challenge the overall composition of the film. The film offers a shock effect as an *addition* to its narrative but does not provide any tension or disjuncture between the element of attraction and the surrounding narrative. The narrative stands on its own, regardless of the blood insert. *The Tingler*, on the other hand, is fundamentally structured around attractions, something that is made clear already from the very outset of the film, as director William Castle directly addresses the audience and tells them to scream for their lives. The film's content, as well as its mode of audience address and exhibition, is filled with pranks and sensational elements. The film's narrative serves to support these elements of attraction, rather than the other way around. Hence, both of these films rely on shock elements but while *The Return of Dracula* is modeled on the classical Hollywood horror genre pictures, *The Tingler* follows a format closer to the classical exploitation film.⁵²

Despite these differences, what is remarkable about both *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler*, in this context, is how the images of blood seek to affect

⁵² I have elsewhere (Rodje, forthcoming) discussed in further detail *The Tingler's* mode of audience address and exhibition, and how this relates to the classical exploitation format.

audiences in ways not determined by the films' narrative structures but rather operate as exhibitionistic intensities. The affective potential of these images can be contrasted with the use of blood in the 1949 movie *The Set-Up*, a film remarkably brutal for its time. In a tightly constructed storyline, *The Set-Up* centers on the fate of Stoker (Robert Ryan), an aging boxer, facing a young up-and-coming fighter, Tiger Nelson (Hal Fieberling). Unbeknownst to Stoker, the match is fixed, as his own manager has taken a bribe from Tiger's manager. Confident that Stoker will stand no chance in the fight, his manager does not let Stoker in on the set-up, keeping all the money for himself. Against all odds, Stoker endures numerous beatings during the match and eventually succeeds in knocking out Tiger. His manager takes off with the money, and Stoker is left alone in the dressing room, exhausted from the match, when confronted by Tiger and his management team. Naturally, Stoker pleads ignorance to their accusations but eventually he is subjected to their vicious retaliation in the alley outside the boxing hall. Stoker's hand is crushed and his face badly bruised. The display of the beating and its aftermath is remarkably explicit in its brutality. The scene makes an emotional impact, calling for empathy with Stoker's pain and suffering, as well as feelings of anger towards his perpetrators.⁵³

Arguably, *The Set-Up* presents the viewer with emotions detectable through a textual analysis. The narrative framing of the blood images in this film strongly conditions the affective responses evoked. As viewers we are invited to identify or empathize with Stoker and his plight, while feeling anguish about how he is betrayed and innocently made to suffer. The blood emphasizes his pain and suffering, and strengthens the emotional relations between his character and us as viewers. These emotions are reintegrated into the film's narrative and are rather strictly conditioned

⁵³ Besides my own personal experiences while watching the film, these audience reactions are also expressed in a number of comments on the IMDB discussion board for *The Set-Up* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041859/board>, February 16, 2011).

by this signifying structure. The degrees of affective freedom are thus minimized, and the possible connections to be made are relatively strictly determined.

This situation is rather different with *The Return of Dracula* and especially *The Tingler*. Whereas blood within classical Hollywood cinema was utilized as a signifier, to provide information to the audience, guiding the viewer through the film, it now increasingly operates in ways that are not contained within a film's narrative or structures of signification. Blood here is used as an element of attraction or repulsion, while its appeal to the viewer is not determined or captured by the grids of signification that structure the films' narratives. Unlike *The Set-Up*, where blood emphasizes and intensifies the emotional impact constructed through the film's narrative, in *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler* blood does not serve a specific function in terms of narrative or as a plot device. These blood images engage their viewers in an exhibitionistic manner, almost jumping out of the screen and screaming "Boo!" in the face of the audience. Although perhaps using crude and simple effects, these films exemplify how blood from the late 1950s onwards came to take on new roles in American motion pictures. What these images point towards is how blood could be put into new and affective uses in cinematic images. This is the theme I will explore further in the next chapters of this dissertation, starting with the early gore exploitation movies of Herschell Gordon Lewis and David F. Friedman.

Chapter 2: Seeing Red, Acting Dead: Blood and guts in the early gore films of Herschell Gordon Lewis

In this chapter I introduce and discuss the early gore films of exploitation director Herschell Gordon Lewis: *Blood Feast* (1963), *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964), and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965). These films are situated in the aftermath of the developments described in my previous chapter. The new breed of exploitation features emerging in the late 1950s combined sensational imagery, such as blood, with a narrative feature format. As mentioned earlier, when independent production companies such as AIP moved upscale in the early 1960s room was left for new operators in the micro-budget league. These filmmakers were unable to compete in terms of elaborate plots or production value, and thus had to find easily exploitable attractions to make their films stand apart from their competitors. After the boom of 'nudie-cutie' sexploitation features in the early 1960s, the new exploiters eventually turned to violence and the graphic display of bloodshed.

From this terrain emerged the pioneering blood epics directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis and produced by his partner David F. Friedman. Starting with the landmark 1963 production *Blood Feast*, I will first explore the composition of these films and how their narratives and characters are discursively constituted. Here, I examine how the scenes of violence and bloodshed in these films operate in relation to the demographic and cultural composition of their original audiences. Next follows a discussion of various lenses through which contemporary audiences can address and approach these films. In this section I point to some limitations and problems with approaching these films through ironic and narrowly discursive readings. Following conceptual distinctions by Gilles Deleuze and Eve K. Sedgwick, I rather argue for a more open-ended and affirmative approach. This is the approach I take with me into the final section of the chapter, where I explicitly address how blood operates in *Blood Feast* and its successors. My theoretical agenda is to explore how

the affective intensities of these images productively resonate against, and connect with, the discursive formations of these films. As I will argue, a certain evolution can be traced through the three films discussed in this chapter, from the crude format of *Blood Feast*, where the blood imagery stand in stark contrast to the rudimentary narrative of the film, to the more intricate compositions of *Two Thousand Maniacs* and, especially, *Color Me Blood Red*.

Blood Feast

Introducing explicit bloodshed onto American cinema screens on an unprecedented scale, Herschell Gordon Lewis, as Jonathan Crane argues, “remade the horror film and introduced splatter” (Crane, 2004, p. 160). Produced on miniscule budgets, characterized by rudimentary storylines, over-the-top acting, and technical ineptitude, these films offered blood and gore as their main points of attraction.

Lewis and Friedman did not start out as makers of gore movies. Their earliest productions can be located in the early 1960s ‘nudie cutie’ sub-genre. Films such as *The Prime Time* (1960), *Living Venus* (1960), *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (1961), *Daughter of the Sun* (1962), *Nature’s Playmates* (1962), *Goldilocks and the Three Bares* (1963), *Boin-n-g* (1963), and *Bell, Bare and Beautiful* (1963) – none of which I have seen myself – were reportedly rather unremarkable with their mild-mannered humorous tales and modest displays of nudity (Curry, 1999; Krogh & McCarty, 1983; Palmer, 2000). *Scum of the Earth* (1963) marks a transitional phase in the Friedman/Lewis oeuvre, as this film departs from the light-hearted tone of their earlier films. Known as the first ‘roughie’ (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 306), *Scum of the Earth* tells a grim tale of a young girl being lured into modelling for nude photos. Although modest by today’s standards, the film is remarkable for its portrayal of sex, degradation and violence, presented without any moral or

educational counterpoint. Unlike the classical exploitation films, *Scum of the Earth* could portray these lurid topics without making any redeeming claims about this being a tale of warning against ills and dangers lurking in modern society. Exploitation films no longer had to uphold the illusion of serving the good of society and could now candidly present their sensational topics – providing audiences with nothing but entertainment driven solely by commercial terms. Nonetheless, today *Scum of the Earth* comes across as relatively tame with regards to actual displays of sex and violence. Its lurid aspects are mainly a matter of narrative rather than visual spectacle.

However, a drastic change take place with Lewis and Friedman's most notorious film, *Blood Feast* (1963), known as the first ever splatter picture (McCarty, 1984; Crane, 2004). As Friedman and Lewis explain it, the idea for *Blood Feast* came about when they realized that the early 1960s nudity films had run their course (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 348; Krogh & McCarty, 1983, p. 12; McCarty, 1995, p. 39). Nudist camps and glimpses of semi-nude skin could no longer guarantee solid audience turn-outs, especially since the nudity market increasingly was taken over by more daring foreign imports. Friedman and Lewis sat down and made a list of potential topics to exploit for their next movie. Apparently, one topic stood out – gore (Lewis, 1983, p. xi; Juno & Pauline, 1986, p. 24; Curry, 1999, p. 52; Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 328). The film's script was hammered out in a few days, and soon production could start in Florida where the film was shot in five days (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 320).

The film follows the exploits of Fuad Ramses, a mad caterer on a killing spree to gather ingredients for an ancient Egyptian feast. Ramses kills off young women one by one and from each victim he removes a part of her body. One victim has her brain scooped out, another her tongue ripped out, a third is kidnapped, flogged and drained of blood. What make *Blood Feast* spectacular are these scenes of graphic

violence. In the opening scene (as described in the Prologue) Ramses stabs and dismembers a woman in a bathtub. In the next display of violence, he attacks a young couple making out on a beach. He chops away at the girl with his machete, and slices her head open. After fondling her blood and guts with his hands, he picks up her brain and puts it into his bag before taking off. The woman is left with the top of her head sliced off, with blood and gore oozing out. Then follows the most notorious scene in the film as Ramses attacks and kills a woman in her motel room. He forces her down onto the bed and pulls out her tongue with his bare hands. The woman is left for dead, with blood running from her mouth, covering her face and neck. The next scene of violence in the film is a flashback accompanying a lecture on ancient Egyptian rites. We here see a woman lying down on a slab of stone. A man stands above her wielding a snake, in a smoke-filled location. He stabs the woman in the chest with a knife, and leaves it standing, plunged into her body with blood running across her torso. We see her chest being carved open and her heart pulled out, leaving her with a gaping wound. Ramses' final killing is a part of his rituals in preparing the Egyptian feast. After kidnapping a girl, he chains her to a wall in his back room. She is flogged and her blood collected in an urn, to be mixed with the slabs of meat in the pot Ramses is preparing for his Egyptian feast. The girl is left for dead at Ramses' table, among body parts and bloody human remains.

As Lewis himself explains, these scenes of carnage deliver the main attractions of his gore films. A low-budget independent operator, Lewis saw only one way to make his movies successful (i.e., make money): by offering what major producers neither can nor will deliver (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 351). Lewis' statement in an interview is here worth quoting in full:

When one makes independent film product, there is only one criterion to be used for the production of films, and this is where so many producers waste so much money and then wonder why no one will play their films. The only

film that an independent can make and survive with is a film that the major producers cannot or will not make. I regard this as a physical law. I don't regard this as a theory. It's been proved so many hundreds of times that it's no longer in question. ... They're [the audience] paying the same amount of money they would to see a high-budget film, so if you cannot titillate them with production value, you titillate them with something else (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, pp. 351-352).

Thus, the films had to offer something the major studios did not, and this 'something else' on offer had to be something that appealed to the films' audiences. This begs the question of what kind of audience Lewis and Friedman originally had in mind when these films were produced, as well as the question of how Lewis and Friedman's perception of the composition of their audience was implicitly manifested in their films' content and stylistic features.

The joys of watching women being slaughtered

Who saw the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis when they were first screened? Providing an accurate answer to this question is difficult but a number of indicators can be found. In terms of exhibition, Lewis' films mainly played in grindhouses and rural drive-ins (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 347; p. 357). The Southern states turned out to be especially lucrative (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 357).

While exploitation features mainly catered to single men (Schaefer, 1999; Friedman & De Nevi, 1990), Lewis claims that it was common to bring a date who would join in on the screaming during his gore pictures (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 357). The extent to which girls and women actively choose to watch, or actually appreciate, these films, remains an open question. Nonetheless, Lewis admits that males substantially outnumbered females in the theatres showing *Blood Feast* and similar blood epics. Besides gender, Lewis' audiences were also divided in terms of class and social standing. McCarthy and Flynn (1975, p. 348) describe Lewis' gore audience as "lower class and less educated," and Friedman and Lewis confirm this

impression. As Lewis explains in an interview, “[a] typical audience member would live south of the Mason-Dixon line, would be between twenty-five and forty-five, would live in rural rather than urban circumstances, would probably be male, would not be highly educated, and would have a terrific number of prejudices” (McCarty, 1995, p. 39). Interestingly, despite this demographic description of a stereotypical redneck population, Lewis claims that his films also did well in black residential areas (McCarthy & Flynn, p. 357).

It is hard, and indeed problematic, to draw any conclusions based on such anecdotal data on the Lewis ‘fan base’ when the films were originally shown. However, it does suggest a following among disenfranchised rather than privileged social groups. The films found their audiences among those who, relatively speaking, were falling behind rather than taking part in the economic upswing following World War II. What is interesting is how the socio-economic status of this demographic seems to be the opposite of the social standing of the victims in Lewis and Friedman’s gore pictures.

Overwhelmingly, women suffer more than men in these films. Far more women than men are victims in the films’ heinous acts, and their deaths and dismemberments are often portrayed in much greater graphic detail.⁵⁴ In *Blood Feast*, women are the victims in all the acts of violence. The only exception is the film’s final scene where Ramses himself is accidentally killed by a garbage truck; however, Ramses’ death is displayed in a far less spectacular or gory manner than

⁵⁴ In her influential study *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Carol J. Clover (1992) identifies the marked differences between the portrayals of female and male victims in horror films. Clover argues that the greater emphasis on graphic details in the portrayals of female victims is not to be understood as a result of a misogynistic voyeuristic gaze but rather as an invitation to identify with female victims. Clover thus argues that the main pleasures derived from these films are masochistic rather than sadistic. However, I find the emphasis on suffering and identification with the victim to be far less central in Lewis’ early gore films than in the later slasher movies that are the main focus of Clover’s study. Rather, my argument is that the pleasures found in these films is not primarily operating along a dimension of gender but rather to be understood in terms of social disenfranchisement and resentment.

his victims. Lewis himself claims the choice of young women in the role of victims was a decision made solely on commercial terms, in order to satisfy audience demand (Lewis, *Color Me Blood Red* DVD commentary track). This statement indicates that Lewis had the demands of his audience demographic in mind while making his pictures. Also, his comments point towards the fact that these films were predominantly oriented towards a male (heterosexual) audience – displaying scantily dressed nubile women as victims of grotesque violence.

However, this picture is not crystal clear, as several elements indicate that gender is not the sole, or even the key, characteristic of the victims in Lewis' gore films. For instance, *Two Thousand Maniacs*, Lewis and Friedman's next gore picture, follows a different format in this regard. *Two Thousand Maniacs* tells the story of Pleasant Valley, a rural southern town with a population of 2,000 rather peculiar people. The film's plot takes place during the town's centennial celebrations, when two cars with licence plates from northern states are tricked into following the dirt road leading into the main street of Pleasant Valley. In the first car are two couples, Bea and John Miller and Beverly and David Wells, while in the second car are the film's two protagonists, Ms Terry Adams and her passenger Tom White. White is a school teacher on his way to a conference. After his car broke down, Adams picked him up as a hitchhiker. The six Yankees unwittingly become the main attraction of the celebrations, and plans are underway to kill them off one by one in spectacular manner. The Millers become the first victims in Pleasant Valley. Both of the Millers are lured away for a secret rendezvous with a charming local character, with fatal consequences. Bea Miller has her thumb cut off by her handsome date, and when brought back for some 'treatment' the locals enthusiastically proceed to chop off her whole arm with an axe. The following night the arm ends up roasted on a spit for the barbeque the locals throw in their guests' honour. John Miller, stupid drunk on white lightning, is too busy with a local girl to even notice his wife's arm on the spit. Left

alone with the locals, in his drunken stupor Mr. Miller is told that he's about to take part in a horse race. He's forced down on the ground and rope is tied to his arms and legs so he can be drawn and quartered by four horses. The crowd is left to watch as the horses drag his detached limbs away.

The next couple, Beverly and David Wells, do not fare much better. Interrupted by the locals when they try to leave the hotel the following morning, the couple is separated and each told to join in on the centennial festivities. David Wells is led to a hill top, to take part in what the locals call the 'barrel roll.' Wells is forced into a barrel decorated with confederate flags, before large spikes are hammered into the barrel. The barrel is let go down the slope, and after finally crashing against a pole at the bottom of the hill, Wells' mauled corpse is pulled out and dumped into a nearby river.

Beverly Wells, the final victim, is taken to a large wooden construction with a big rock mounted on a small plate above her head. The town mayor explains the mechanism of the construction, called the 'Teetering Rock.' As a spring mechanism is triggered, the rock will fall down and crush whoever is placed on a larger plate at the bottom of the construction. Despite her wild protests, Beverly is tied down onto the plate, and the game is on. In order to trigger the mechanism someone must throw a rock and hit a bulls eye. The locals eagerly take turns trying to hit the target. As the rocks keep missing their target, the town's mayor walks over to Beverly in between the attempts. He tells her to speak the line: "It ain't fallen yet." Reluctantly, Beverly in the end goes along, and says: "It hasn't fallen yet," for the mayor to reply: "Well, pardon my grammar."

These lines of dialogue underline the class distinctions that characterize the portrayals of the victims in *Two Thousand Maniacs*, as well as in Lewis and Friedman's other films. Beverly's reluctance to use improper grammar, even when in a state of panic, underlines her social standing and sense of elevated status above

the common people inhabiting Pleasant Valley. *Two Thousand Maniacs* plays upon antagonistic relations between the poor rural south and the urban middle-class north, as exemplified by the use of grammar in the dialogue above. Other examples in *Two Thousand Maniacs* can be seen in differences in dress, cars, manners, and so on, between the locals and the visiting Yankees, as well as in the film's plot which reveals Pleasant Valley to be a ghost town, appearing on the centennial of the massacre of the whole town by Union soldiers during the civil war.

Likewise, under closer scrutiny *Blood Feast* also follows similar lines of social antagonism. The young female victims are attractive, and seemingly sexually active; one is killed while making out with her boyfriend on the beach, while another is attacked immediately after being followed by a man to her motel room. The final victim is kidnapped after leaving a cool party in an upscale neighborhood. The girls' upper/middle-class appearance and good social standing can further be seen in their dress and mannerisms.

When considering the composition of the original audience for these movies, it seems plausible that the films' victims do not share the same demographic profile as the typical audience members. Thus, audiences are not invited to identify and sympathize with the victims slaughtered on-screen. Rather, the films feed into already existing biases, connecting with possible feelings of resentment directed towards more privileged social groups. The victims' vanity and stupidity further stir this resentment. The portrayals confirm stereotypes and reinforce perceptions about social groups economically and culturally distant from the audience members.

In his cultural history of (predominantly American) horror, David J. Skal (2001) makes a case for seeing the popularity of American horror in the 1970s and 80s through a lens of class resentment. Pointing to the instant popularity of Stephen King's horror novels, Skal argues that King's first novel "*Carrie* is a ferocious howl of the outsider, a cry of class resentment and social disenfranchisement that found its

public at the precise moment a certain segment of the population began to suspect perhaps subconsciously, that its safety net was about to snap” (Skal, 2001, p. 357).⁵⁵ King’s novels draw energy from a popular rage of unfulfilled hopes and desires, at the same time as progress is apparently happening on all fronts in the surrounding culture. This gap between aspirations and experience provides a fruitful breeding ground for stories and images of horror; a sense of justice can be restored as those (undeservedly) more successful are made to suffer and repent.

Earlier horror movies, like the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* films of the 1930s and the monster movies of the 1950s, located the horror elsewhere, apart from the everyday lives of their audiences. Even when the source of terror was shown as a real human being, like the oft-used role of the mad or evil scientist, the characters and milieu portrayed were remote from the audience’s frame of reference. How many in a 1950s drive-in audience would actually know a real-life scientist? Thus, besides upping the gore content, and similar to Alfred Hitchcock’s low-budget hit *Psycho* (1960) a few years earlier, the proto-slasher films of Lewis and Friedman brought horror closer to home. Discursively, these films constructed a universe populated with social characters familiar from the everyday lives of the films’ audiences. The point to be made here is not that the films were more realistic than their predecessors but rather that the characters and milieu portrayed constitute easily recognizable stereotypes. The people made to suffer in these films, as in the later King novels and slasher films of the 70s and 80s, are characters the audience can recognize – though (especially in the slasher films) not necessarily identify with. Rather, these characters can be recognized as others – as social and cultural groups different and apart from the target audience. The life and social standing of the

⁵⁵ Skal further illustrates how the critical reception of King’s book often comes with an elitist class-bias, as illustrated in this quote from the *New York Times Book Review* on King’s *Needful Things* (1991): “the type of book that can be enjoyed by longtime aficionados of the genre, people who probably have a lot of black T-shirts in their chest of drawers and either have worn or dreamed of wearing a baseball cap backward” (quoted in Skal, 2001, p. 371).

victims can be contrasted with the everyday lives of the films' audiences – as being more popular, more successful, more beautiful, and better-off financially. The one dimension where the victims are not superior is intelligence. In Lewis and Friedman's films, as with the later slasher cycles, the victims are typically portrayed as extraordinarily feeble-minded. This indicates that their financial and social successes are not well-deserved. Their status is rather due to looks, class status, family relations, or pure luck – circumstances that do not reflect merits. Pretty, spoilt, and desirable, the female victims in Lewis' films personify the popular, yet unobtainable and thus despicable, girl that is out of reach for the common lower-class (heterosexual) male. What makes these girls loathsome is not necessarily that they are sexually active but that their boyfriends and sexual partners are picked among the upper and middle classes, the attractive, the popular – not the typical drive-in and grindhouse gore crowd.

These characters, partly due to the outright ineptitude of the actors, do not constitute believable real human beings. The flatness of the acting and the moronic dialogue make the characters appear annoying, rather than as points of sympathy and identification. This is perhaps most apparent in *Color Me Blood Red*, Lewis and Friedman's final collaboration. This film takes on a more absurdist and satirical tone, playing into populist stereotypes about artists and the contemporary art scene. *Color Me Blood Red* is a tale about a deranged artist, Adam Sorg. Adam is a despairing painter, living in a small cabin by the beach with his girlfriend. Frantically painting, he is productive but not very successful. Exhibiting his pictures in the local gallery he has moderate commercial success but the local art critic is less than impressed, being especially critical of Adam's use of color.

After his girlfriend accidentally hurts her finger and bleeds onto one of his canvases, Adam discovers a color of the perfect hue: the redness of blood! He slices open the finger of his girlfriend – against her desperate protests – and uses her

blood for his painting. Not surprisingly, she gets angry and leaves, so Adam starts cutting into himself to gain access to blood, until he finally collapses, totally exhausted. Upon awakening he stabs his girlfriend in the head, and immediately starts dragging her head across the canvas to make use of her blood. After emptying her body of the valuable red fluids he buries her outside in the sand. Adam's painting becomes a critical success. However, he refuses to sell this picture. Having achieved artistic success he now rejects commercialism.

Adam continues his killing-spree to gain access to more blood, and kills a couple visiting the beach by his cabin and drains their corpses of blood. Ultimately, Adam pays for his evil deeds, and in the film's climax he is about to attack a girl posing for his latest picture when he is interrupted by the girl's boyfriend who shoots Adam in the face with a shotgun. Falling over, Adam's face is pressed against the canvas, making his final artistic statement.

Adam is portrayed without any redeeming features. Still, Adam is a 'true' artist, producing genuine art works. His violent acts are not a way to work around the codes and norms of the art world but rather results from Adam taking their logic literally and pushing them to their extreme. Adam draws a distinction between commercial and artistic success, and sacrifices the former, as well as his sanity, his girlfriend, the lives of others and ultimately himself, for the sake of the latter. Adam becomes a parody of the mad genius, who gives up everything in order to accomplish his artistic vision. The art critic and the local connoisseurs appear pretentious and ultimately clueless in *Color Me Blood Red*. Adam's status in the local art scene rises as his deranged behavior intensifies. This absurdity also spills over into the film's portrayal of art more generally. Adam, the mad artist, finds a way to accomplish his artistic dreams, and wholeheartedly embraces his vision, regardless of the price. He thus illustrates Lewis' own views on artistic aspirations as nonsensical and futile when separated from monetary gain. The hideousness and

mania of his violent acts further emphasize this point. The film plays into a populist anti-art discourse that Lewis himself appears to support in his interviews. He does not claim to have any artistic aspirations for his movies and openly admits he is operating on solely commercial terms. In an off-hand manner, Lewis has repeatedly stated that success is measured in terms of film rentals, not artistic recognition (see e.g., McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 355).⁵⁶ Yet the point here is that regardless of whether or not the film's portrayal of art reflects Lewis' personal views, it provides ample material for stereotypes and ideas audiences might foster towards artists and their peculiar behaviors, as well as towards the art scene in general. Again, this film taps into a sense of resentment against success that is not related to skill or merit. Although Adam succeeds in playing the artistic game – at least for a while – his success merely exposes how the absurd logics and criteria according to which the art world operates are fraudulent and hypocritical. Art comes across as an arena for poseurs and deranged lunatics.

Other characters in the film do not fare much better; rather, these characters further stir the resentment expressed in *Blood Feast* and *Two Thousand Maniacs*. Adam's girlfriend comes across as an obnoxious beach bunny, and the beach couple he slaughters again feeds into the pretty, young, popular, and successful stereotype so cherished as victims in Lewis' films. Another striking character is Mrs. Carter, the local art patron, who is portrayed as a peacock-dressed middle-aged woman constantly spewing inane and pretentious comments in a rather snobbish vernacular.⁵⁷ Again, populist stereotypes join forces with vibrant streams of resentment, and this conditions how audiences react to the display of violence.

⁵⁶ Likewise, Lewis argues against auteurist approaches to his films; as he explains it in an interview, his films, "instead of being the extension of somebody's personal ego, they were the *bottom end* of the commercial film world" (Juno & Pauline, 1986, p. 23, emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ In a plot line also found in *Blood Feast*, Mrs. Carter's daughter, April, is the closest *Color Me Blood Red* comes to a protagonist. April happens to be the survivor who in the film's climax

When blood erupts into these discursive settings, affective intensities are given direction and motivation. The sensations⁵⁸ evoked by the eruptions of blood become socially significant as the blood enters constellations with social and cultural stereotypes and forces of resentment. As viewers perceive these blood images the images connect with not only personal memories and experiences but also social and cultural formations. Shifting the setting for receptions thus can have a great impact on how the attractions and repulsions evoked by the sensational blood images will be perceived. Before returning to a close analysis of the use of blood in these gore films, I address the methodological question of how to approach these films as phenomena to be studied. I outline various viewing strategies that can be mobilized towards these films, and argue that a humorous, reparative approach is more productive than an ironic, paracinematic approach. As I will explain, these films arguably appear as richer and more interesting when approached in an affirmative, rather than strictly critical, manner.

Paracinema

The reception history of the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis provide for interesting materials in terms of how different viewing strategies can be applied to exploitation cinema. Other than an interview in the 1975 publication *Kings of the Bs* (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975), Lewis vanished into obscurity in the years following his departure from the movie business in 1972.⁵⁹ He did not resurface in the public eye

escapes Adam's attack, and can thus be seen as a precursor to what Clover (1992) describes as the 'final girl' characteristic of later slasher movies.

⁵⁸ I here use the term "sensation" in the sense elaborated by Deleuze in his book on the painter Francis Bacon. Sensation does here not operate by way of narrative and meaning but neither is it understood merely in terms of the "sensational" as something spontaneous or disruptive. Sensations are formed and ordered, not simply random or chaotic. Sensations operate in specific ways but do not represent anything. Rather, sensations are particular moments of intensity and movement (see Deleuze, 2004, pp. 31-38) – or, simply put, "[s]ensation is vibration" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 39).

⁵⁹ Lewis eventually found his movies less profitable and left the film industry after the release of *Gore Gore Girls* in 1972. He later started a lucrative career in direct marketing. In 2002

until being briefly mentioned as one of the worst film directors of all time in the 1980 publication *Golden Turkey Awards* (Medved & Medved, 1980). The next year, John Waters published his autobiography *Shock Value* (Waters, 1981) where Lewis (along with Russ Meyer) is interviewed as one of Waters' great heroes.⁶⁰ In the following years publications such as *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (Weldon, 1983), *Splatter Movies* (McCarty, 1984), *Incredibly Strange Films* (Vale, Juno & Morton, 1986), as well as Daniel Krogh and John McCarty's *The Amazing Herschell Gordon Lewis and his World of Exploitation Films* (1983), brought renewed attention to Lewis, while his films were starting to be made available to new audiences through video cassette releases.

As Lewis himself makes explicit, the demographic of the later audiences who have rediscovered his films runs almost exactly opposite to the original audience of his movies (McCarty, 1995, p. 39). Unlike the original audience for Lewis' films, later audiences have taken to these films as part of a subculture of 'trash,' or 'paracinema' (Sconce, 1995). Lewis, along with film makers such as Ed Wood Jr., constitute the pantheon of the 'so-bad-that-it's-good' cinema. These films are deliberately seen through an ironic and confrontational lens, holding them up as a 'counter-cinema' standing in contrast to established taste and criteria for 'good' cinema. These fans develop reading strategies, often emphasizing non-diegetic stylistic features (gore effects, monster costumes, music, 'bad' acting, etc.), that cherish these films as a counterpoint to established cultural values and aesthetic standards. These readings thus establish what Jeffrey Sconce calls "an ironic form of reverse elitism" (Sconce, 1995, p. 382). As Sconce further argues, the paracinema fan base "embodies primarily a male, white, middle-class, and 'educated' perspective on the cinema"

Lewis made a long awaited comeback to the film industry in with the release of *Blood Feast 2: All U Can Eat*.

⁶⁰ Waters is also responsible for the first cinematic homage to Lewis, back in 1970, with his film *Multiple Maniacs*, referencing *Two Thousand Maniacs* (Waters, 1981, p. 202).

(Sconce, 1995, p. 375).⁶¹ Their reading strategy presupposes a familiarity with cultural and cinematic codes, at the same time as distance from these codes is established. By elevating themselves above these codes, the paracinematic fans can establish a distance from conformist and elitist 'others' assumed to be slaves of the codes, unable to break free from their normative frameworks.

However, this paracinematic 'antielitist' position itself constitutes a form of elitism. The paracinematic viewing/reading position depends upon an intricate knowledge of cultural, technical and aesthetic codes, and a film's paracinematic 'value' is confirmed by its adherence to – or negligence of – these codes. The paracinematic subculture thus confirms and consolidates these codes, although in a negative manner. By cheering the incompetence of the films, the codes and the audience's knowledge of them are reaffirmed and at the same time the bonds between those 'in-the-know' who constitute the paracinematic subculture are strengthened. Thus, by affirming a discourse, and distancing themselves from codes seen as conventional and mainstream, an alternative and allegedly subversive and superior viewing position is established. This viewing position emphasizes a film's non-diegetic aspects. The focus is almost exclusively on the film's form and stylistic features, paying attention to how the film operates not as a closed off universe but rather as a cultural and sociological document whose boundaries towards other profilmic and extra-textual realms constantly collapse (Sconce, 1995, p. 387). The experience of watching these films becomes interesting and fascinating as discursive

⁶¹ Arguably, a distinction can be made between a first and a second paracinema generation. The first generation, exemplified by publications such as *Incredibly Strange Films* (Vale, Juno & Morton, 1986), appears to approach these films in a serious manner, portraying them as expressions from marginalized, but nonetheless genuine, artists. The second generation, from the late 80s and early 90s onwards, emphasize an ironic take on these films, valuing their displays of incompetence and 'bad taste'. A key difference here is that, whereas the first reading strategy seeks to approach these films on their own terms, and explore their respective original qualities, the second strategy, on the other hand, is fundamentally deconstructive, seeking to expose the flaws in these films and read them in the context of other, more 'competent' cultural productions and standards. Despite this difference, a clear distinction cannot be made between these two generations/categories as their respective viewing/reading strategies often overlap.

layers are added to their viewing experience. Thus, through intricate inter- and extra-textual layers of meaning, the films emerge as thick and complex documents, always interwoven in discursive streams reaching beyond the specifics of the cinematic image.

Admittedly, my own first interest in these films was through such a paracinematic lens. Not coincidentally, my initial interest for such films went together with my first exposure to 'postmodern' theory in cultural studies and with a burgeoning interest in 'textual' approaches to cultural products. However, this appeal for me was short-lived. Although I could find a film like Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda* (1953) wildly amusing, most of the films soon turned out to be mainly boring. The attractions promoted by this reading strategy were all negatively framed. The films' appeal was decided by how they failed to do things, or how they did things wrong. The discursive lens through which to see the films came to be experienced as a straitjacket – laying down narrow and negatively defined parameters defining where amusement was to be found. Above all, these films were to be perceived ironically and discursively. They should be enjoyed in terms of how they were standing in relation to other cultural documents in a far-reaching extra-diegetic universe. I had to deploy my discursive resources in order to 'read' a scene in a manner that extracted its counter-hegemonic potential. Although an amusing exercise, my interest in this mode of viewing eventually faded away. Repeatedly I had to remind myself that something was supposed to be entertaining, if only interpreted in this light. I had to step back from the films and from the viewing experience in order to be able to enjoy them. I lost interest, and explored cinematic satisfactions elsewhere.

It was not until my work on this research project that I approached 1960s exploitation cinema again. However, I would now see the films through a new lens, and often found them much more enjoyable. My framework and strategy for

approaching these films had become different. Rather than holding the films up against standards for 'correct' or 'good' cinematic style, and ironically cherishing them to the degree to which they failed to accomplish these, I now rather tried to follow the films' own logics, to see where they might take me. That is, I no longer subjected the films to a negatively framed reading but rather sought out ways to engage with them in a manner that took the films as valid statements and expressions of their own. Although often coming short in terms of budget and skill, these films can be approached in ways different from viewing them as hilarious detractions from stylistic codes and standards. This involves letting go of the privileged position of ironic distance whereby the films can only be appreciated discursively and in a negative manner, in terms of lack.

To illustrate the difference between these two viewing positions, I will make a short detour through the concepts of humor and irony, as understood by Gilles Deleuze (1991b). Deleuze points to irony and humor as different strategies of comedy, which each in its own way opposes or subverts the law. Law can here be understood in legal terms but also as natural, moral, social or cultural laws – or as cinematic stylistic codes. Irony, in this view, ascends towards whatever principles a particular law is supposed to follow and then points out any discrepancies between these principles and the law as it actually functions. Humor, on the other hand, focuses on the consequences of the law. This involves pointing out absurd or unintended effects of the law when followed to rule. While irony takes the form of negative critique and distance, pointing out the gap between actual practices and higher ideals or principles, humor offers no alternative position from which criticism can be raised, rather it points out the absurd in existing practices and regulations. Thus, irony is in this sense predominantly an intellectual and discursive form of comedy, as it requires a 'reader' familiar with the 'law' as well as the principles the law is supposed to follow. Humor, on the other hand, does not necessarily depend

upon such discursive knowledge but rather exposes the logic of the law as absurd in and of itself.

Applied as strategies for reading texts or viewing films, humor and irony entail different relationships between film/text and viewer/reader. Irony points to the gap between cinematic standards and actual practice, which in this instance involves seeing the comedy in the incompetence of these films. Humor, on the other hand, involves seeing the comedy in these films as absurd excursions in movie-making where the focus is not upon the gap between these films and cinematic standards but rather upon how these films take cinematic styles and standards to absurd conclusions, and thus implicitly to new and hitherto unknown places.

A humorous viewing strategy implies a certain naiveté, as one needs to step down from a position of discursive superiority in order to engage with the films on non-judgmental terms. The point to be made is not that all inter- and extra-textual discursive knowledge is to be disregarded when viewing/reading a film. The difference is rather that such discursive knowledge can now be added to the film in order to expand the network of relations through which the film is experienced. Thus, the discursive relations are here deployed in a constructive rather than a deconstructive manner.

This distinction can be phrased differently by applying Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concepts of paranoid and reparative reading strategies. Sedgwick locates paranoid strategies in the tradition following Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud which Paul Ricoeur (1970) called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Sedgwick, 2003, pp. 124-125). These strategic practices of questioning and undermining knowledge are useful, but only to a limited degree. They represent only "a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 130). In contrast, or rather in addition, to the paranoid position, Sedgwick, following Melanie Klein, holds up the reparative position (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 128; pp. 146-151).

Through reparative practices some sense of wholeness can be assembled. However, the reparative should not be understood as some nostalgic restoration of something that once was. Rather, the reparative process builds something new but from foundations and parts already in existence. Rather than solely paranoid reactions which mistrust everything, the reparative readings and practices make it possible to accommodate and welcome new experiences. As Sedgwick states, “[t]he desire of a reparative impulse (...) is additive and accretive” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 149). The reparative welcomes openness and flexibility, new combinations between the already existing and potentials for something different.

Irony can provide joy and pleasure but predominantly so in a paranoid manner. The enjoyment of the text/image is itself negatively framed, in the sense that it preconditions a position of discursive superiority and distance, rather than a positive engagement with a text/image. Thus, irony turns a negative critical position into a positive experience. Pleasure is found in a process of critical detachment and distancing from the text/image. However, this does not lead to a position of autonomous judgment but rather a shift of relations. The enjoyment is found not so much in the direct engagement with the text/image – that is, in the relation between text/image and reader/viewer – as in the capability of the reader/viewer to elevate her/himself above the text/image and find pleasure in discursive linkages drawn from the text/image to a wider inter-/extra-textual universe. Irony always comes with a hint of negativity, as it relies upon a negative strategy in order to establish its reading/viewing position.

The reparative and the humorous, on the other hand, occupy a more inclusive, engaging and positive position, seeking connections as well as detachments. These strategies start out from what’s already there, and then seek to locate, or follow, new constitutions that can emerge from this. Pleasures are thus to be found in moving along with, rather than seeking to tear apart, the texts/images

under study. What this implies for the study of films like the oeuvre of Herschell Gordon Lewis, is an approach that engages with the absurdities of these films in an affirmative manner. Rather than seeing the images as lacking, according to some predefined code or standard, the question becomes how to explore their potentials for evoking sensations and experiences in their encounters with audiences and viewers. The main problem with the paracinematic position is its reductiveness. Through a lens of cool ironic detachment, this position treats films as intertextual documents and nothing else. The film is thus reduced to its signifying markers: to its relations to other texts in endless semiotic chains. While this perspective grasps certain elements of how a film operates, other aspects are left aside. A humorous or reparative approach, on the other hand, explores the ways a film can potentially engage their audiences also in different manners. This entails explorations of how cinematic images can carry potentials to connect affectively and viscerally with their audiences, elements that are key in tracing the potentials for audience impact in films like *Blood Feast*.

It should be stressed that this does not necessarily lead to a celebration of the films under study. The streams of populism and resentment running through Lewis' blood epics can lead in several directions, with widely diverging implications. My aim in this analysis is not to produce an act of moral judgment but rather an exploration of potentials running from and through these films.

Film perception, following Deleuze's Bergsonian perspective, is not a matter of merely taking in images as they appear to us but rather a process of co-construction, connecting images with viewers, for something new to emerge each time a film is seen and experienced. In this process, each viewer actualizes personal and cultural memories in the encounter with the cinematic image, and these memories guide the ongoing perception. The unfolding connections between image and memory produce responses in form of embodied thoughts, perceptions, actions

and affections. Thus, no 'effect' or 'response' is already there, present in the image itself. Rather, the images are potentials, to be actualized each time anew in the encounter with the film's audience.

Differently situated positions of reading or viewing rely upon different memory schemes. While *Blood Feast* could readily actualize feelings of resentment and social disenfranchisement in a 1960s rural drive-in in the southern US, these aspects of the film are less likely to be turned into actual experiences by contemporary audiences seeing the films through an ironic paracinematic lens. The potentials of images will always exceed their actualization. That is, what we perceive is less than what is in the image. At the same time, what we perceive is also different from what is in the image, as each instance of perception is entangled with memory processes and thus each perceived image is unique. It becomes impossible to perceive the same image twice, as each perceived image is a singular entity.

Perception thus becomes a process of potentially unlimited complexity, involving the actualization of memory as well as features of the image. This complexity further involves relations between images as these unfold in a successive manner, as well as relations between the various components of the images. Images relate to each other, and each image is a multitude of relations. The next step in my analysis of Lewis and Friedman's blood trilogy will be to explore how these image-relations are played out in these films. I will here look into how the aspects concerning the films' content, as discussed above, relate to the films' stylistic features. I focus on the role played by blood, and how this visual element connects with other aspects and features of these films.

Blood Style

Blood and gore as visual elements take on explicitly affective roles in Lewis and Friedman's blood epics, while still resonating and connecting with a discursive

backdrop. The tone of class resentment and social disenfranchisement in these films can potentially condition and resonate against the scenes of carnage but this does not fully explain the affective impact of the gory scenes. As these images unfold the viewer is addressed viscerally as well as discursively. The films' affective impact operates according to logics not fully captured by a semiotic or narrative framework. In *Blood Feast* in particular, the blood and gore appear as ruptures in the narrative flow of the film. The sequence of images comes to a halt, as the camera lingers on torn bodies and organs drenched in blood. Blood images and narrative do not join together smoothly into one coherent whole, as was the case in for example *Río Bravo*.

As argued by Gary D. Rhodes, Lewis' horror films are very consistent stylistically (Rhodes, 2003, p. 260); yet, some interesting stylistic differences can be detected between and within the three films discussed in this chapter. In *Blood Feast*, two distinct cinematic styles can be detected throughout the film. The film's 'non-violent' sequences are mainly centered on dialogue and narrative development, presented swiftly and economically. These scenes are filmed in long takes, with static medium shots, typically including all characters present within the frame. Occasionally medium close-ups of individual characters are inserted to break the monotony. The scenes are brightly lit, and everything takes place within the image's frame. Non-diegetic music is used only sparsely.

This style can be contrasted with the film's scenes of carnage. Non-diegetic music is frequently deployed, as the film's monotonous theme music accompanies each of Ramses' killings. No dialogue is uttered, although the occasional scream can be heard. The pace of editing is far quicker, alternating between close-ups of the victim and the killer. The camera is less static and the acts of violence and the resulting blood and gore are shown in rapid sequences of close-ups or medium close-ups. Often, central parts of the action take place off-screen or hidden from our view;

for instance, none of the murder scenes in the film actually display the exact moment when the weapon or hands of the killer cut or rip open the body of the victim. Typically, the images become blurry as they close up on the killer's weapon as he attacks his victim, or the back of the killer covers the actions of his hands or weapon. The focus is on the before-and-after: we see the killer as he attacks, his hands as he fondles the body parts, and then the mauled body of the victim.

The stylistic and formal contrast between these two types of scenes in *Blood Feast* makes clear a rather crude separation between scenes of narration and plot development and scenes of visceral and affective attractions and repulsions. As Lewis explains with regard to the making of *Blood Feast*, little attention was paid to the film's plot line, while considerable care was directed towards its effects (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 353, McCarty, 1995, p. 40). The dialogue and narrative sequences mainly serve as a means to tie together a series of gory scenes. During the film's production minimal emphasis was put on non-violent scenes, few retakes were allowed and the main focus was on making the lines run correctly.⁶²

The most important constituent part of the film – in fact, much more important than casting the actors – was blood (Lewis, 1983, p. x; McCarty, 1990, p. 40; Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, p. 335). Lewis was not satisfied with the existing products commercially available for the presentation of blood on screen. For this film, color was needed and a red fluid of the desired hue and texture proved hard to find. While in earlier black and white features a number of artifacts could be used to portray blood, color film brought about a number of new challenges. Theatre stage-blood was commonly used but often the color did not come out quite right on film;

⁶² The *Something Weird* DVD release of *Blood Feast* contains 47 minutes of outtakes from the film's production – allegedly all the remaining materials not used in the actual movie. Most of these outtakes show left-over materials from the film's killings and gore sequences. This indicates that while several takes and versions were made of these scenes, the narrative sequences were mainly done in one take only. Lewis and Friedman's statements on the DVD's commentary track confirm this. Actually, they claim to be surprised that as much as 47 minutes of outtakes existed.

Lewis found it to be too purple (Mendik, 2002, pp. 192-193). Also, Lewis wanted a blood mixture that was edible, in order to make full use of its potential for gore effects (McCarthy & Flynn, 1975, p. 353; Curry, 1999, p. 53; Palmer, 2000, p. 39). To solve these problems Lewis contacted a local lab in Florida, *Barfred's Cosmetics*, and collaborated with them in developing a new blood concoction. The main ingredients were Kaopectate (a diarrhoea remedy) and red food coloring (Lewis, 1983, p. x; Palmer, 2000, p. 39). This mixture came to be a staple ingredient in all of Lewis' gore films. Beside Barfred's blood, Lewis' gore pictures also made use of a wide array of additional artifacts such as food ingredients and animal remains in order to produce true-to-life effects.

In *Blood Feast* these artifacts take on the role of the film's central actors, as it is through the assemblages of these ingredients the film's gore scenes establish their affective impact, and thus constitute the film's main attraction.⁶³ This emphasis on effects rather than narrative and acting is exemplified by the film's infamous tongue-ripping scene. The actress in this scene, Astrid Olson, who appears only in this scene and does not utter a single line, was allegedly chosen for her extraordinarily large mouth, which was big enough to hold the sheep's tongue that was used as a prop in this scene (Curry, 1999, p. 56; Palmer, 2000, p. 52; Friedman & De Nevi, 1990, pp. 340-341).⁶⁴ As the scene unfolds, we see Ramses knocking on her motel room door, and as she opens, Ramses moves in and attacks. She screams as Ramses pushes her back into the room. The next shot is a close-up of Ramses pushing her down onto the bed with his fingers in her mouth, pulling at her tongue. She wriggles and screams, and the camera closes in further as the struggle continues. The fight goes

⁶³ See Chapter Three for a further discussion of blood as an actor assemblage.

⁶⁴ Still, no image in the final cut of the film – or in the outtakes – actually shows Ramses pulling the tongue out from her mouth. Randy Palmer explains that Lewis decided to not insert the sheep's tongue in the actress' mouth after all – due to the fact that the tongue at this stage in the film's production had turned rather gamy and foul-smelling and had to be doused in Pine-Sol before being used (Palmer, 2000, p. 53).

on for a few seconds, with medium close-ups alternating between showing the struggle from the side and from above. The shot of Ramses pulling out her tongue is shown from above, with him lying on top of the victim, his back blocking sight of her face as well as of his hands. Next follows a cut to a close-up from the side, showing Ramses' head and blood-soaked hands as he pulls out the large tongue. Then the final shot of the scene, again from above, shows Ramses' hands withdrawing, revealing the victim's face and shoulders. Blood covers her cheeks and neck, and oozes from her wide open mouth as her head drops to the side and she draws her last breath.

In this scene, the body of the victim is transformed. Step by step, she is depicted losing control over her body, until it is reduced to lifeless flesh and pieces of pulp. She is no longer a mere stereotype but undergoes transformations; she becomes meat. Quite literally so. Blood and flesh replace the human actor as the central character as the scene unfolds. These images operate in a tactile and haptic manner – appealing directly to our senses.⁶⁵ Like in this scene, several images in *Blood Feast* display the hands of the killer fondling tissue and bloody organs.⁶⁶ This gives a sense of tactility and texture; the meat is something to not only see but also touch (and smell). These images appeal to what Laura U. Marks labels as “haptic visuality” where “the eyes themselves function like organs of touch” (Marks, 2000, p. 162). The experience of watching these images is multisensory; vision is brought “close to the body and into contact with other sense perceptions” (Marks, 2000, p. 159).

⁶⁵ As Jonathan Crane explains regarding Lewis' films: “Singularly little interpretation is required as the films are solely concerned with generating affect from the gratuitous display of the broken body” (Crane, 2004, p. 165n9). Although I largely concur with this statement, I would stress that the affects generated always resonate against a discursive backdrop which help shape the reactions and emotional responses evoked by these scenes.

⁶⁶ Lewis himself explains this in purely functional terms as a means of getting maximum impact for as little money as possible. As he states in an interview, “they [contemporary film producers] don't linger as I did. I went for *intensive* gore rather than *extensive* gore, and the rationale behind that is quite simple: I didn't have any budget” (Rice, 1986, p. 28, emphasis in original).

The images connect with the viewer in a concrete visceral manner, evoking what Paul Gormley (2005) calls a “body-first-reaction” – before connecting with systems of knowledge and meaning. ‘Before’ is here to be understood as ‘immediately connecting with.’ The point to be made is that the instant visceral reaction happens independently of its discursive framing; however, as soon as some sense is made of this reaction it connects with systems of signification. Drawing upon recent brain research, political scientist William Connolly refers to this as the “‘half-second delay’ between the reception of sensory material and the conscious interpretation of it”⁶⁷ (Connolly, 2002, p. 83; also see Massumi, 2002, pp. 29-30). This gap between embodied sensory response and conscious interpretation is key to understanding our affective and visceral response to cinematic images as here we often respond to something before being consciously able to comprehend what we are seeing.⁶⁸

Repulsions and attractions are established as connections are made between the images and our bodies. The affective impact is thus a matter of an instant material relation, not a matter of any prior interpretation and resulting emotional response. However, this process of perception does not occur isolated from other ongoing relations and processes. The affects evoked do not enter a vacuum but rather resonate against a backdrop of discursive relations which frames their further directions and impact. These discursive relations stem both from other images and from our actualized memories. In this perspective, affects are both autonomous and in effect always entering discursive and social relations. In the words of Brian Massumi, affective intensities are asocial but not presocial (Massumi, 2002, p. 30). The social is always already there, and cannot be excluded; yet still, this does not

⁶⁷ As Connolly explains, “half-second delay” should not be understood too literally, but rather as an average – often the delay can be far shorter (Connolly, 2002, p. 83n6; also see Nørretranders, 1998, p. 221).

⁶⁸ Comedy is here a typical example, especially in those instances where we happen to laugh at something, for then to realize that our laughter might be an improper response.

say that everything is social or that everything can be explained through social factors. Affect and social strata intermingle and intersect, always entering new formations and combinations.

The reactions evoked by watching Ramses pull out the tongue, fondle it in his hands, and leave his victim gurgling blood as she dies, happen instantly and regardless of the viewer's ability to consciously make sense of the scene. However, as soon as this happens, sense making mechanisms are triggered, memories are actualized, and the sensations evoked are made to resonate against, and connect with, systems of meaning and signification. This does not necessarily mean that the instant response is a universal reaction – equal for everyone who happens to experience the scene. Our visceral responses are themselves malleable historical and social products, individually as well as collectively, as patterns of previous sensations, experiences and reactions help shape future abilities to enter new relations and be affected by these. There is thus no clear-cut separation between social and biological behavior. The analytical separation between a visceral, affective, body-first, reaction, followed by a process of conscious interpretation, is not to be understood as a separation between a biological response and a social and cultural interpretation. As I will discuss in greater detail in my next chapter, both aspects involve nature *and* culture, biological *and* social processes, in various constellations.

The tongue-ripping evokes a visceral response – nauseating for some, the source of laughter for others – and this response is itself conditioned by a number of individual, cultural and situational factors. The 'body-first' reaction is instantly socialized as the viewers make sense of the scene as well as of their own reaction. As argued by John Protevi, when making "sense of a situation, we determine the potentials in this encounter for making assemblages" (Protevi, 2009, p. 53). Through this assemblage-making the singular incident becomes interwoven with complex sets of relations and formations. As this process unfolds memories increasingly get

intermixed with the perceived images, and this further conditions our conscious interpretation of the scene as well as our interpretation of our own visceral responses.

The potential for reactions evoked by this scene is thus in principle unlimited but does not operate on a random basis. Although the repulsive character of the scene provides for negative audience responses, potentials for positive, or at least more nuanced, responses are also possible. As previously argued, a stream of class resentment and social disenfranchisement is running through *Blood Feast*, and this brings along a potential for turning the affective response into feelings of joy when watching the young woman slaughtered. For a contemporary paracinematic audience, such a reaction is perhaps less likely. From such a perspective, the potential joy evoked by the scene is located in the scene's failures and shortcomings – the grotesquely oversized tongue, the over-the-top acting, the dramatic music, and so on. From my own perspective, neither of these reactions quite explains my experience of witnessing this scene. Although startled by the scene, my reaction turns out to be somewhat empty. When the woman is slaughtered, her character does not evoke any negative responses in me strong enough to relish her fate, and thus feelings of resentment are never actualized.⁶⁹ Nor do I manage to feel any particular sympathy for the victim in this case. The scene has less of an impact on me as the victim neither stands out as believable person, nor as a stereotype I can identify or recognize as somehow relevant to me. Also, as explained above, ironic paracinematic readings are something I myself have become increasingly tired of, and the scene doesn't strike me as 'bad' enough to warrant any great entertainment value. Although startling, I don't find this scene, or any other scenes in *Blood Feast* for that matter, particularly productive. The blood images do not have much to offer

⁶⁹ Possibly, *Blood Feast* would have been able to evoke such responses in me if I had seen the film as a teenager. Today, however, I am not able to connect with the film on these terms.

in terms of potentials for further connections and assemblages to be made. Basically, the blood appears, shocks, and that's it, to simplify somewhat. Thus, I will turn to *Two Thousand Maniacs* and *Color Me Blood Red*, as I find the gore scenes in these films, in many ways, to have a greater potential impact, especially for a contemporary audience.

The distinction between gore and narrative is less crude in *Two Thousand Maniacs* and *Color Me Blood Red*. Unlike *Blood Feast*, in these two films there is no marked stylistic difference between scenes of dialogue and plot development and scenes of carnage. Rather, these films strive towards a consistent style, with more fluid camera movements, a faster pace of editing, and a greater variation of shots. The images do not to the same degree linger on gore effects in close-ups, and the blood scenes are more closely integrated into the films' narratives. In *Two Thousand Maniacs*, for instance, the build up to each killing is more intricate as the preparations and schemes leading up to the scenes of blood-shed are a key part of the film's plot. Rather than merely providing images of gore, *Two Thousand Maniacs'* stronger emphasis on narrative introduces an element of suspense missing from *Blood Feast*.

A distinction can be made between *Two Thousand Maniacs* and *Color Me Blood Red* in this regard. In *Two Thousand Maniacs*, the gory scenes support the film's narrative, while in *Color Me Blood Red* the scenes of carnage bring the narrative to its absurd conclusion, and thus contest the logics of the film's diegetic universe. While the killings in *Two Thousand Maniacs* make sense according to the logic the film's narrative operates within, no such ground is established in *Color Me Blood Red*. Even though Adam can be interpreted both as a suffering romantic artist and as a modern painter using bodily fluids as an artistic statement, the sheer ridiculousness of his acts makes the scenes of slaughter and dismemberment implausible and absurd.

Interestingly enough, Herschell Gordon Lewis himself claims to be dissatisfied with *Color Me Blood Red* for these same reasons. As he explains it, there is no plausible reason why Adam's discovery of the superior visual qualities of blood should result in him starting to kill off his girlfriend as well as random strangers. As Lewis states, the blood of chickens could have served exactly the same visual results (Palmer, 2000, p. 91). Adam's acts make little sense, not even within the logics of the film's universe. Or rather, he follows these logics slavishly, to the extent that the artistic logics that guide Adam's acts themselves turn absurd, and the film becomes a parody. For me, it is exactly the absurdity of his acts that constitute this film's greatest appeal and the reason why *Color Me Blood Red* is the one of these films I find the most enjoyable.

The joy evoked by the killings in *Color Me Blood Red* is different from the potential joys implicitly present in the gore scenes in *Blood Feast* and *Two Thousand Maniacs*. In *Blood Feast* the carnage is directed towards young, pretty and popular women, and the gory images resonate with feelings of resentment towards this stereotype. In *Two Thousand Maniacs* the acts of violence likewise resonate against feelings of resentment, although this time according to divisions of class rather than gender. *Color Me Blood Red*, on the other hand, has a stronger emphasis on Adam, the film's antagonist. In this film, resentment is less of an issue as the carnage takes the form of a joyous celebration, rather than a negative critique. The blood and gore is less a destruction of the victims' bodies, than elements in Adam's ongoing quest towards artistic perfection. The blood and gore here take on a more active role, directed towards the canvas and the new connections blood enters as it is now reassembled as part of a work of art. The emphasis is on the potential of the blood for making new assemblages. The blood is dehumanized and depersonified, characterized less by the personality and social standing of its originating subject, than its status as a constituent part in absurd acts of artistic creation.

Some of the same mechanisms are present in *Two Thousand Maniacs*, although to a lesser extent. Also in this film, the blood and gore are mediating elements in acts of celebration. However, the focus is on the acts of killing, rather than on the gore and carnage itself. The murders are the points of ecstasy in the centennial celebrations, and the resulting blood spill is more of a side-effect than a central focus of the festivities. Typically the scenes come to an end when death is achieved, where the violent acts serve as an outlet of resentment. In *Color Me Blood Red*, on the other hand, blood is given a freer rein. A potential is constituted for blood to take on a role as an active agent and for entering productive connections and new assemblages, although the extent to which this potential is actualized is another question.

Adam's first act of killing happens as he stabs his girlfriend in the head with his scalpel. Screaming, she drops down dead with the scalpel sticking out from her left temple, with blood running from her mouth as well as from the head wound. The camera zooms out on her full body, and then cuts to a close-up of Adam's face, staring towards his dead girlfriend. Next follows a short sequence where the image of Adam sitting perplexed by the canvas is dissolved onto an image of him holding his dead girlfriend up by the hair and dragging her head across the canvas. Viscerally grotesque, while at the same time illustrating Adam's desperate struggle to achieve artistic success, these images function both in terms of affect and in terms of discourse. His artistic quest is presented as both horrible and dedicated as he goes to absurd lengths to accomplish his goals.

Adam's next act of murder is likewise portrayed in an absurd manner. The young couple frolicking on the beach set out onto the water on a pair of bright red pedal-boats. Armed with a spear, Adam races after them in a small motorized boat. He rams his spear into the chest of the young man, leaving him floating in the water in a pool of blood. His girlfriend is left screaming as she witnesses it all. This scene is

followed by the most gruesome sequence in *Color Me Blood Red*. Back in his studio, Adam stares intensely at his canvas, again drenched in red color. He paints and dips his brush into a bowl filled with a bright red liquid. As the bowl runs empty Adam rushes into his study. Next follows a close-up of the head of the young woman last seen screaming at the sight of her dead boyfriend. Her head slanted to the side and blood dripping from the mouth, she is now quite obviously dead. Then follows a cut to a medium shot of her whole dead body hung up by her arms on the wall in Adam's study; her stomach is cut open, and her intestines are hanging out. Her abdomen and pelvis region are covered in blood. Adam approaches the body with his empty bowl, and kneels down in front of her corpse. Next follows a close-up of him squeezing her intestine for blood to flow into the bowl. As Adam squeezes the intestine and blood spurts out, a visceral response is potentially evoked but its effects do not end there; rather the red liquid takes on new functions and enters new connections in the succeeding shots. After showing him squeezing blood from the intestine into his bowl, the film cuts to a close-up of Adam's canvas, covered in blood. The camera zooms out, showing Adam sitting next to his finished painting, in the local art gallery. The blood serves as a connection between Adam's heinous deeds and the absurdity of his artistic quest. The scene turns into comedy through the audience's knowledge of the nature of the red material on the canvas, and the lengths Adam has gone to in order to achieve this accomplishment. The scene's humorous appeal operates through the disjuncture between the 'real' nature of the blood on the canvas and its new constellation within an artistic setting. Affect and discourse here join together, without the one being subordinated to the other. Rather, a potential for a creative tension is furthered as the affective impact of the blood, heightened through the preceding images, connects with the film's portrayal of a pretentious art scene celebrating Adam's frenzied works.

The world of art appears absurd in *Color Me Blood Red*, and so do Adam's malevolent deeds. Rather than taking a step back and giving the viewer a reminder that this is not real after all, the film follows through with its twisted logic and hideous acts. By taking the acts completely over the top, the scenes of bloodshed, which indeed are truly grotesque, function as humor, in the Deleuzian sense discussed above. No distance is created from the logics of the art world; rather, these are taken to their furthest extreme as Adam in his deranged artistic stupor gleefully chops away at human bodies, all for the sake of art. The images become repulsive, yet absurd. The visceral nature of the bloodshed stands in relation to the absurdity of the story but it is not contained within the narrative. Tension is established between the film's discursive logic and its affective impact. The humor of the film operates in this disjuncture between discourse and the sensations evoked. Rather than generating an ironic distance towards its portrayal of a pretentious artist, the film's affective impact makes Adam's quest all too real.

What make this film absurd are neither the scenes of carnage nor the narrative. Rather, the bloodshed becomes comical through the processes of sense-making where Adam's heinous deeds enter connections with discursive formations. Without any pre-knowledge of the art world, be it through populist stereotypes or actual appreciation or knowledge of contemporary art, the blood imagery will not have a humorous impact. This, I think, is what makes this film resonate with a contemporary viewer such as myself. The film connects with discursive formations that still carry cultural resonance. My enjoyment of this film unfolds as I recognize the codes and logics that the film's narrative operates within. At the same time, the humor is not a mere discursive construct. It is through the excesses of Adam's acts that his quest for artistic perfection turns absurd. As he chops apart innocent women and squeezes blood from their intestines, the logic he follows appears to have gone off the rails. But the point here, following Deleuze's understanding of humor, is that

Adam never diverts from the laws of the universe he operates within, he merely takes them to their furthest possible consequence. The film does perhaps not so much offer a negative critique of art as it presents an absurd exercise in artistic excess.

The blood here operates in relation to more complex and multifaceted assemblages. Unlike *Blood Feast* and *Two Thousand Maniacs*, the blood no longer vanishes as soon as the acts of carnage are done with. Rather, it transforms as well as being itself transformed as it takes on new roles and enters new relations, in succeeding images and scenes. The blood is no longer a mere object of affect, neither simply an element of narrative. It becomes connective potential. Potentially proactive, not merely an after-effect, the blood draws connections between images, between various elements within the images, and between the images and the viewer. This role of blood as an active aesthetic agent in cinematic images, which carries potentials for new connections within and between images, and between images and audiences, will be the central topic of my next chapter. I will there discuss the role of blood as what I label a visual actor-assemblage – a heterogeneous and shifting constellation that takes on an active role through the relations it enters with other elements in (cinematic) images.

Chapter 3: Blood Assemblages

My arguments regarding the role of blood in the films discussed in my previous chapter have a number of theoretical implications to which I now turn. In this chapter I focus explicitly on blood as a visual element that can be conceptualized as an assemblage that operates as an actor in cinematic images, performing different roles, with different potentials for affecting its audiences. As we could see in the previous chapter, within the diegetic universe of *Color Me Blood Red*, the red material on Adam's canvas is 'really' blood – but how do we know this? What is it that makes us accept this red material as blood? And what makes us react to these blood images? These questions are central to this chapter. In the two chapters that follow, I will proceed to trace how blood has been portrayed in Hollywood cinema in the 1960s, with a special focus on the eruption of more explicitly violent movies towards the end of the decade, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and the role played by blood in these films.

The functions and effects of images of blood, as with all visual objects, are related to a potentially unlimited number of factors. The red fluid we see on screen is rarely 'real' blood. Rather it is something made to *look like* 'real blood.' It performs an act of make believe. This act is always collective, in the sense that one element alone is not enough to uphold this illusion. Spilling a red fluid in front of a camera will not necessarily make an impression of blood. Blood itself, as it appears in an image, is a relational construct, an ever-shifting composite of a multitude of elements, factors, and processes. Furthermore, it is through the constellations images of blood enter, and through the unfolding of these constellations, that images connect with and affect their viewers. These relational aspects of blood in cinematic images are the theme of this chapter. I will first give a brief outline of the visual characteristics of blood and its media presence in 1960s American culture, and how

blood increasingly came to be a special topic in both popular and professional literature on make-up and special effects. As this discussion will illustrate, blood is not a simple and standardized product but appears in many different variations. Next follows the question of what it is that makes blood such a spectacular effect: Why do human beings tend to react to the sight of blood? After discussing a number of the key theoretical approaches to this question, I will make an argument that visual images of blood can be seen as relational assemblages, performing expressive potentials. I will then propose to view these assemblages as actors, that perform various roles in motion pictures and that make a difference with regard to other elements within the cinematic images as well as with regard to how these images can potentially affect their viewers.

Blood effects

Blood is notoriously difficult to represent in a realistic manner. 'Natural' human blood does not come in one standard color; rather, blood appears in many varieties. Typically, oxygen-rich blood leaving the heart through the arteries has a bright red color, while the deoxygenated blood returning to the heart through the veins come in a substantially darker shade of red (Seeman, 1961, p. 196). The color of blood that appears when human beings are bleeding can thus be very different from one instance to the next, depending on from where in the body the blood originates. For instance, blood from a vein will be darker than blood from an arterial or capillary bleeding. Furthermore, blood changes color as it dries out, taking on a darker, brownish, hue (Tilstone, Savage & Clark, 2006, p. 90).

The inconsistency in the visual appearance of blood means that audiences will have different standards of reference for deciding if the blood they see on screen is realistic or not. This becomes even more complicated as audiences increasingly use other mediated images of blood, be it real or fake, as their reference rather than

actual human or animal blood. It was not only on the cinematic screen that blood increasingly became visible in the 1960s. The new media landscape from the 1950s onwards, with television and the increasing use of color photography, provided audiences with a wider frame of reference. On the television screen, eventually also in color, blood came to be seen more frequently. Besides fictional television shows, which were still more cautious in regards to the display of violence than their counterparts on the big screen, newscast footage increasingly showed explicit and bloody footage. The Vietnam War, escalating throughout the latter half of the 1960s, often filled the late night newscasts with blood-soaked footage from the war. Of course, television was not the only media to display images from the Vietnam War. Magazines, books, newspapers, and other media increasingly displayed images of combat, casualties, and injured soldiers and civilians. Increasingly, media also reported on violence related to political protest, culminating with televised coverage of the riots and police beatings during the Democratic convention in Chicago, August 1968 (Gitlin, 1980; 1987; Perlstein, 2008).⁷⁰

Perhaps the goriest of all media in the 1960s was neither fiction movies nor news reports but rather educational films, especially the grim traffic accident footage of driver education films. Unlike exploitation films, the so-called *Highway Safety Films*, starting with *Signal 30* in 1959, were made as earnest pedagogical message films warning young drivers against careless behavior behind the steering wheel. The hard-hitting message of these films was that reckless driving could have tragic and brutal consequences, resulting in serious injury or death. Using actual footage from traffic accidents as well as staged scenes, these movies presented grim and violent

⁷⁰ Footage from the Chicago convention riots and beatings also made its way into the 1969 feature film *Medium Cool*.

images of traffic accident victims, either dead, dying, or injured.⁷¹ The films feature a plethora of wrecked cars, revealing still or moving bodies, often severely bloodied, crushed within the wrecks or receiving medical attention. At times the footage is accompanied by sound recordings from the scenes of the accidents, making audible the cries and agonies of fatally injured drivers and passengers, while a voice-over would often laconically inform the audience that these same people would be dead within hours. Needless to say, these educational films made a lasting impression on legions of American teenagers in the 1960s.⁷²

Together, these new sources of non-fictional portrayals of blood and gore made such images more widely available, accustoming audiences to graphic visual imagery, while at the same time setting standards of reference for determining whether the fictional portrayals of blood on screen were realistic or not. The variations in visual appearance of blood provide challenges for film make-up and special effects. Any single standardized blood product will be incapable of capturing the full range of visual qualities. Hence, a number of factors need to be taken into consideration when deciding how to portray blood realistically on the screen. Color and consistency are key factors but these must also be seen in relation to the kind of film stock used. Various practices evolved with regard to finding realistic looking blood make-up to be used in films. Besides homemade remedies, based on readily available household items, blood used in films from the 1950s and 1960s were most often commercial make-up products, supplied by a number of manufacturers. The variant most regularly used for black-and-white images was called Panchromatic blood, while Technicolor blood was used when filming in color (Johnson, 1996, p. 195; Clark, 1966, p. 128; O'Connor & Hall, 1980, p. 166).

⁷¹ The titles alone give a clear indication of the message of these films; examples include *Mechanized Death* (1961), *Wheels of Tragedy* (1963), *Carrier or Killer* (1965), *Death on the Highway* (1965), and *Highways of Agony* (1969).

⁷² For an introduction to the Highway Safety Films and their influence on 1960s teenagers, see the 2003 documentary *Hell's Highway: The True Story of Highway Safety Films*.

Besides the readymade industry products, blood increasingly became an area of experimentation for movie makers, special effects people, and make-up artists during the 1960s. In addition to mere visual qualities, more practical considerations also came into play, such as whether or not the blood product is edible and whether it could easily be washed away from textiles and especially from human skin. In the previous chapter, we could see how these various factors played a part in the recipe for blood make-up in the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis. The development of the Barfred's blood concoction was a result of Lewis' struggle to find a blood product that would photograph well in color while at the same time being edible.

Lewis was not the only one to experiment with making his own blood mixtures. Step-by-step, literature became available on how blood could be portrayed realistically on-screen. Publications such as Frank P. Clark's *Special Effects in Motion Pictures: Some Methods for Producing Mechanical Special Effects*, first published in 1966 (based on Clark's 1963 dissertation from the University of Southern California), targeted a professional audience with concrete advice on how to produce numerous effects, among others the realistic portrayal of blood. Clark's book contains a section discussing both commercially available blood products as well as potential substitutes, in addition to offering advice on how to apply these remedies (Clark, 1966, pp. 126-128). Furthermore, the book offers instructions on how to portray the impact of bullets, knives and arrows on human bodies (Clark, 1966, pp. 167-179).

In a more popular vein, 1965 saw the publication of Dick Smith's *Do-it-yourself Monster Make-up Handbook*, published as part of the *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine series. Aspiring monster makers could buy the magazine for 60 cents from their local newsstand, and start turning themselves and their friends into werewolves, ghouls, and other uncanny creatures. Despite being published in the *Famous Monsters of Filmland* series, with a pulpy front cover, Smith's monster make-up handbook provides intricate details on not only how to apply make-up but

also on where to buy supplies and how to make your own materials from scratch. The handbook introduced numerous younger make-up artists, especially those with a penchant for the grotesque, to the skills and craft needed to get a start in the film business (see e.g., Savini, 1983; Timpone, 1996). Dick Smith was at the time a renowned make-up artist for television productions and he would later have a very successful career in the film industry on movies such as *Little Big Man* (1970), *The Godfather I* (1972) and *II* (1974), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *Amadeus* (1984). Smith's handbook contains a special chapter on "Scars, cuts, bruises and blood," and provides comments on commercially available stage blood products as well as recipes for making your own blood from supermarket ingredients (the main ingredients being clear Karo corn syrup and red food coloring) (Smith, 1965, p. 56). Smith refined this blood mixture over the years, using it in a number of films, including *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *The Godfather*, and *Taxi Driver*.⁷³

Unlike more sophisticated make-up and special effects, which required greater investments of time, skill and money, blood could be deployed by nearly anyone, with a minimal investment. It thus comes as no surprise that the ready availability of make-up blood contributed to make it a cherished artifact for aspiring and low budget film makers. Blood as such became a reliable and attractive tool for exploitation filmmakers in the 1960s into the 1970s. Nevertheless, the role played by

⁷³ In a later edition of his handbook Smith describes his refined blood recipe as follows: "The basic formula is one ounce of red food color mixed into one pint of KARO plus one or two teaspoons of yellow food color depending on the colors you get. Add the red first, then the yellow a little at a time. Put some on your hand to check the color. Real blood is a warm red color. Prick your finger if you want a perfect match. I usually add an ounce of water to dilute the KARO a little. This mixture can be put in the mouth or even swallowed but do not get it in the eyes because red dyes can cause eye infections. Professionally I add one more thing, a wetting agent to make the liquid flow naturally on skin and soak into fabrics. I add one ounce of KODAK Photo-Flo 200 (Photography store) to the pint of KARO but you can get the same results by adding two or three ounces of IVORY LIQUID (detergent). Obviously either of these mixtures should not be put in the mouth. KARO blood can get moldy so store it in the fridge if possible and only use a new fresh mixture in the mouth. These formulations will not stain the skin (except the palms) and will wash out of clothing. However, the more the KARO is diluted with water, the more staining will become apparent" (Smith, 1985, p. 58).

blood varied from film to film, and likewise did its status and importance relative to other elements within the film.

Visual characteristics alone do not define the red we see as blood. Writing about theater props, Andrew Sofer (2003) argues that

motion is the prop's defining feature. Yet motion is precisely what slips from view when the prop is considered as a static symbol, whose meaning is frozen once and for all on the page, rather than as an object that creates and sustains a dynamic relationship with the audience as a given performance unfolds. If we are to recover the stage life of objects, we must attend to how the prop moves on stage for both actor and audience" (Sofer, 2003, p. vi).

Although perspectives from theater cannot be automatically assumed to be applicable for moving images, certain key aspects of Sofer's argument are of relevance here as well. Also in moving images, props are in motion and "create and sustain a dynamic relationship with the audience" as the images unfold. Movie props, including blood, are dynamic entities, entering relationships with other features of the image as well as with the audience. As Sofer argues, "[a] prop exists textually only in a state of suspended animation. It demands actual embodiment and motion on the stage in order to spring to imaginative life" (Sofer, 2003, p. 3). Likewise, although not technically in itself a prop,⁷⁴ blood in a film – often not even mentioned in the script – is only actualized as the concrete images are unfolding. While blood can be applied in a static and passive manner, as an inanimate element of the mise-en-scene, what is characteristic of the new roles and functions increasingly occupied by blood as a sensational visual element in the 1960s, is the degree of activity exercised as blood enters relations with other elements in the unfolding cinematic images.

⁷⁴ Sofer defines a prop as "*a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance*" (Sofer, 2003, p. 11, emphasis in original).

One of the key questions that this dissertation explores is, how can blood take on all these different roles and functions in cinematic images? To address this question it is necessary to discuss how blood is constructed in such images, and how different blood images can play different roles within a film, and carry different potentials for affecting their viewers. But first I will look closer at blood itself, and discuss in more detail scholarly theories about how we as human beings tend to react to the sight of blood in visual images.

The sight of blood

Why do human beings often, at least in certain situations, react particularly strongly to the sight of blood, even when an image of blood is displayed in a fiction film? Several different directions can be taken in order to address this question. One direction would be to look for characteristics of blood itself, and how we as humans react to seeing this substance. Such an approach would seek to determine any automatic and direct effects from blood images on human spectators. A range of different theoretical positions can be drawn on here. Biological or medical explanations often argue there is an evolutionary foundation to adverse human reactions towards the sight of blood, claiming this is a behavioral response protecting us from potential danger (see e.g., Seligman, 1971; Connolly, Hallam & Marks, 1976; Thyer, Himle & Curtis, 1985; Marks, 1988). Unlike these explanations, which seek to explain our reaction to the sight of blood as being biologically determined, more culturally and iconographically oriented explanations seek to explain the effect of blood through its symbolic value in, for instance, religious or historical imagery (e.g., Bradburne, 2001). In these perspectives, blood is seen as having certain inscribed meanings and effects, which are explained as being determined by cultural and historical factors, rather than through our biological or evolutionary hard-wiring. Both of these approaches explain any adverse or strong reactions to the sight of

blood by pointing to characteristics of blood itself, be it through the biologically determined responses it evokes or its culturally inscribed meanings.

Other explanations take on a more functional and relational character, such as those found in the broad stream of anthropological literature that focuses on the social function and regulation of blood rites and menstruation. This stream of research, as for example provided by the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), explains the effects of the sight of blood structurally and in terms of its relations to other signs or artifacts. As Douglas explains, "dirt is essentially disorder" (Douglas, 1966, p. 2), and when we react negatively towards something perceived as dirt this is not due to some inherent characteristic of the dirty object or phenomenon; rather, dirt is what threatens our social mode of order and organization. Thus, according to Douglas, the elimination of dirt is "not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment" (Douglas, 1966, p. 2). The exclusion of dirt, disorder, is a way to maintain the mode of organization which constitutes our epistemological framework.

In this perspective, humans would react towards the sight of blood when it appears 'out of place,' that is, in settings and locations where it would 'normally' not be present. Under regular circumstances, blood circulates inside the body, invisible to the human eye. Thus, the sight of human blood only occurs when blood is deemed to be out of place, when the surface of the body is broken or when blood flows from body orifices (such as during menstruation). In Douglas' perspective, social practices regulating the occurrence and visibility of blood are established in order to maintain a cohesive social structure. When blood occurs outside of such regulated practices it is classified as abhorrent and threatening to the social order as well as to the individual.

A similar approach from a psychoanalytic perspective is provided by Julia Kristeva (1982), whose concept of "the abject" seeks to explain negative human

reactions towards, among other things, bodily matter out of place. The abject is negatively defined, as that which opposes the I, or the system within which the I is positioned. Abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

Kristeva acknowledges her debt to Douglas but criticizes the anthropologist for leaving out the subjective-symbolic dimension, which Kristeva argues “*corresponds* to a specific structuration of the speaking subject in the *symbolic order*” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 67, emphasis in original). For Kristeva, Douglas succeeds in outlining a symbolic system, which as a structure or classification system constitutes a logical order where that which has no classification, no symbolic order, is jettisoned and abjected. In such a system, that which does not fit into the system of classification, filth, becomes excluded as a possible object and turns into something threatening to the symbolic order and constitutes defilement (Kristeva, 1982, p. 65). However, Kristeva argues, Douglas fails to adequately account for the role of the human body in such a symbolic system. According to Kristeva,

the explanation she [Douglas] gives of defilement assigns in turn different statuses to the human body: as ultimate cause of the socio-economic causality, or simply as metaphor of that socio-symbolic being constituted by the human universe always present to itself. In so doing, however, Mary Douglas introduces willy-nilly the possibility of a subjective dimension within anthropological thought on religions (Kristeva, 1982, p. 66).

This “subjective dimension” becomes the focus of Kristeva’s own contribution, and leads towards what she labels as “semantic problems” regarding the “meaning” of the defiled border elements (Kristeva, 1982, p. 66). In her reorientation, Kristeva makes explicit that when she herself speaks of symbolic order, she “shall imply the dependence and articulation of the speaking subject in the order of language, such

as they appear diachronically in the advent of each speaking being, and as analytic listening discovers them synchronically in the speech of analysands" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 67). In this shift from Douglas to Kristeva, we can trace a theoretical move from structuralism to post-structuralism, where the relations between the subject and language and the construction of meaning become imperative as operative parts in the functioning of the symbolic system. This introduction of a subjective-symbolic dimension into the operations of a social symbolic system, for Kristeva, "presents the *effects* and especially the *benefits* that accrue to the speaking subject from a precise symbolic organization." Furthermore, it has "the advantage of not turning the 'symbolic system' into a secular replica of the 'preestablished harmony' or the 'divine order'; rather, it roots it, as a *possible variant*, within the only concrete universality that defines the speaking being—the signifying process" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 67, emphasis in original).

Abjection, according to Kristeva, "is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization. But abjection assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various 'symbolic systems'" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 68). This does not say that abjection is always the same, rather, Kristeva emphasizes, the subjective experience of abjection, "varies according to time and space" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 68). Still, Kristeva argues, a universal abject state is associated with corporeal waste, especially menstrual blood and excrement, a phenomenon Kristeva claims is left unanswered by the structural-functional anthropological canon (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 69-70). The particular abject status of menstrual blood, Kristeva argues, is associated with its feminine status, as a threat to the male, phallic power of the reigning symbolic order. Feminine defilements do not fit in, not merely in terms of being bodily waste but particularly in terms of its association with feminine bodily orifices. Menstrual blood thus threatens not only a

bodily order but furthermore a patriarchal order as it becomes a threat to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes and the prescribed identity of each sex (Kristeva, 1982, p. 71).

When considering this perspective, I am sympathetic towards Kristeva's attempts at destabilizing the social and symbolic order, turning it into a dynamic system of possible variants, rather than a model for static or pre-established harmony. However, I am far more skeptical towards Kristeva's exclusive focus on symbolic orders and processes of signification. Kristeva's focus on menstrual blood, rather than blood in general, underlines her emphasis on signification and meaning. Menstrual blood assumes abject status through its association with the feminine, and its resistance to a patriarchal symbolic order, not primarily in terms of its physical characteristics. Unlike Douglas, who operates with a static model, seeing the abject status of, for instance, (menstrual) blood, as an outcome of its function within a symbolic system, Kristeva's model sees the abject, for instance (menstrual) blood, as operating within dynamic relations between signifiers, where the meaning is not given by a predefined system but rather actively incorporated by the subject. While the explanation still operates on a systems-level, in Kristeva's case there is room for several, potentially contradicting systems and modes of interpretation. What these positions have in common is a focus on blood as a representation, not on its specific operations in a specific set or series of, for example, cinematic images. The question, in these perspectives, concerns the relation between the part and the system(s) of which it is a representation, not so much how specific images act and operate. Thus, in both Douglas' and Kristeva's perspectives, the function of blood images becomes something that can be studied in a structural, semiotic or textually oriented manner where the images are isolated from their context of use and perception.

Furthermore, for Douglas and Kristeva alike, the particular function of (menstrual) blood in a situated context functions as an effect or representation of a

concept or social formation. Their focus is on general abstract systems, not on particular and specific operations in localized societies and communities. Or rather, the local practices are seen as representations of social and cultural structures and formations. The effects, functions and meanings of blood are determined through structural, conceptual and semiological analysis, not through empirically grounded situations. They both operate within a tradition of anthropology which, according to the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “imagines each culture or society as the embodiment of a specific solution to a generic problem – as the specification of a universal form (the anthropological concept) with a particular content (the indigenous representation)” (Viveiros de Castro, 2003, p. 8). In this model, the concrete and localized ontological state of being is explained epistemologically, as an exemplary representation of a universal phenomenon (e.g., the abject status of menstrual blood). Viveiros de Castro contrasts this with a different, dissenting, image of anthropology, where no analytic distinction is made between the procedures for studying anthropological concepts and those used for studying specific populations. Following this approach, specific practices cannot be seen as representations of general concepts or systems. Rather, the effects, functions and meanings of the practices and ideas are generated locally (in time as well as space). Thus, practices do not represent concepts and structural models; rather, such concepts and models emerge through concrete and situated practices. The methodological challenge that follows from this perspective is to closely observe, document and analyze these practices, and how these take part in producing, rather than representing, social and cultural formations (Jensen & Rodje, 2010, p. 3).

Although Kristeva does not explain the meaning of (menstrual) blood by referring to its position within a static symbolic system, she remains tied to a model of representation, where the focus is not on the concrete instances where blood appears, and what follows from this, but rather on generating an abstract model

explaining the meaning of, for instance, (menstrual) blood. This model itself has no location in time or space, but the particular meanings of blood are still referred back to, and seen as representations of, this general model. What is lost in an attempt to apply the perspectives of Douglas and Kristeva to a study of cinematic images of blood is the active roles images play when connecting with audiences as well as with other material artifacts. In these perspectives images are seen as carriers of meaning, and in effect dematerialized as they operate through systems of signification rather than through encounters with concretely situated and embodied viewers. I will thus argue that Douglas and Kristeva both fall short of providing explanations for the wildly differentiating effects and functions of various visual and cinematic images where blood plays a part. While Douglas and Kristeva, as well as scholars working within similar perspectives, may provide clues as to why people may react strongly towards the sight of blood, they do not provide much help in explaining why different images have different functions and effects, or why even different perceptions of the same image can go in different directions.

A recent, more nuanced historical study on the use of blood in symbols and rituals by Melissa L. Meyer (2005) sees such practices as a cultural universal, although the meanings attributed to blood have been undergoing variations. Meyer points to a number of inherent reasons for humans to signify blood, from the neurophysiology of color perception to its affiliation with human life cycles as well as the slaying of animals (Meyer, 2005, pp. 1-4). Still, Meyer argues, this universality cannot account for the wide range of symbols, rituals and metaphors involving blood (Meyer, 2005, p. 4). Meyer here points to the field of gene-culture co-evolution in order to explain this diversification, as this perspective sees human culture as “most elaborate where the neurophysiological bases most favor it” (Meyer, 2005, p. 4). Thus, Meyer argues, the special status and immense elaboration as well as variation attached to blood in symbols, rituals and metaphors are affiliated with the role of

blood in the reproductive life cycle (Meyer, 2005, p. 5). As Meyer explains, “[h]umans have imposed more symbolic and metaphorical meanings on blood in more ritualized contexts than any other substance. Blood symbolizes life most extensively, death secondarily” (Meyer, 2005, p. 5). As such, Meyer sees the function of blood as cultural universal, although its particular expression in symbols, ritual and metaphors varies across cultures.

Unlike Douglas and Kristeva, Meyer explicitly allows for a biological component in explaining why we as human beings react towards the sight of blood. Nevertheless, Meyer distances herself from both biological and cultural determinism (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). While a biological determinist perspective fails to account for the diversity in human behavior, cultural determinism, on the other hand, Meyer argues, tends to exaggerate the belief in cultural variability, while at the same time ignoring the role of the human mind (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). In response, Meyer prefers a co-evolutionary perspective, where “genes and culture interact and shape each other, guided by epigenetic rules” (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). Meyer acknowledges a wide cultural variation in symbols and rituals involving blood. Nonetheless, she sees these symbols and rituals as “unmistakably patterned” (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). Symbols and rituals concerning blood, and especially menstrual blood, thus form what Meyer labels a “patterned heterogeneity” (Meyer, 2005, p. 205).

I find Meyer’s perspective more nuanced and multifaceted than those of Douglas or Kristeva, and it might very well prove useful for studying the roles and meanings as well as variations of blood rituals and symbols, especially in relation to the human reproductive cycle. However, this perspective has little, if anything, to offer when it comes to explaining the concrete role and meaning of images of blood in specific motion pictures. A co-evolutionary model might provide explanations for why many human beings tend to react strongly to the sight of blood (although the cultural and individual variation is great) as well as to why blood tends to occupy a

central role in a number of cultural representations. Still, this perspective can only account for images at the level of representation; that is, how these images stand in relation to a more general pattern or phenomenon. Even if our reaction towards the sight of blood is in part biologically hard-wired – something I do not wish to deny – this cannot account for the specific functions and effects of diverse blood images. The question that remains is how such images are engaged in concrete and local practices. Minute variations and engagements with specific cultural movements operate within a too limited temporal domain to be explained from an evolutionary perspective. A general explanation of why people may react to the sight of blood, even if partly true, tends to leave aside the more interesting questions regarding how different images carry potentials to affect us in different ways. The applicability of evolutionary perspectives in studies of cultural phenomena is limited to studies seeking more general explanations, or that operates across wide (spatio)temporal domains, and such perspectives are hence of less relevance when the object of study is more specific and local practices and forms of expression.

Furthermore, this has ethical and political implications. When the roles and effects of specific, historically located, images are explained as evolutionary, the connections these images make with other contemporary movements become irrelevant. These explanations thus tend towards the universal and ahistorical, while any virtual potential the image might carry with regards to affecting its contemporary site is disregarded. To clarify, I am here not making a general claim that evolutionary accounts of human practices, rituals and symbolizations involving blood are by necessity apolitical.⁷⁵ Rather, my argument is that such evolutionary perspectives cannot explain the specific political relevance of blood images in a

⁷⁵ For an explicitly political account from an evolutionary perspective, see for instance Chris Knight's *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* (1991), a Marxist and feminist analysis of the origins of human culture, which Knight traces back to the role of menstruation in regulating sexual relations and human reproduction.

contemporary setting. Thus, what is needed, are approaches that account for what images (potentially) do and how images (potentially) act, rather than approaches seeking general explanations for what images mean and what they can be said to represent.

To reiterate, I do not contest that the sight of blood might trigger any biologically hard-wired or culturally inscribed reactions or meanings; however, my aim is to expand the scope and explicitly focus on the differentiating potentials of blood images. I will thus argue for an approach which goes even further in the direction of relationality and process, while still allowing for the materiality and potential physiological impact of images. Such an approach would need to encompass the specificity of each image and each process of perception, and how each image-perception differs from the next. Images are in this perspective never finished products but rather made anew each time a connection is made. In this perspective, blood would be understood by what it does and contributes to, in the dynamic unfolding and connective activity of images.

An image-analysis can never be completed. Patterns and models emerge from the connections images enter; however, the images cannot be reduced to representations of any general structure or mechanism. Rather, as seen in my earlier discussion on Bergson's ideas on perception and images, and how these ideas have been taken up in Deleuze's writings on cinema, images are productive, and as they are being perceived new images are generated (see Introduction). These new images are separate yet not independent from the images being perceived. Blood sets things in motion, it is productive, and the outcome of these motions cannot be solely determined by what these images can be said to represent. Cinematic images comprise potentials, which when perceived may have actual, real-life, effects and consequences.

Blood assemblages

In the previous sections, I established that in a motion picture, blood is never an individual stand-alone item that by itself dictates a specific and uniform interpretation or reaction. What we as film audiences see is merely something red on the screen – or as stated by Jean-Luc Godard: “It’s not blood, it’s red.”⁷⁶ The question then becomes how this ‘something red’ comes to be interpreted or experienced as blood. This is further complicated by the fact that viewers in most cases know, or at least suspect, that what they see is not actually real blood but rather some substitute made to appear as blood. We see something, which we do not ‘really’ believe to be blood; yet, we ‘willingly’ accept this illusion, which still can affect us in a visceral sense.

In order for the red on the screen to be interpreted and experienced as blood, several criteria or factors need to be fulfilled. It must look like blood in terms of color (red in a color movie, dark in black-and-white) and texture (fluid, yet rather thick and sticky). The appearance of blood needs to be confirmed by its relations with other elements in the image (for instance, if the red fluid appears on torn skin it will likely be interpreted as blood, if the same red liquid appears in a wine glass it will most likely not, unless the contents of the glass are being consumed by a vampire). This appearance of a red fluid will more likely be interpreted/experienced as blood if the interpretation is confirmed by other elements in the film (for instance, if a character watching a pool of red fluids starts screaming). Related to these other factors, the appearance of the blood should logically make sense temporally within the diegetic universe of the film, that is, the images of blood should enter a relationship with its preceding and/or following images (for instance, in ‘real’ life people will bleed after being hit by gun bullet but not after being stroked with a

⁷⁶ Godard’s oft-quoted aphorism was stated in a 1965 interview with *Cahiers du cinema* with reference to his film *Pierrot le fou* (1965) (see Sterritt, 2002).

feather, and for a film to appear 'realistic,' it is to be expected that blood should appear under similar 'realistic' circumstances).

None of these factors will on their own ensure the illusion of blood but what these criteria point to is that a number of interrelated factors have to be in place, where the characteristics of the 'blood' need to appear in visual and discursive combinations which make its appearance logical, plausible and convincing – spatially as well as temporally. These factors may include special effects, make-up, human actors, material artifacts, sound, plot and story components, and relations of cause and effect.

As there is no single criterion that can define what constitutes blood in a cinematic image, the presence of blood will always be a relational construct. Minimally, four interconnected levels or aspects of relationality need to be enacted in order for the illusion of blood to succeed on the screen. First, the object itself, the sticky red (dark) liquid looking like blood, is constituted through numerous relations. Second, for each image this 'blood-object' enters relations to other objects or entities within the image. Third, each 'blood-image' enters relations to preceding and succeeding audiovisual images in the film. And fourth, these film images enter relations to biologically, socially and culturally situated and embodied audiences and viewers. These four levels – the blood artifacts, the images, the film, the process of perception – all enter into relations with each other, in continuously ongoing processes.

A multitude of factors is hence operating in this process of making 'something red' on the screen be interpreted and experienced as blood. The term 'blood assemblage' will here designate this multitude of operating factors which together make the appearance of blood convincing to the viewer. No essential characteristic of blood can be detected anywhere in this assemblage; rather its effects are distributed and enacted across a potentially unlimited number of relations.

Blood assemblages are both expressive and material, and these aspects appear in various combinations. The constitution of a blood assemblage affects its expressive capacities, and as its constitution is always undergoing transformations, its expressions are never uniform and stabilized. The blood assemblage has to be created anew for each image, each film and each process of perception. Its expressive potentials are enacted through these relations, not by way of any inherent characteristics. Three key questions then emerge: 1) How are the blood assemblages constituted? 2) Which potentials for expression can be found in these images? 3) What happens, and can happen, as these images are actualized in the encounters with their audiences? These questions are in effect interrelated. The material constitution of the blood assemblages in cinematic images and their potential for expression will go hand in hand as the constitution of the assemblages will impact their expressive potentials, and, conversely as the images are assembled, this will, at least partly, take place with the expressive potentials of these images in mind. These potentials can never be fully predetermined as the number of relations constituting the assemblage and its performance is in principle unlimited.

A further implication of this 'assemblage perspective' is that it moves a Bergsonian image-perspective away from the auteur-oriented approach to cinema to which Deleuze himself adheres. Despite his focus on the materiality of images, in his cinema books Deleuze implicitly tends to operate with an idealistic model when it comes to the constitution of these images. His focus is on the minds and ideas of the films' directors, and how these are expressed in the images of their films. This goes together with Deleuze's preference for the time-image as it expresses a concept-generating, philosophical form of cinema, which is far removed from the sensational, visceral and affective cinema exemplified by exploitation films.

The auteur perspective sees cinematic images as an expression of one individual mind: that of the film's director. Assemblages, on the other hand, are

fundamentally collective, beyond the control of any one individual. Although a director, as well as other key personnel involved in the making of a movie, makes a number of creative decisions impacting the assemblages of cinematic images and their expressive potentials, these decisions will never fully overrule other factors at work. Cinematic images are not contained units where each single element is a result of a conscious decision made by the director or any other person involved in the making of the film. As trails of associations are un-nested, a multitude of mediators come into play, all contributing to the final constitution of the images. These trails of associations can be strong or weak, and some assemblages are constituted more loosely, with greater degrees of freedom for randomness and unforeseen processes, while other assemblages are constituted more tightly, with less room for unforeseen events. The difference is one of degree, as neither a completely random nor a completely contained assemblage is a likely, or even possible, end result. The degrees of freedom tend to be greater the more the elements deployed in a film are beyond the control of the filmmakers. For instance, location shooting introduces a greater number of factors beyond the control of the filmmakers (weather, lighting conditions, traffic, etc.) as compared with shooting a movie in a studio.

Exploitation movies typically operate with a greater degree of freedom than their studio counterparts. In these movies, filmmakers would often lack both the means and the skills needed to keep a tight rein on the images under construction. With little or no access to studio lots, expensive equipment, skilled actors, elaborate special effects, extensive retakes, advanced post-production work, and so on, the gap between idea and realization can be significant. Add to this the practices of re-editing exploitation films, which was done for numerous reasons – pleasing censor boards, padding, insertion of more explicit materials, demands from distributors or exhibitors, etc. – and it becomes clear that the filmmakers' control over the final product is at best limited. On the one hand, this could lead to chaotic, and at times

catastrophic, results, where films end up messy and incomprehensible, due to limitations in time, budget, equipment, and so on – or merely due to sheer incompetence. Typical examples abound in, for instance, the films of Ed Wood Jr., where scenes seemingly at random shift from daylight to nighttime; flying saucers are carried by very visible strings; cardboard walls are on the verge of falling over, and so on. On the other hand, these chaotic modes of production can at times lead to unexpected advances and bursts of creativity. This, I would argue, was the case with *Color Me Blood Red*, discussed in the previous chapter. As mentioned, Herschell Gordon Lewis himself was dissatisfied with this film, due to what he perceived to be an implausible plot, where the mad artist's obsession with the visual characteristics of blood makes little or no sense when it comes to explaining his hideous deeds. Lewis sees this as one of the lesser films in his oeuvre (Palmer, 2000, pp. 95-96), and this is partly explained by his own lack of control over the finished product. The partnership between Lewis and Friedman broke down during the postproduction of this film, and the final version of the film was eventually assembled by a professional film cutter (Palmer, 2000, pp. 94-95). Although the basic premise of the film's story was conceptualized by Lewis and Friedman, the final version of the film was a result of a number of events beyond their control. For instance, a pair of red pedal boats, central in several of the film's scenes, which added to the general absurdity of the film, were included as a promotional stunt, courtesy of the manufacturer of these boats, who let the film crew use them for free in their film (*Color Me Blood Red*, DVD commentary track). In addition, the special gore effects malfunctioned on several occasions, resulting in murder scenes different from those originally planned (Palmer, 2000, pp. 85-91).

What makes these stories relevant is that they demonstrate the collective, dynamic and uncontrollable nature of the blood assemblages as well as other elements within a film. Blood assemblages are constituted through a potentially

unlimited number of unstable relations and carry infinite potentials for expression, which can only partly be controlled by the filmmakers – and this degree of control itself varies substantially from one movie production to the next.

Let us for example consider the infamous tongue-ripping scene from *Blood Feast*, as discussed in the previous chapter. The special effects and artifacts used in this scene include Barfred's blood mixture, gelatin and cranberry mix, which together with the actors playing the roles of the victim and the murderer as well as the sheep's tongue that was used as a prop, constitute the main material ingredients in this scene.⁷⁷ Each of these artifacts is constituted through sets of relations between various ingredients and processes – as for instance with the special concoction making up the Barfred's blood mixture. Thus, these ingredients, each of which themselves may be considered relational composites, enter into relations which together enact the illusion of blood in this scene. These assemblages here operate together with the bodies of the actors in this scene, especially the hands of the killer and the mouth of the actress.

The sensations and potential responses evoked by this scene are not fully determined by the images alone. As argued in my previous chapter, these images will function differently in different settings. As the images are made anew each time they are being perceived, a huge span of differentiating factors come into play. Images always connect with other matters and processes, and these connections again result in new movements and sensations. In this vein, each appearance of 'blood' on screen is constituted as an assemblage, through a multiplicity of relations, where no one factor alone determines its status as blood. This assemblage is never given or static but constantly needs to be reassembled. Sets of relations need to be in place and enacted for the blood to appear plausible and convincing. The

⁷⁷ For details on the making of this scene, see Palmer (2000, pp. 52-53); Curry (1999, p. 56); Krogh (1983, pp. 12-16); Waters (1981, p. 206).

expressive potentials of the blood are further enhanced by additional sets of relations, through which the blood and its appearance take on more specific characteristics. Different blood styles and different effects can be enacted through the various constellations of the blood assemblages, with different potentials for affecting and connecting with their audiences. I will now seek to further develop my conceptualization of the blood assemblage, and the roles these assemblages play in constituting such potentials.

Blood as actor

The first and foremost function of blood in a cinematic image is in most instances to appear as 'genuine' blood, realistically speaking. As stated above, audiences possess some preconceptions of what blood should look like – based on personal experiences, other factual and fictional images, medical knowledge, etc. – against which the performance of the blood assemblage can be compared. Based on such criteria a given blood image can be deemed as more or less 'realistic' or convincing. The blood assemblage performs an act of make believe.

Blood on-screen can be described as a representation-in-the-making, a visual object begging to be interpreted as something very specific and recognizable. In such a perspective, blood is seen as a copy, more or less equal to its original – 'real' blood. Furthermore, the status of the blood assemblage will here be determined by the extent to which it 'succeeds' in mimicking the appearance of real blood. Blood either appears realistic, or it does not. However, the expressive and performative potential of the blood assemblage is severely restricted when perceived in this manner. What gets lost is its potential for entering different sets of relations, with widely diverging potentials for actualization. An emphasis on potential and actualization, on the other hand, means that the blood assemblage, through the relations it enters, can partake in creations of new images, practices, and

experiences. In order to capture these productive potentials, rather than portraying them as a case of representation, I will explore the performative aspects of the blood assemblages. They perform. They act. They resemble but are not equal to real blood. I will thus study the role of the blood assemblage as an actor, in the dual sense of this term that here applies.

In a dramaturgical sense, an 'actor' in a movie is an individual taking on a role as a character, without ever fully becoming this character. Acting, in this sense, is always both singular and double; it is a unique performance but this performance stands in relation to something else, which it performs or resembles. Acting is always relational. In a movie, the actor and the role enacted can be seen in relation to each other, and different styles of acting can be distinguished by how this relation is played out.⁷⁸ Likewise, blood in a movie is always relational; the red we see on the screen stands in a relationship to 'real' blood, and this relation plays a key part in determining the impact of the image.

Although acting can be described as a realistic form of representation, such an interpretation, I would argue, can lean towards reductionism as the role will always be deemed to be a copy, an imitation of an original character – be it a 'real' person, a fictional or mythological character, an archetype, a psychological concept, an emotional state, and so on. Indeed, such an interpretation will always take form of a judgment – a performance is deemed more or less successful the degree to which it manages to reproduce and replicate the 'original.' However, a more fruitful approach may be to explore the productive potentials of an actor's performance. What does it bring into existence, which capabilities are brought forward, which connections does it invite? These are all more interesting questions to pose regarding

⁷⁸ For a historical exploration of theories of acting and their relation to scientific and biological models, see Roach (1993).

an actor's performance than to merely judge whether this is a successful act of representation or not.

This brings me to the second sense of the concept 'actor,' more familiar from the social sciences, where it can be used as an analytic term to describe an agent, an entity that acts and makes a difference. An actor is thus a center of activity, a differentiating mediator that makes events happen and that affects other entities – an actant, to use the vocabulary of ANT. Furthermore, following from an actor-network perspective, these actors are themselves relational. Each actor is a product of transient sets of relations, and it is only through entering relations that the actor can operate as a mediator. Activities unfold spatially between the actor and its surroundings as well as temporally between one state and the next. The actor transforms, while itself being transformed.

The blood assemblage is thus performing a role as blood while at the same time it acts as a transformative agent, a mediator. The various factors, processes and relations constituting the blood assemblage perform a role which appears to the viewer as blood, or at least as something resembling blood. This assemblage potentially affects other constituent parts and processes within the unfolding cinematic images, while at the same time it potentially affects the viewers of these images.

(Re)Distribution of agency

In movie scenes where blood operates as an element of attraction, the active role played by the blood assemblage not only relates to other elements within the image, such as human actors, but also positions itself as a center of attention relative to these other elements. The focus of attention shifts from human actors to material artifacts, or to put it otherwise, the most central connections in the actor-network are redistributed. Rather than the material artifacts supporting the human

actors, in these blood scenes the blood assemblage takes the centre stage, with humans as supporting actors.

The skills of the human actors hence become less of an issue, something which can often benefit a scene, as in many low-budget gore movies the actors were often inexperienced and of a rather limited acting caliber. Rather than relying upon the actors to express the terror and emotions suffered as they are attacked, mauled and killed, the blood assemblage shifts the key 'acting part' of a scene towards its non-human actants. The 'tongue scene' in *Blood Feast* is a clear example of this. Astrid Olson, the actress playing the victim, has no lines in the movie, and only appears in this one scene. Likewise, Mal Arnold, the actor playing Fuad Ramses, can hardly be called an accomplished performer by any stretch of the imagination. Neither Olson nor Arnold come across as believable figures, and nor do they express any convincing emotions or sensations, despite Arnold's evil gaze and Olson's struggle as she's being attacked. The main expressive and sensational components of this particular scene are the assemblages of blood and gore. While Olson's face and appearance are easily forgettable, the image that for many viewers, including myself, remains after having seen this scene, is the sight of the enormous tongue dripping with blood that Ramses fondles in his hands after extracting it from her mouth.

For low-budget exploitation productions, whose human actors cannot match those in more prestigious productions, the blood assemblage provides a possibility for displaying something else and something more than Hollywood can offer. The low-budget gore films can thus showcase cheap effects and the performative role of the blood assemblage. The relative emphasis on attractions over narrative integration goes together with a shift from character-driven to more sensational and visceral modes of organizing images and sequences within a film. In these films, the blood assemblage can often play as prominent a role as the human actors when it

comes to characterizing the potentials of a scene or a film. This can introduce a greater degree of unpredictability in a movie production. The blood assemblage can be hard to control when it is being deployed in a scene. Its texture makes the blood product itself slippery and evasive. Furthermore, the number of relations constituting the assemblage and its performance is potentially unlimited. As an actor, the blood assemblage is thus an erratic performer, which does not easily take direction. This allows for significant variations in its performance. And, as stated above, the unpredictability of the blood assemblage tends to be greater in low budget productions, with less skilled personnel, less advanced special effects and less time and money for retakes and post-production work.

What *Blood Feast* and its successors established was a place where the blood assemblage could operate as the focal point of a movie: the central attraction for the audience. The role of the blood assemblage in these films stands in stark contrast to its performance in *Rio Bravo*, or other classical Hollywood movies, where the blood assemblage tended to be closely integrated within the narrative of the film. As I have discussed in previous chapters, from the late 1950s onwards blood images appear that break clearly with this pattern, like the red blood inserts in *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler*, or the extravagant gore of *Blood Feast*. These rather crude images stand out as shock effects, directly addressing the viewer in a sensational and visceral manner. These effects can appear as rather one-dimensional, providing the audiences with affective jolts but often not much more than that. Arguably, the more interesting blood images are those that operate in the unstable intersections and constellations between attraction and narration, and which explore the interrelations and ruptures between affect and signification. As I argued in the previous chapter, this is what increasingly happened in Lewis' blood movies following *Blood Feast*, namely *Two Thousand Maniacs* and, especially, *Color Me Blood Red*. In these later movies, the blood assemblage is neither an element of narrative, nor a

mere shock effect. Rather, the blood assemblage in these films came to operate along the intersections of affect and signification. Here we start seeing the development of more intricate interplays between blood assemblages and discursive strata.

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, the blood assemblage continued to take on central roles in independent, low-budget, and exploitation features. Influential and innovative titles include *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Last House on the Left* (1972), and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974).⁷⁹ During this period, the blood assemblage also came to take on new roles within Hollywood, to which I will now shift my focus. The next two chapters of this dissertation will explore how the blood assemblage in the 1960s traversed Hollywood studio productions, and how such assemblages, across a number of films, came to take on different roles, with different expressive potentials.

⁷⁹ For an analysis of these films, and their progressive political potentials, see Wood (2003).

Chapter 4: Blood in the 1960s: *Bonnie and Clyde*

In her personal memoir on how , all of a sudden, blood seemed to be everywhere in American cinema, film scholar Vivian Sobchack recalls one film in particular that made an impact,

a first film—the film which transcends its surface intentions and burns into us some unstated message with the intensity not of an arc lamp but of a laser. *Bonnie and Clyde*, released in 1967, was just such a film. Although it was not the first film to overtly bathe itself in blood, it was the first one to create an aesthetic, moral, and psychological furor. Uneven in tone yet brilliantly conceived, it fired our imaginations not merely because it was a good film, but because it was the first major film to allow us the luxury of inspecting what frightened us—the senseless, the unexpected, the bloody. And, most importantly, it kindly stylized death for us; it created nobility from senselessness, it choreographed a dance out of blood and death, it gave meaning and import to our mortal twitching (Sobchack, 2000, p. 114).

Many viewers, like Sobchack, were forever touched. Blood came to the forefront, stylistically and aesthetically, it all its senselessness. Indeed, *Bonnie and Clyde* is repeatedly cited as the film that brought blood to the forefront in Hollywood cinema, and is often identified as marking a watershed moment in the history of violence on the screen. For example, in his study *Classical Film Violence*, Stephen Prince argues:

Violence, in our contemporary sense of the term, does not exist in Hollywood cinema before the late 1960s. Signaled by *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 and the inauguration of the Code and Rating Administration's G-M-R-X scheme for rating film content in 1968, the new film violence that emerged in these years differed from the shootings, beatings, and other mayhem in the films of classical Hollywood because it was far more graphic. This new level of explicitness helped to put motion picture violence, as an idea and a topic, on the nation's agenda and gave it a visibility it had not previously possessed. Prior to that time, 'violence' did not exist as a 'thing-in-itself,'

perceived as an irreducible feature of cinema irrespective of considerations such as genre or the dramatic content of a given scene (Prince, 2003, p. 30).

This quote outlines the topics to be explored in the next two chapters. In this chapter, I discuss *Bonnie and Clyde*, focusing on the role of the blood assemblage, and contrast it with earlier depictions of blood in Hollywood productions from the 1960s. Furthermore, in order to illustrate how the shifting portrayals of blood took place in close interrelationship with other transformations in the American film industry, I give a brief outline of the American systems for rating and censoring movies and how changes in these systems allowed for more leeway in explicit depictions of violence during the 1960s. My next chapter focuses on the topic of film violence. I there discuss 1969's *The Wild Bunch*, the film that is viewed as the most violent film to be released by a Hollywood studio in the 1960s (Prince, 1998). This film occupies a central place in Prince's own analysis of film violence, and I will critically address his position in the next chapter.

To begin this chapter I will trace developments in the performance of the blood assemblage in a number of foundational films from the 1960s, leading up to the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967. Throughout the 1960s, Hollywood motion pictures became increasingly graphic, although not necessarily more realistic, in the portrayal of violence and bloodshed.⁸⁰ In a number of films, the blood assemblage becomes more central. Blood not only becomes more visible, it also takes on more active and diversified roles, entering complex relations with other elements on the screen. At the same time, blood increasingly comes to modulate the violent intensities and affective potentials of the cinematic images where it plays a part.

⁸⁰ I here follow the distinction made by Joel Black, who makes the claim that movies increasingly are taking on a "reality effect," which is not to be understood in terms of realism but rather as becoming "more *graphic* – more physical and explicit" (Black, 2002, p. 8, emphasis in original). A graphic imperative involves making things explicit and visible while at the same time masking the constructed and partial nature of the "reality" presented and perceived.

Hitchcock: *Psycho*, *The Birds*, *Marnie*

A natural starting point is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* from 1960. The (in)famous shower scene where Marion Crane, the character played by Janet Leigh, is attacked and murdered by a knife-wielding killer was unprecedented in American mainstream cinema when it came to the portrayal of violent acts. The shower scene appears suddenly, early in the movie, and can be experienced as an audiovisual assault on the audience, despite its restraint in showing explicit images. We never see the actual physical appearance of the killer, only his/her shadow through the shower curtain, and neither do we ever see the knife cutting the body of the victim. The violent effect is created by a combination of rapid editing, music, and images showing the aftermath of the murder. Blood flows down the drain of the shower, and the film cuts to a close up of Leigh's pupil.⁸¹

After a string of major film productions during the 1950s, such as *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958) and *North by Northwest* (1959), Hitchcock was at the peak of his career. Further helped along by the success of the ongoing TV-series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, Hitchcock became one of very few movie directors at the time to be a household name. Many in the audience expected similar mild-mannered morbid innuendos as was the trademark of the TV-series, not the full-on shock of the shower scene and the film's lurid sexual allusions.⁸²

⁸¹ This close-up actually constitutes one of the few technical 'mistakes' in the film. The papers on *Psycho* in the Margaret Herrick Library reveal that Hitchcock received several letters from physicians regarding this scene, all pointing to fact that Leigh's pupils in this image are of a normal, constricted, size, while in 'reality' the pupils of a person recently killed in such a manner would have been dilated. Some of the letters even point to methods the filmmakers could have used in order to achieve the effect of making pupils dilate (MHL Special Collections, Alfred Hitchcock papers, *Psycho*, folder 592; also see Rebello, 1990, p. 171).

⁸² The sexual controversies evoked by the film centered on two scenes. The first was the film's opening scene, where Janet Leigh appears in her underwear, sprawled on a bed after a sexual liaison with her secret boyfriend during her lunch break. The second was the famous shower scene where Janet Leigh is perceived to be naked, although her nude body is never actually shown. Several letters to Hitchcock following the film's release also show that certain audience members found the film repulsive and too focused upon the abnormal psyche of the film's killer (MHL Special Collections, Alfred Hitchcock papers, *Psycho*, folder 592).

Psycho became a big hit, and paid back its small budget many times. The film also enraged many critics as well as audience members. The files on *Psycho* in the Alfred Hitchcock papers in the Margaret Herrick Library reveal that the film was met with adverse audience reactions towards its graphic violence. Several audience members wrote letters addressed to Hitchcock after seeing the film, expressing their disapproval and physical repulsion. For instance, in a letter dated September 27, 1960, a woman from Texas stated that

I am not writing this letter as a crank. I am very sincere in what I am going to say. My husband and I recently saw your movie 'Psycho', and I would like to say that it was the most gruesome, morbid, REALISTIC movie I have ever seen. I would further like to state that it was a very unnerving experience, and I was visibly upset for hours after viewing it. To be perfectly frank—it made me sick at my stomach and weak in the knees!

I have always been a television fan of your [sic] and I thought you were the master of suspense. But I have changed my opinion of you considerably after seeing 'Psycho.' I will never see another movie of yours—nor do I intend to watch your television programs (MHL Special Collections, Alfred Hitchcock papers, *Psycho*, folder 592, emphasis in original).

In another letter, dated October 8, 1960, a woman from Livermore, California, writes "I have just seen 'Psycho.' I found it the most repulsive, disgusting, and utterly putrid picture I have ever seen" (MHL Special Collections, Alfred Hitchcock papers, *Psycho*, folder 592). Several letters express similar sentiments, often mixed with a strong moral condemnation of the film. Morals aside, what is most striking is the sheer physical impact several people report. What the letters illustrate, is that upon its release in 1960 *Psycho* quite literally had the effect of a shock on many viewers. The film left a lasting emotional impact, which the writer of another letter, dated October 12, 1960, describes as being "a little like stepping

away from the scene of a bloody automobile collision" (MHL Special Collections, Alfred Hitchcock papers, *Psycho*, folder 592).

These letters illustrate the affective and visceral impact *Psycho* made upon unsuspecting audiences in 1960. The letters describe vivid physical reactions to the macabre and revolting scenes Hitchcock presented. The film was markedly different from previous mainstream productions in its portrayal of violent death in a shocking and unexpected manner. Linda Williams (2000) makes an argument for *Psycho* as the first postmodern sensational blockbuster. *Psycho* provided thrills and visceral sensations, and demarcates a break from the emphasis on narrative integration characteristic of classical Hollywood cinema (Monaco, 2001, pp. 189-190). Or to quote Williams, *Psycho* "does mark the important beginning of an era in which viewers began going to the movies to be thrilled and moved in quite visceral ways, and without much concern for coherent characters or motives" (Williams, 2000, p, 356). Williams points to Gunning's concept of "cinema of attractions" to describe this renewed interest in the display of visceral sensations which, rather than a film's narrative and characters, constitute its main audience appeal. The most spectacular attractions of the film are also the most shocking and horrific – the two scenes of murder and the final revelation of the identity of "mother" in Norman Bates' basement.

Blood plays a minor, albeit significant, part in both murder scenes. The violent impact of these scenes is constructed by rapid editing and manipulation of the viewer's perspective (as well as evocative use of music). The blood mainly functions as a confirmation, establishing the violent consequences of the acts just put on display. During the acts of violence the editing is very swift, and actual violence towards the body is not shown. The blood thus ensures there is no confusion regarding the actual outcome of the scene and provides audiences with information to fill in any gaps after the sudden displays of violence. However, these images are

still not fully integrated within the film's narrative as was the case in, for example, *Rio Bravo*. Besides its function as a plot device, the blood here underscores the horrific nature of the scene and makes evident the brutality of the act the audience has just witnessed.

Psycho contains no graphic gore images, if by this we mean images where blood or other bodily matter is displayed in a manner designed to evoke a visceral response in the audience. Although sensational and shocking, *Psycho* establishes these effects through the relations established by cinematic technique rather than specific elements of mise-en-scene.⁸³ In the shower scene, what you don't see is as important as what you actually see. The effect of the scene is established through the relations between its various audiovisual elements. Blood appears as the scene calms down and the viewer has the opportunity to take in and comprehend the preceding event. Blood here adds to the chilling aftermath of the shock of witnessing Marion Crane unexpectedly attacked in the shower.

As with most Hitchcock productions, the shower scene was carefully calculated and planned out (see e.g., Truffaut, 1966). To achieve the effect of blood being washed down the drain, chocolate syrup was applied, as was common for black and white movies (Clark, 1966, p. 126; O'Connor & Hall, 1980, p. 115; Rebello, 1990, p. 112). The brown color of chocolate looks identical to red in black and white film, and the consistency of chocolate syrup resembles the thickness and stickiness of blood. Allegedly, Hitchcock had originally planned a more elaborate bloodshed in the filming of this scene and the film's storyboard indicates images of blood running

⁸³ Hitchcock himself claims to appreciate this film as a success in terms of arousing the audience emotionally by purely cinematic means. As he explains to Francois Truffaut: "My main satisfaction is that the film had an effect on the audiences, and I consider this very important. I don't care about the subject matter; I don't care about the acting; but I do care about the pieces of film and the photography and the sound track and all of the technical ingredients that made the audience scream. I feel it's tremendously satisfying for us to be able to use the cinematic art to achieve something of a mass emotion. And with *Psycho* we most definitely achieved this. It wasn't a message that stirred the audiences, nor was it a great performance or their enjoyment of the novel. They were aroused by pure film" (Truffaut, 1966, p. 211).

down tiles on the bathroom floor. However, Hitchcock eventually settled for blood running down the drain instead (Skal, 2001, p. 311). Also, Hitchcock later made claims that a blood-spurting dummy had been prepared but ended up not being used (Truffaut, 1966, p. 210). This, however, has not been confirmed by other members of the production staff (Rebello, 1990, p. 112).

In *Psycho* blood mainly provides information and contributes some atmosphere in the aftermath of the immediate shocks, following the rapid montage sequences in the scenes of violence. In Hitchcock's next movie, *The Birds* (1963), blood is to a larger extent integrated into the enactment of the film's dramatic scenes of violence. *The Birds* features several scenes of bird attacks, which progressively are presented as intense and violent. The bird attacks are portrayed through rapid editing, including close ups of birds pecking away at their flailing human victims as they shed blood.

Unlike the sudden bursts of violence in *Psycho*, the bird attacks in *The Birds*, especially towards the end of the movie, are sustained over a prolonged period of time.⁸⁴ Blood is spilled during the attacks, and heightens the intensity of the scenes. In the film's climaxing scene, Melanie Daniels, Tippi Hedren's character, is attacked by a flock of birds while trapped inside an attic. Through rapid editing, we see the birds hacking and tearing her skin and flesh, while she increasingly becomes drenched in blood. Unlike *Psycho*, where the attack in the shower appears suddenly and unexpected, shocking the audience, and where the blood appears after the event as a confirmation of what happened, the progressive nature of the attacks in *The*

⁸⁴ Paul Monaco argues that "*The Birds* marked the emerging attempt to redesign the fundamental structure of a feature film by distinguishing those parts of a movie that are dialogue-based and conventionally dramatic from other parts that consist of sensational visual action and effects. The film attempted, with only partial success, to reintegrate these disparate elements into an artistic whole" (Monaco, 2001, p. 191). This uneasy disjuncture between more conventional narrative scenes and sensational horrific episodes that remained unexplained in terms of the film's narrative is likely a key reason why *The Birds* did not become a success with critics and audiences upon its initial release. For others, this disjuncture, where the bird attacks remain unexplained, makes the film more appealing. Myself, I find *The Birds* to be Hitchcock's most fascinating movie largely for this reason.

Birds makes the attack in the attic something the audience can anticipate. This scene is distressing and disturbing, rather than shocking, and the blood heightens this affective experience. The blood assemblage here operates in terms of affect, not predominantly as a purveyor of information. The display of blood intensifies the severe agony of the attacks, and adds to the tension, excitement and distress audiences may experience.

Blood plays a key, although somewhat different role in Hitchcock's next movie, *Marnie* (1964).⁸⁵ In this film, Marnie, again played by Tippi Hedren, reacts strongly to the sight of bright red colors, be they in red gladiolas, red ink, red spots on a shirt, or a red jacket. It is made obvious that the color has some emotional impact on Marnie as she experiences a strong sensation of fear. However, the meaning of this reaction is concealed – from the audience as well as from Marnie herself and other characters in the film. As Marnie experiences fear at the sight of red, the screen is tinted red in a flashing manner. Marnie's reaction is presented to the viewer as a mystery: a sign in search of an interpretation.

Only towards the end of the film is the meaning of Marnie's fright made obvious, in the one and only scene in the movie to actually display blood. In a flashback sequence, Marnie finally remembers a horrific incident from her childhood. Marnie's mother, at that time a prostitute, was servicing a client (played by Bruce Dern) in her apartment, with Marnie present in the adjacent room. A thunderstorm erupts and the client directs his attention towards the frightened Marnie and starts fondling her. Defending her daughter, Marnie's mother attacks the client, hitting him in the head with a fire poker. Blood then runs down the man's face. Next, the young Marnie herself picks up the poker and beats the man to death, resulting in massive bloodshed. This repressed memory is the cause of Marnie's distress, and in a classical Freudian manner her symptoms can finally be resolved as their origin

⁸⁵ *Marnie* and *The Birds* share the same make-up artist, Howard Smit.

eventually is revealed. The film's plot follows a popularized psychoanalytic logic where the sight of a color resembling blood impacts Marnie so strongly because subconsciously it triggers repressed memories of beating a man to death with a fire poker, causing massive bloodshed.

The flashback scene is portrayed in such a way as to have an affective impact on the audience. When blood finally appears in *Marnie*, it is both as an affective intensity and as a narrative component, solving the mystery of Marnie's distress. In the flashback scene blood serves a narrative function, informing the audience about the origins of Marnie's fragile mental state, and explaining her reactions to the sight of bright red colors. Nonetheless, when blood appears it also operates in terms of affect, as the audience witnesses the horrific repressed memory of Marnie as a child beating a man to death. While graphic violence is absent up until this point in the film, this flashback scene breaks the pattern and shows the beating as well as the blood stained aftermath.⁸⁶

In *Marnie* the blood serves as a backdrop that implicitly orchestrates everything that happens in the movie as well as Marnie's actions and feelings, including her experience of fright. Although the final revelation, where Marnie as a child beats a man to death and the floor is covered in blood, appears as horrific, the scene mainly functions discursively, revealing hitherto undisclosed information to Marnie, and to the audience. Despite the affective impact of this scene, in *Marnie* blood for the main part operates within the film's narrative framework. Blood is a key ingredient in the film's plot, and contributes to its suspense, where bits of information gradually join together to form a coherent picture. This differs from *The*

⁸⁶ 1964 also saw the release of *The Beautiful, the Bloody, and the Bare*, a sexploitation feature with elements of gore. The plot is centered on a photographer who reacts with panic at the sight of blood. He stabs a model to death after seeing her bleeding from a cut to her finger. He next kills another model before deteriorating into complete insanity, cutting and stabbing himself and finally dying in a pool of blood. However, unlike the psychoanalytic framing of *Marnie*, *The Beautiful, the Bloody, and the Bare* offers no explanation for the bizarre behavior of its leading character.

Birds, which, as I have argued above, follows a different pattern. As this film moves forward blood increasingly comes to perform an affective, rather than a discursive, function. In the earlier scenes of bird attacks, blood plays a more traditional, signifying role, confirming the consequences of the bird attacks. Blood in these scenes appears after, not during, the attacks. However, in the prolonged and climaxing bird attack sequences later in the film, blood becomes more integral to the intensity of the scene, and strengthens its affective impact. Of Hitchcock's films, it is thus *The Birds*, I would argue, which goes the furthest in establishing the blood assemblage in an explicitly affective role. At the same time, similar developments took place in other Hollywood productions in the mid-1960s that gradually challenged the Production Code in their portrayals of violence. I will now turn to two of these films, *Hush ... Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964) and *The Killers* (1964), before explaining in greater detail the practices of censorship and ratings that regulates the American film industry, and how these practices changed in the 1960s.

Testing the waters: *Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* and *The Killers*

Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte, directed by Robert Aldrich, features what has been described as the first Grand Guignol⁸⁷ moment of American cinema (Skal, 2001, pp. 311-312), when, in an early scene of the film, a hand is chopped off with a meat cleaver. The hand is chopped off in a close-up, followed by rapid intercutting between the falling meat cleaver, the screaming victim writhing in agony, the bloody wrist stump, and the severed hand as well as blood spurting onto a nearby

⁸⁷ The Grand Guignol was a theatre located in Paris, from 1897 to 1962, which specialized in violent stage plays with excessive use of blood and gore effects (see Gordon, 1997; Hand & Wilson, 2002). Despite being often mentioned in passing as a forerunner to gore cinema (see e.g., McCarty, 1984; Worland, 2007; Dixon, 2010), no concrete linkages of inspiration can be established between the Grand Guignol and later blood baths in American movie productions. As Walter Kendrick states, in his argument against seeing Grand Guignol as a predecessor to gore cinema, "the Grand Guignol looks more like the end of a tradition than the source of one" (Kendrick, 1991, p. 203).

sculpture.⁸⁸ The sequence ends as the victim's head is chopped off, off camera, revealed only by a thud as the head hits the ground. The sequence lasts a mere 15 seconds and in black and white it is relatively mild compared to the excesses of the Lewis and Friedman productions from the same period. Nonetheless, the film clearly breaks the pattern of non-graphic portrayals of violence in Hollywood movies, and exemplifies a shift towards the more active and affective roles the blood assemblage now comes to play. A major film production could now display violent and grotesque imagery of bloodshed, portrayed in close-ups explicitly focusing upon horrific details of bodily harm. Similar to the shower sequence in *Psycho*, the violence in this scene appears suddenly, without a narrative build-up, but it differs from the former film in its integration of vivid details of bodily mutilation. Blood and severed limbs here function as shock effects, shaking and disrupting an unsuspecting audience.

Another film which interestingly combines images of narrative integration with images of attraction in its portrayal of blood and violence is the 1964 film *The Killers*, directed by Don Siegel. This film was initially intended as a 'made-for-TV' movie – the first of its kind – but deemed too violent for the small screen it was instead given a regular theatrical release (Siegel, 1993). *The Killers* appears to seamlessly integrate various modes of using and not using blood. This is perhaps best illustrated by the final scene of the film, starring its three main actors: Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, and Ronald Reagan (in his final movie, and his only role as a villain). Marvin stars as a professional hit-man who has just been double-crossed by Reagan. In the previous scene, Reagan shot Marvin and his partner from afar with a sniper rifle, leaving Marvin badly injured and his partner for dead. Next, Reagan heads back to his house with his mistress, played by Dickinson. As Dickinson and Reagan are frantically packing their bags and getting ready to flee with a suitcase of stolen money, a car pulls up in front of the house. A close-up shows the feet of a man

⁸⁸ As in *Marnie*, the unfortunate victim is played by Bruce Dern.

stepping out of the car. Drops of red liquid spill next to his feet – he’s bleeding. The film then cuts back to Reagan and Dickinson inside the house, getting ready to leave in a hurry, when the door crashes open and Marvin stumbles in, visibly injured. It is thus revealed that Marvin was the bleeding man just exiting the car. After a brief interception, Marvin raises his gun and shoots and kills first Dickinson and then Reagan. However, neither Dickinson nor Reagan spills any blood when they are hit.

Their deaths are portrayed in what Stephen Prince labels as the “clutch-and-fall” mode of showing the impact of gun violence, where little or no direct bodily trauma is visible (Prince, 2003, p. 152).⁸⁹ Their bodily appearance signals that they have been hit by a bullet but no wounding or bleeding can be seen. However, these clean scenes of death are contrasted with the succeeding images of Marvin leaving the house, carrying his gun and the suitcase with stolen money. As the audience has already been informed, Marvin is injured, and as he exits the house and heads towards his car he finally succumbs to his injuries. He first stumbles to the ground, before spewing a gob of blood from his mouth. After getting back on his feet he again stumbles, before finally collapsing dead, just as he reaches for his gun when the police arrive.

The absence of blood in this sequence is as remarkable as its presence, and illustrates how this film is positioned in-between different modes of practice for

⁸⁹ In Prince’s detailed description, the clutch-and-fall mode “has a number of components, and some or all may be present in any given instance. The defining feature of this mode lies in the victim’s response. The victim takes the bullet with little to no physical reaction, even if the shot is fired at close range. Rather than responding with pain or distress, or with an involuntary physical reaction such as the spasms that wrack Scarface when the police machine-gun him, the clutch-and-fall victim falls into a trance, or seems to fall asleep, and then sinks gradually and slowly out of the frame. The most striking anomaly of this mode is the bizarre nature of the victim’s response. Victims die in increments, sequentially and from the ground up. Their feet and legs are the first to go, with their torso and head, unmarked by gunfire, the last to expire. As a result, their legs may buckle while their upper bodies show no loss of faculty until they topple or sink out of the frame. No bullet strike is visualized—even in cases where one should be plainly evident, as when the victim wears a white shirt and is shot in the chest, or when, as in *The Big Heat* (1953), a suicide shoots himself in the head and slumps quite bloodlessly onto the top of his desk” (Prince, 2003, p. 153).

portraying movie violence. The deaths of Reagan and Dickinson are portrayed 'cleanly' and as adhering to what Prince (2003) describes as the standards of classical film violence within Hollywood cinema. The physical impact of the acts of violence is not made visible but merely indicated to the audience. Blood, if it is used at all, serves to provide the audience with information about the violent acts and their consequences. Marvin's performance, on the other hand, belongs to a somewhat different regime in the portrayal of movie violence. His performance is here closely integrated with the blood assemblage. First, as he steps out of the car and onto the porch, the dripping blood informs the audience about his condition: he's injured. Later, when he exits the building and stumbles towards the car, the blood he spews as he tumbles over, again serves a communicative function, informing the audience about the severity of his condition. However, the blood here also operates in terms of affect, calling for responses that are not determined by the film's narrative and discursive construction. The spewing of blood exceeds its narrative function, appealing directly to the audience in an exhibitionistic manner. The experience of seeing Marvin spewing gobs of blood can be repulsive, evoking visceral sensations in the audience. These sensations relate to, but are not determined by, the film's narrative and characterizations.

In terms of its depiction of violence, the scene serves as an example of what Prince (2003) describes as a constant struggle by filmmakers to push boundaries in terms of the portrayal of violence. In this regard, the traditions for depicting violence have been evolving in close interrelationship with contravening forces that feed into pressures to regulate film productions and what is considered permissible on the screen. Hence, one of the factors that contributed to the increasing visibility of blood during the 1960s was the relaxation of movie censorship regulations. Thus, as Prince demonstrates, despite pushing boundaries in terms of screen violence, and although being deemed too violent for a television release, *The Killers* was not met with

resistance from the Production Code Administration (PCA) regarding its portrayal of violence (Prince, 2003, pp. 198-200). Prince sees this as an indication of the shifting standards of the Production Code during the 1960s. In order to further explore how the transformations of the blood assemblage were closely interrelated with these shifting standards, it is necessary to explain in further depth the American ratings and censorship regulations, and how these changed during the 1960s. As the history of American film ratings and censorship has been thoroughly researched elsewhere (see e.g., Randall, 1968; Phelps, 1975; Jeff & Simmons, 1990; Couvares, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Prince, 2003; Doherty, 2007; Pollard, 2009; Tropiano, 2009), I will keep this section brief, and concentrate on the developments of relevance for the possibilities of depicting graphic bloodshed on the screen.

Censorship and ratings

The American system of film ratings and censorship is predominantly a system of self-regulation where the film industry seeks to guard its financial interests. As argued by Jon Lewis,

the political and social utility of film censorship is altogether secondary to its economic function. Like other forms of industrial regulation, content censorship functions to secure the long-term health of the industry as a whole. That the content of so many films has been changed in service of such a corporate agenda reveals just how little art matters in the film business (Lewis, 2000, p. 6).

When faced with outside threats to their products, from operators such as the Catholic Legion of Decency and state and regional censorship boards, the film industry has strayed towards self-censorship, regulating their own product in order to ward off external interferences.

Questions regarding censorship have framed the American movie industry from its very beginning. A central topic has been the status of the movie product

itself, and whether it should be regarded as a statement, protected under the regulations of free speech (like print publications), or if it should be seen as a regular industrial product (like bars of soap or candy). In a 1915 decision (*Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*) the US Supreme Court denied motion pictures the protection of free speech, and movies were thus to be regulated as any other commercial product (Randall, 1968, pp. 18-21; Lewis, 2000, p. 90; Jowett, 1996, pp. 258-260; Tropiano, 2009, pp. 22-23). Being denied constitutional free speech protection, movies were subject to the whims of the various state boards of censorship across the nation, calling for significant regional differences in what would be allowed onto the screen. Motion pictures were eventually granted first amendment rights in 1952, known as the *Miracle* case (*Burstyn v. Wilson*) (Randall, 1968, pp. 25-30; Jowett, 1996), and this diminished the influence of the various regional censorship boards (Lewis, 2000, pp. 97-104). However, a 1961 Supreme Court decision (*Times Film Corp. v. Chicago*) upheld the legislative power of local censors to prevent exhibition of any film they would find unacceptable (Randall, 1968, pp. 34-42; Jowett, 1966, pp. 268-269). Still, local censorship gradually became less of an issue throughout the 1950s and 1960s, before becoming obsolete with the introduction of the current rating system in the late 1960s (Randall, 1968, p. 40; Jowett, 1966, p. 270; Tropiano, 2009, p. 89).

Film censorship and regulation first became a major issue after the public image of the American film industry took a dip in the early 1920s, following a series of scandals involving sex, drugs and death in the private lives of some of its most famous performers. Most notorious were the lurid rape and murder trials against famed comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. Cleaning up their public relations and streamlining their product, the studios delegated the task of regulating their movies, and maintaining the industry's image to the newly established MPPDA (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America) office, and in 1922 Will Hays, former

postmaster general, was appointed as its first president. The "Hays Code" as it was commonly called, served as a set of regulations and guidelines for movie makers within the studios and designated what could and what could not be portrayed in a film. These regulations underwent numerous revisions, at various stages, and in 1934 the Production Code Administration (PCA) was founded. The PCA was the agency enforcing the production code, regulating the content of every film produced by an MPPDA/MPAA⁹⁰ member, and films could not be released until they had received a "Seal of Approval" from the PCA (Pollard, 2009, pp. 53-54; Tropiano, 2009, p. 52). The code prohibited graphic depictions of crime and extreme brutality but remained vague on the specifics of what could and could not be displayed. The overarching moral principles of the code included upholding the audience's moral standards, present "correct" standards of life, and display respect for divine, natural and human laws (Pollard, 2009, p. 54).

The year 1934 also marked the founding of the Catholic Legion of Decency, which until 1965 operated as a separate rating board. The Legion of Decency categorized each film prior to its release based upon its moral standards in relation to the teachings of the Catholic Church (Tropiano, 2009, p. 53; pp. 79-82). The Legion operated with a classification system deciding whether a film was morally unobjectionable for a general audience, suitable for adults only, or whether it was in part or completely objectionable.⁹¹ Although it had no formal influence, the verdict of the Legion of Decency on a specific film would have substantial impact on its distribution, exhibition and audience turn out. A film condemned by the Legion would

⁹⁰ From 1945 the office was renamed the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

⁹¹ The original classification scheme, implemented in 1936, operated with the following categories: "A-1: Morally Unobjectionable for General Patronage;" "A-2: Morally Unobjectionable for Adults;" "B: Morally Objectionable in Part for All;" "C: Condemned." In addition, a film could be given a separate classification when it would require special analysis and explanation to protect an uninformed public against interpreting the film in an objectionable manner.

In 1957 the classification scheme was revised and an additional A-category was introduced, deeming a film unobjectionable for adults and adolescents (Tropiano, 2009, p. 289).

have trouble finding an exhibitor, and would face boycotts from large segments of its potential audience as well as negative publicity. Similar to the PCA, the Legion could list specific cuts it would like to be made, in order for a film to secure a favorable rating. Furthermore, the Legion of Decency had an influence upon the operations of the PCA. As an unfavorable rating could have grave consequences at the box-office, it was an imperative function of the PCA to secure that film would not be deemed objectionable by the Legion upon its release.

Under the PCA system, films were pre-approved in their script phase. Questionable or unacceptable materials were removed before production could start. A plot synopsis, a treatment and all drafts of a film's screenplay would have to be submitted to the PCA for approval (Tropiano, 2009, p. 54). The correspondence between film producers and the PCA office often reveal considerable negotiations on how to make a script passable. Before a film would be released, the final edit had to be pre-screened for the PCA to receive a stamp of approval. In cases where the PCA requested changes, the reedited version had then to be approved at a later stage (Tropiano, 2009, p. 55). The system operated on a pass/fail basis; a film was either approved or it was denied a PCA approval (something that would in effect deny a film screening in any MPPDA/MPAA operated theater). If a studio disagreed with a PCA ruling, an appeal could be made to the board of directors of the MPPDA/MPAA, which could overturn any decision made by the PCA but in most cases the PCA ruling was sustained (Tropiano, 2009, p. 58). Despite the adults-only policy of some (mainly exploitation) film distributors and exhibitors, films were at this time not divided into age-appropriate categories. A PCA approval meant that a film was deemed suitable for all age groups, children and adults alike.

Neither the PCA nor the Legion had an official mandate to sanction a film. Films could be distributed through alternative channels without the approval of the PCA or the Legion as was the case with most exploitation films. Eric Schaefer makes

the point that following the PCA regulations could be counterproductive for the exploitation filmmakers:

Embracing the Code might have meant saving money for exploitation producers by allowing their films to play in territories with censorship, but it also would have stripped them of that aspect that differentiated them from the majors. ... The exploiteers remained afloat by offering moviegoers the forbidden spectacle that was lacking in other movies (Schaefer, 1999, p. 153).

Again, we can here see how the exploiteers operated on a business model whose fundamental principle was to offer audiences something that the major studios would not or could not put on display. Nonetheless, on some occasions exploitation producers would seek a Production Code seal of approval in order to gain wider distribution and access to MPPDA/MPPA affiliated theatres (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 156-158).

Regardless of PCA approval, films still had to face state and local censorship boards. These censorship boards had the power to decide whether or not a film could be shown within its area of jurisdiction. Made up of more or less qualified citizens, the verdicts of these boards could often vary from state to state, some being stricter than others.⁹² The studios aimed at standardizing their product, and a key function of the PCA pre-screening process was to ensure that a film would not run into problems with censorship boards later in the distribution and exhibition process. Exploitation producers and distributors, on the other hand, often sought other ways to circumvent the censorship boards, adjusting their films to local censorship standards, as illustrated by the practice of hot and cold versions (see Chapter One). Schaefer

⁹² As Schaefer explains with regards to the state censorship boards, "members were appointed by the governor, had to be residents and citizens of the state, and were to be 'well qualified by education and experience to act as censors.' Censors were invariably upper-middle class men and women who possessed the tastes and prejudices of their social station and education" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 139).

argues that while for the major studios customizing film prints to the whims of local and state boards would prove too costly, this obstacle was surmountable for those in the classical exploitation business:

For states' righters, who operated in a limited territory with a small number of prints, the problem was not overwhelming—as long as a film was licensed and capable of pulling a profit. Although customizing prints was certainly an annoyance for those who distributed or roadshowed exploitation movies, it became an accepted part of doing business (Schaefer, 1999, p. 141).

Other times, exploitation distributors would deliberately seek to stir a reaction from the censorship board as a matter of publicity, a practice that for instance the classical exploitation legend Kroger Babb often carried out successfully (Friedman & De Nevi, 1990).

Eric Schaefer makes the argument that the Production Code was utilized by the Hollywood studios to ward off competition from independent exploitation films (also see Jowett, 1996, p. 271). The Production Code had a clearly articulated position regarding the role of motion pictures: they were to provide entertainment, not education. This position effectively undermined the exploiters' claims that educational merits validated their films (Schaefer, 1999, pp. 154-156). Furthermore, this position implied a preference for narrative over spectacle, and reinforced the "conception of Hollywood film as something morally unobjectionable, narratively coherent, plausible, realistic, and noneducational" (Schaefer, 1999, p. 156), characteristics seen as lacking in exploitation movies.

The emphasis on narrative integration is reflected in the PCA correspondence files, where documents state that violence tends to be more acceptable when necessary for the film's story. An example can be found in the correspondence regarding the 1964 western *Major Dundee* (to be directed by Sam Peckinpah). In a letter from PCA director Geoffrey M. Shurlock to the film's producer, dated December

9, 1963, commenting on a revised draft of the film, Shurlock states: "The very nature of this story demands that there be considerable amount of violence. We do ask that this violence be kept to a minimum in order that the audience not get the impression that it is thrown in for shock value" (MHL Special Collections, Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration records, Major Dundee). This comment distinguishes between violence necessary for the film's story, and violence "thrown in for shock value." While some moderate display of violence can be tolerated as long as it is an integral part of the storytelling, it is not to be accepted if it exceeds this function.

Increasingly throughout the 1950s and 1960s the ratings system was challenged by filmmakers and producers. Despite having undergone several revisions since its initial inception, the Production Code increasingly was seen as an obstacle to keeping up with developments in the international film industry and cultural and social trends within the US. As described in Chapter One, foreign film imports displayed sex and violence beyond what could be shown in domestic productions. Likewise, audiences became accustomed to more graphic and daring themes and images in other media, such as literature and contemporary arts.

In several instances filmmakers proceeded to include more graphic language and visual materials in their films, despite the recommendations of the PCA. A landmark case was the 1953 Universal Artists (UA) release of *The Moon is Blue*, despite being denied a PCA seal of approval. The controversy surrounding the film resulted in lots of free publicity, and eventually UA (temporarily) quit the MPAA so the film could be released (Lewis, 2000, pp. 105-107). The controversy over *The Moon is Blue* was rooted in language use. However, later on films would also challenge the Code with regard to the portrayal of violence. For instance, the PCA correspondence files for the production of *Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, reveal concerns about the film's portrayal of graphic violence. In a letter from Shurlock to

director Robert Aldrich, dated May 14, 1964, commenting upon the script of the film, *Shurlock* states that: "This murder scene would appear to be in danger of proving unacceptably gruesome in your finished picture if photographed too explicitly. We ask that the severing of the hand and the beheading be handled by suggestion only" (MHL Special Collections, Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration records, *Hush ... Hush*, *Sweet Charlotte*). Clearly, the filmmakers in this instance went ahead with their production as described in the script, portraying the murder scene in a graphic manner, ignoring the recommendations of the PCA.

Filmmakers' practice of increasingly ignoring or opposing the PCA recommendations – and getting away with it – illustrated the problems of maintaining the Code in this new era. Studios increasingly started pushing against the Code, and thus against the organization whose mandate was to protect the interests of the film industry. This split between the studios and the PCA was further increased as a result of the Paramount decree, as studios now no longer were in control of the exhibition of movies. This made it possible for films to be released without a seal of approval from the PCA as long as the exhibitors were willing to take the risk. Censorship pressures, from the Legion of Decency, regional censorship boards, and other concerned individuals and organizations increasingly came to be directed towards the exhibitors, rather than the producers and distributors, of controversial films (Lewis, 2000, pp. 126-127). This situation could prove chaotic and unpredictable, with considerable local variations in what was allowed to exhibit. While some minor operators managed to take advantage of this situation in order to maneuver their other-wise unacceptable exploitation fare onto the screen, for the studios this generated problems and furthered the pressures towards a new, standardized classification system.

Throughout the 1960s the studios increasingly lost out in the competition against independent and foreign productions (Pollard, 2009, p. 118). Imported films

could often be far more daring than what the Code would allow for studio productions. The old Production Code now started hindering the studios' efforts to keep up with competition from foreign and independent productions and no longer served their best business interests. Conflicts between the PCA and film producers escalated, as illustrated by the controversies surrounding the use of profanities in the 1966 film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (see Tropiano, 2009, pp. 140-142).

In 1968 the PCA was eventually replaced by a new ratings system, under a newly formed branch of the MPAA, the Code and Ratings Administration (CARA) (Tropiano, 2009, pp. 91-94).⁹³ The new CARA ratings system operated with four categories: "G: Suggested for general audiences;" "M: Suggested for mature audiences—adults and mature young people;" "R: Restricted—Persons under 16 not admitted, unless accompanied by parent or adult guardian;" "X: Persons under 16 not admitted" (Tropiano, 2009, pp. 92-93; p. 292). Unlike the PCA system, which subjected movies to pre-censorship in their script stage, the CARA model designates films with a rating based solely on screenings of completed productions.⁹⁴

This new system made it possible to restrict and target movies on the basis of age demographics. Films could now be targeted towards an adult audience, without an undue burden of taking into account how the films would affect younger viewers.⁹⁵ The rating system was thus again brought in line with the financial interests of the studios, and served, as claimed by Jon Lewis, as a "studio-managed entryway into the marketplace" (Lewis, 2000, p. 138). The new rating system

⁹³ The new CARA system also replaced the earlier, unofficial, *Green Sheet* rating system, which had been in place since 1933. The *Green Sheet* was a monthly publication offering advisory, age-appropriate, motion picture ratings. The publication and distribution of the *Green Sheet* was a joint feature of the Film Board of National Organizations, which itself was constituted by ten member groups, and the MPAA (see Randall, 1968, pp. 181-184).

⁹⁴ This practice has led to the common phenomenon where films are being reedited to avoid an undesirable rating.

⁹⁵ Jon Lewis makes the argument that the shift from a system of censorship to a system of classification was inevitable as the Hollywood studios increasingly came to target their product towards specific audience demographics (Lewis, 2000, p. 114).

reinstated the studios in a position where they could control the entertainment marketplace. What is regulated is not so much film content as participation in the film market (Lewis, 2000, pp. 150-151).⁹⁶ This struggle to keep up with competition from foreign imports and independents, and to control the motion picture market, as well as catering to specific age demographics, contributed to a more lenient climate for the portrayal of movie violence.

1967

A marked shift in Hollywood portrayals of violence happened in the midst of this process of revising the ratings system, and the revision of the ratings system was itself one of several mediators making this shift take place. In 1967 several films were released that would push the borders for depictions of violence and brutality on the big screen, with productions such as *The Dirty Dozen*, *Point Blank*, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, and especially, *Bonnie and Clyde*.

The directors of *The Dirty Dozen* (Robert Aldrich), *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* (Roger Corman), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn), already had established their reputations making violent movies,⁹⁷ while *Point Blank*, the most experimental of these films, was directed by a young British director, John Boorman, who would venture further into a terrain of sexualized violence a few years later with *Deliverance* (1972). Stephen Prince (2003) argues that filmmakers were not pushed

⁹⁶ This move to increase control over the marketplace was initially only partially successful. While the G, M and R ratings was copyrighted by the MPAA and could not be applied by any other agency, this did not take place with the X rating. Thus, any film producer or distributor could supply their films with an X rating, without ever running their films by the CARA board. This served to distinguish MPAA approved G, M and R rated films from X rated movies, which were shunned by the major studios. At the same time, this created a loophole for exploitation film makers and the burgeoning porn industry, which could release their products with seemingly legit ratings (Lewis, 2000, pp. 188-189, 192-193). However, the studios themselves also utilized the X rating to signify and advertise films of a markedly different and more challenging nature, neither endorsed nor condemned by the MPAA (Lewis, 2000, pp. 226-227).

⁹⁷ Aldrich's earlier films included *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), *Attack* (1956), and *Hush ... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964); Corman had directed films such as *House of Usher* (1960), *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964); Penn had established a reputation with *The Left Handed Gun* (1958), *Mickey One* (1965), and *The Chase* (1966) .

towards making more violent movies by the studios or audience demand; rather, they cherished the opportunity to explore the capabilities of the portrayal of violence. Prince more generally argues that violence provides filmmakers with a way to explore the potentials of the medium, and, if left without restraints, they will continue to push borders and increase the level of brutality and graphic displays of violence in their movies. According to this logic, as soon as something *can* be done, it *will* be done unless some regulating mechanism steps in and blocks its path. Prince thus argues that it is necessary to regulate the film industry, in order to rein in its inherent tendencies for portraying violence in an aesthetically pleasing manner, something Prince sees as a potential threat to society.⁹⁸ I will return to a discussion of what I see as problematic aspects with Prince's perspective in the next chapter; for now, it suffices to say that, despite my rejection of the implicit teleological tendencies of Prince's arguments, I do think he is right in the claim that filmmakers in the 1960s were not pushed by studios or audience demand towards making their films more violent. Furthermore, I argue that the turn towards more graphic displays of violence was not a result of technological developments. Techniques, technology and expertise were already in place, and filmmakers were quick to utilize the opportunities that came about in this new and more permissive territory. In this context it is notable that few of the films that pushed limits in terms of violence in the 1960s can be said to be at the very forefront in terms of special effects and technology. Rather, the films, to varying degrees, displayed innovativeness in terms of developing new modes of expression by utilizing existing techniques and technologies.

⁹⁸ Conservative film critic Michael Medved makes an argument along similar lines in his book *Hollywood vs. America* (1992). Medved here claims that box office numbers demonstrate that violence does not pay in terms of audience turnout. Rather, Medved argues, filmmakers' preference to portray violence is a matter of personal taste and "artistic" aspirations. Audiences at large, Medved argues with support of box office statistics, tend to prefer "family oriented" and more wholesome forms of entertainment (Medved, 1992).

In *The Dirty Dozen* and *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* the blood assemblage plays a role in a more traditional, narratively integrated form. Both films are fairly violent, and both end with a bloody massacre, but like other films I have already discussed, the blood images serve mainly as a confirmation of the violent deeds taking place. The blood informs the audience that a character is seriously harmed or killed. *The Dirty Dozen* ends with a massive combat scene, with numerous casualties and injured soldiers and civilians, yet remarkably little blood is spilled. We can see some blood as a soldier takes a bullet hit in the forehead, and another bleeds from the mouth after being hit. The film's main character, played by Lee Marvin, is shot in the shoulder and his hand is covered in blood as he grasps the wound. Apart from this, blood is absent from the film.

Blood is more prevalent in *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* but this movie also features relatively little blood until the final shoot-out scene. In this scene, the massacre of the film's title, the victims are lined up against a brick wall and executed in a hail of machine gun fire. The scene unfolds through rapid editing between shots of the blaring guns and shots of the victims taking hits in the back and falling over. Blood bursts from their mouths and as the dead bodies are left in front of the brick wall, their faces and bodies are covered in red. Nonetheless, the bloodletting mainly functions as an affirmation of a fact, presenting and at the same time confirming the fate of these central characters in the film. As Prince (2003, p. 239) argues, this scene is shot in a far more conventional manner than the final shoot-out scene from *Bonnie and Clyde*, which was released the same year.⁹⁹ No squibs¹⁰⁰ are used on the

⁹⁹ As Prince more elaborately explains: "In light of the changes that *Bonnie and Clyde* brought to cinema in 1967, one of the peculiarities of *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*, released that same year, is the lack of squibbing to show impact wounds. Gangster characters are shot on-camera and at close range with pistols, shotguns, and machine-guns, but bullet holes are not visualized. Blood only appears on the victims in a subsequent fashion, following a cutaway to their killers. The filmmaking shows no hesitation in dispatching large numbers of mobsters in brutal fashion—but the stylistics of the violence, in terms of damage to the body, reflect the norms of the classical Hollywood period rather than the new cinema of violence which was then emerging" (Prince, 2003, p. 239).

human actors, and direct bullet hits are not visualized. What is shown are the effects of the hits, emphasizing the brutal nature of the massacre.

The Dirty Dozen and *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* both take place in specific historical settings. *The Dirty Dozen* is a fictional account of World War II while *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* portrays a historical incident in 1929, when Al Capone's men massacred members of a rival Chicago gang.¹⁰¹ Both are brutal films, portraying brutal men in brutal times. The blood underscores these harsh and cruel atmospheres, without becoming a center of attention. While *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* is presented in a somber documentary tone, *The Dirty Dozen* includes elements of action spectacle. Both films display a certain ambivalence in the portrayal of these violent acts. The emotional impact of *The Dirty Dozen* is to a large extent constructed discursively, as audience sympathies and antipathies are established and challenged through the characters, missions, and deeds portrayed. It can be regarded as an anti-war film to the extent that it ridicules the military establishment and reveals atrocities committed by American soldiers during WW2, torching and killing German officers as well as civilians. At the same time, these acts can be seen as heroic and as a just retribution. The film balances between a universal condemnation of war, and a celebration of the heroics of a rebel gang of American convicts turned soldiers.¹⁰² The popular and critical responses to the film illustrate that both of these readings were prevalent upon the film's release. As Mark

¹⁰⁰ Squibs are small explosive charges, that when detonated creates an effect resembling the impact of a bullet hit. Squibs had sporadically been used in earlier films but did not become common until 1967 (Prince, 2003, p. 238). When used together with capsules filled with artificial blood, squibs can simulate the effect of impact wounds from bullets on the human body (Cook, 1999, pp. 142-143).

¹⁰¹ This gang-war killing is also featured in the classic 1932 gangster movie *Scarface* (directed by Howard Hawks and produced by Howard Hughes), and *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* includes several incidents also portrayed in this film.

¹⁰² This balancing act is commonly found in war movies, arguably in particular American WW2 films. For example, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) follows a similar formula. The film moves from an opening scene that graphically portraying the horrors of war to a more conventional and heroic tale following the pursuits of a group of American soldiers behind enemy lines.

Harris explains, *The Dirty Dozen* managed to appeal to both fans of war movies and to a younger anti-war and anti-establishment audience (Harris, 2008, p. 331). The subdued role of the blood assemblage helps to maintain this balancing act. Without appearing shocking or overwhelming, the modest display of blood underscores the brutality of the action while at the same time integrating with the film's plot development and emphasis on character identification.

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre is far less heroic in tone, rather emphasizing the brutality of 1920s gang wars. The film's documentary style, in which a voice-over supplies biographical details and foreshadows events that will later take place, leads to an absence of suspense. Audiences are thus not invited to become emotionally involved in the characters and the outcome of the story. Rather, the main appeal and fascination of the film is the seemingly realistic portrayal of heinous gangster characters. The blood underscores this factual tone of the film, and emphasizes the amorality of the universe these gangsters operate within. At the same time, the film's austerity also subdues the affective impact of the bloodshed, and the blood acts to grant the film historical credibility rather than to affect the audience viscerally and emotionally.

Point Blank is the most experimental of these films. It breaks fundamentally with established standards for movie violence, but little blood is spilled. Rather, violence is here to a large extent directed towards inanimate objects. The main character, again played by Lee Marvin, fires shots at an empty bed, smashes bottles of perfume, shoots up a telephone, and tortures a car. Only reluctantly does he engage in explicitly violent acts towards people, for instance when accidentally dropping a man from the top of a building or when ending a fight with a solid punch to the genitals. When blood appears, it is used sparsely and again merely illustrates and underlines the violence that has taken place. Despite arguably being formally and stylistically more innovative than *Bonnie and Clyde*, perhaps even with regards

to its portrayal of violence, *Point Blank* does not explore any new potentials with regards to the depiction of blood, instead pointing towards how violence can be expressed without excessive bloodshed and bodily destruction.

Together with the other films discussed thus far, *Point Blank* illustrates different ways a turn towards more graphic portrayals of violence can be executed. None of these films can inherently be said to be more realistic in their portrayals of violence than the others. The differences between them run along other lines. When I next turn towards *Bonnie and Clyde*, the movie that brought the blood assemblage to the forefront in Hollywood motion pictures, it will be with a special focus on how this film stylized violence and how blood was utilized in this regard.

Bonnie and Clyde

From its very inception, *Bonnie and Clyde* was modeled on French new wave cinema.¹⁰³ The film was initiated by its scriptwriters, Robert Benton and David Newman, who in the early/mid 1960s were both journalists at the magazine *Esquire*. Inspired by the films of Jean-Luc Godard and, especially, Francois Truffaut, Benton and Newman set out to break into the movie industry (Biskind, 1998, p. 26; Newman & Benton, 1972a). They decided upon the topic of real life 1930s criminals Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, because of their appeal as “aesthetic revolutionaries” (Biskind, 1998, p. 27), or as Benton and Newman elsewhere explain it, *Bonnie and Clyde* is “about style and people who have style” (Newman & Benton, 1972a, p. 16).

¹⁰³ *Bonnie and Clyde* was far from the first or only Hollywood production to take in influences from French new wave cinema. For a discussion on the influence of the French new wave, as well as of European and American avant garde and experimental film, on Hollywood in the 1960s, see Jonathan Rosenbaum (2004). Rosenbaum mentions films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Point Blank* as examples of Hollywood productions taking up European art cinema impulses. Still, as Rosenbaum argues, more than other American films of the 1960s influenced by new wave and art cinema, *Bonnie and Clyde* proved influential on subsequent Hollywood productions (Rosenbaum, 2004, p. 141).

Benton and Newman trace the ideas for the movie back to an article they published in *Esquire* in June 1964 called "The New Sentimentality." The article, Benton and Newman claims, "struck a nerve. A lot of response, a lot of identification, a lot of interesting letters continuing the notion. What had been our own bull-session appeared to have some kind of real relevance to readers, and, in addition, we kept developing it for ourselves. What we had, although we didn't consciously think of it at the time, was a set of ideas in search of a movie" (Newman & Benton, 1972a, p. 14).

"The New Sentimentality" describes a zeitgeist and a generational shift, from what Newman and Benton labels as "Old Sentimentality" to what they characterize by the title of their article. The Old Sentimentality was characterized by "'values' that everyone could see, bywords that meant the same to all. Patriotism, Love, Religion, Mom, The Girl" (Newman & Benton, 1964, p. 25). This set of shared values was opposed by the New Sentimentality, where the values "are not out there emblazoned on banners. They differ slightly from man to man, because one of the definitions of New Sentimentality is that it has to do with you, really just you, not what you were told or taught, but what goes on in your head, *really*, and in your heart, *really*" (Newman & Benton, 1964, p. 25, emphasis in original). While "[s]elf-indulgence used to be a bad idea" it is now a "virtue," and while people used to pride themselves on their "ability to Maintain a Firm Position, on anything," they now pride themselves on their "Ability to Change" (Newman & Benton, 1964, p. 25). The people and characters exemplifying the New Sentimentality, such as Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg in the movie *Breathless* (1960) or John F. and Jackie Kennedy, do so because of their *style* (Newman & Benton, 1964, p. 25). The article reads as a fragmented list of who and what is Old and who and what is New Sentimentality. Examples from the cinema abound. John Wayne, Gene Kelly and Grace Kelly all represent the Old Sentimentality, and figures such as Alfred Hitchcock, Audrey

Hepburn, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jeanne Moreau and Francois Truffaut represent the New, while Marilyn Monroe and Humphrey Bogart are named as transitional figures (Newman & Benton, 1964).

The article marks a turn away from what Newman and Benton see as more traditional American value systems and sensibilities towards a more European influenced sense of individualized style and aesthetics. Especially, the influence of French new wave cinema is palpable. The article directly references three new wave movies (*Breathless*, *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Jules and Jim*) as well as key figures such as Truffaut, Belmondo, Seberg and Moreau. Besides the French new wave (especially the films of Truffaut), the main cinematic influence on Benton and Newman was another figure namedropped in the *Esquire* article, namely Alfred Hitchcock. The scriptwriters describe how they devoured Hitchcock's films obsessively, and how these films provided them with what they label as "an education in pure cinema" (Newman & Benton, 1972a, p. 14). Inspiration for the source material for *Bonnie and Clyde* came to Benton and Newman from the publication of the book *The Dillinger Days* by John Toland (1963), a historical account of famed 1930s criminals. Although the material on Bonnie and Clyde in Toland's book is slight, Newman and Benton were captivated by the gangster couple and saw a potential for a New Sentimentality movie (Newman & Benton, 1972a, p. 14).

Both Truffaut and Godard were contacted to direct the movie, and both expressed interest before eventually turning down the opportunity (Biskind, 1998; Harris, 2008; Cawelti, 1973b; Finstad, 2005). The project was in limbo until it attracted Warren Beatty, who contacted the scriptwriters expressing an interest in reading their script. Beatty was enthused by what he read and took on the role of producer (Biskind, 1998, pp. 26-28; Finstad, 2005, pp. 344-349; Harris, 2008). After several directors rejected the project it eventually ended up in the hands of Arthur

Penn, who had recently directed Beatty in *Mickey One* (1965) – a movie that was a critical and commercial flop. Beatty had several disagreements with Penn during the production of *Mickey One* and disliked the completed film, but still respected the director (Finstad, 2005, p. 319). After repeatedly turning down the film, Penn finally agreed to direct *Bonnie and Clyde* (Harris, 2008, p. 16, pp. 148-154; Finstad, 2005, p. 341, pp. 356-359). Beatty secured financing from Warner Brothers and the production could start (Harris, 2008, pp. 190-195).

Like Sam Peckinpah, who will be the focus of my next chapter, Penn belongs to an in-between generation of American filmmakers, too young to be part of the Old Hollywood system and older than the up-and-coming 'movie brats' who would define the 'New Hollywood' of the 1970s. Similar to Peckinpah, and other directors of their generation such as John Frankenheimer, Sidney Lumet, Robert Altman and Stanley Kubrick, Penn's career took hold in the 1950's, mainly through his work outside of the Hollywood circuit. These directors all honed their skills in related media forms such as television, or, in the case of Kubrick, documentary film making, before moving onto feature film productions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with varying degrees of success.

Already from his very first film, *The Left Handed Gun* (1958), Penn had established a reputation as a director with a penchant for scenes of violence. In an early, auteur-oriented, study of Arthur Penn's films, published shortly after the release of *Bonnie and Clyde*, Robin Wood makes the claim that the essence of Penn's art is "an intense awareness of, and emphasis on, physical expression" (Wood, 1967, p. 6). Wood argues that

Physical sensation (often, but not necessarily, violent) is perhaps more consistently vivid in his films than in those of any other director. Again and again he finds an action—often in itself an unusual, hence striking, action—likely to communicate a physical 'feel' to the spectator, and devotes all his

resources—direction of the actors, camera position and movement, editing—to making that ‘feel’ as immediate as possible, arousing a vividly empathic response (Wood, 1967, p. 6).

At the time when he finally took on the project of *Bonnie and Clyde*, Penn's career was in a slump, after the critical and commercial failure of his previous two productions, *Mickey One* and *The Chase* (1966). These films are both interesting when seen in relation to *Bonnie and Clyde*. *Mickey One* was a highly experimental low-budget production, and among the first attempts at making an American new wave-style movie. Although Beatty, who was the leading actor in the film, found it affected and pretentious, *Mickey One* was met with approval by Benton and Newman (Biskind, 1998, p. 28).

The Chase was a big budget studio production starring Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda and Robert Redford that became a critical and commercial fiasco.¹⁰⁴ Penn himself was disgruntled as he was excluded from the editing process and ended up dissatisfied with the final version of the film. Nonetheless, *The Chase* features some remarkable violent and bloody elements, most notably a scene where the town sheriff, played by Marlon Brando, gets brutally beaten by a trio of vigilante thugs. I will return to this scene towards the end of this chapter when I will compare it to the final shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde*. As I will argue, these two scenes follow very different patterns in the portrayal of violence and blood takes on a very different role in each of the scenes. However, first I will discuss *Bonnie and Clyde* in greater detail.

¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, in his 1967 study of Penn, Robin Wood labels *The Chase* as the director's "first indisputable (one would have thought) masterpiece" (Wood, 1967, p. 52), and describes it as a more complete film than *Bonnie and Clyde*.

“They’re Young. They’re in Love. And They Kill People”¹⁰⁵

Bonnie and Clyde is loosely based on the real lives and criminal careers of Bonnie Parker (Faye Dunaway) and Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty), an outlaw couple who from 1932 until their deaths in 1934 gained a certain public notoriety.¹⁰⁶ The film starts as Bonnie discovers Clyde attempting to steal her mother’s car. Taken by his charm, Bonnie joins Clyde on the road and eventually takes part in his crimes. The couple is joined by C. W. Moss (Michael J. Pollard), and later by Clyde’s brother Buck (Gene Hackman) and his lackluster wife, Blanche (Estelle Parsons). They become known as the notorious ‘Barrows Gang.’ The film follows the gang on their robbing sprees, tracked by the police, as their reputation and outlaw status grow. The movie alternates between comedy, action sequences, and more tranquil moments, without offering a clear cut position for the audience to position themselves in relation to the characters and events on the screen. Penn himself likens the sentiments provided by the film to cartoons, where each frame alternates between laughter and crying, and so forth (Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, p. 18).¹⁰⁷ *Bonnie and Clyde* is structured by swift juxtapositions, rather than coherent episodes of prolonged emotional attachment. Penn explains this as a necessity, as the characters of Bonnie and Clyde are fairly shallow and do not provide much material for intellectual reflection or moral contemplation. The characters had to be portrayed in a superficial manner, through swift moments of action, displaying different sentiments. While audiences are initially drawn into the story and invited to sympathize with the characters through the use of comedy, the film eventually takes on a darker tone as it draws closer to Bonnie’s and Clyde’s eventual demise (Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, p. 18). Likewise, the scenes of violence become increasingly

¹⁰⁵ The marketing slogan of *Bonnie and Clyde*.

¹⁰⁶ See Cawelti (1973a) for additional information on the real-life Bonnie and Clyde, and how the film differs from historical facts.

¹⁰⁷ For a closer analysis of *Bonnie and Clyde*’s integration of comedy and tragedy, see Cawelti (1973c, pp. 43-45).

explicit and bloody, culminating in the final shoot-out scene where Bonnie and Clyde die in a hail of gunfire.

John G. Cawelti makes the argument that the balance between involvement and detachment *Bonnie and Clyde* achieves in its juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy is also to be found in its treatment of the two dimensions of the film's temporal and visual environments. In Cawelti's words: "The key feature of the temporal environment is involvement; the intensifying pattern of flight and its increasingly insistent movement pulls us in emotionally. The visual environment, however, seems quite brilliantly arranged to create a sense of dreamlike distance" (Cawelti, 1973c, p. 54). While the film's rapid movements and increasing intensity draw the audience in and escalate their involvement in the film's story and characters, the hazy and dreamlike visuals serve to remind the audience that what they're experiencing is not an actual historical reality but rather a mythical presentation. The effect of this structure, according to Cawelti, is that "while the temporal environment of the film possesses a compelling and emotionally involving structure of movement and stasis, the visual environment acts on us to create a sense of distance and myth, implying that we are the witnesses of actions that have a larger, more portentous significance" (Cawelti, 1973c, p. 56).

Several scenes foreshadow the tragic end that Bonnie and Clyde eventually meet, most notably the two scenes immediately preceding the fatal scene when the Barrow gang is attacked by the police while in hiding. In the first of these scenes, the gang kidnaps a couple after having stolen their car and takes them along for a ride. After some initial tension, the atmosphere in the car turns jovial, and the kidnapped couple joins in on the gang's banter. This scene plays as comedy until it is revealed that their passenger is an undertaker by profession, whereupon the tone instantly turns dark and solemn. Everyone grows silent, until Bonnie insists that the couple leave the car immediately. The following scene, the most poetic and visually striking

in the movie, shows the reunion of Bonnie with her family. Again, the scene shifts as the poetic atmosphere turns gloomy and brooding when Bonnie's mother turns down Clyde's sentimental claim that he and Bonnie would like to settle down close to her family, by glumly pointing out that Bonnie and Clyde would then stand no chance of survival and their only hope is to keep running. The scene then comes to an end as Bonnie says her final goodbyes to her family. From this point onwards, Bonnie and Clyde cease being the main catalysts of the events in the film. Rather, they are now constantly on the run from the police, until they are finally betrayed and killed.

Already in the early stages of making *Bonnie and Clyde* violence was a central topic. Benton and Newman claim that Penn shared their view that "bullets should hurt when they go in people and the audience should feel that hurt" (Newman & Benton, 1972a, p. 27). In their script, Newman and Benton in several places make explicit the desired emotional responses of the audience. Most remarkably, the script makes the point that the three major gun battles in the film should each carry a different emotional and cinematic quality (Newman & Benton, 1972b, p. 87). In the first two shoot-out scenes the Barrow gang is attacked by the police while in hiding. These two scenes are played out very differently. The first scene juxtaposes comedy and action, and is relatively light in tone, despite the violent gunfight. The second battle scene is far darker and more brutal. This scene is more explicitly violent, and in its aftermath Buck eventually dies after being shot in the head while Bonnie and Clyde manage to escape with severe injuries. The final shoot-out scene of *Bonnie and Clyde* is its most famous, and most violent. Betrayed by C. W. Moss' father, Bonnie and Clyde are led into a trap and ambushed by waiting police officers. The film shifts to slow-motion as their bodies convulse while being peppered with bullets. Finally, they are left lifeless and bloody. It's the end of Bonnie and Clyde and of the movie.

Penn explains that he strived to portray the death of Clyde differently from the death of Bonnie, with “Clyde’s to be rather like a ballet, and Bonnie’s to have the physical shock” (Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, p. 16; also see Biskind, 1998, pp. 34-35). At the same time, both deaths appear as less brutal and ugly than they would have if a strictly realistic approach had been followed. Penn stresses that he did not strive towards realism in Bonnie’s and Clyde’s death scene; rather, he tried to capture an abstraction, and to make their deaths appear as legendary rather than as real (Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, pp. 16-17; Harris, 2008, p. 256).¹⁰⁸ As reported in *The New York Times* on May 24, 1934, the day after the shooting took place, the historical Bonnie Parker wore a red dress on the day of her death as well as red shoes and a red and white hat (Cawelti, 1973a, p. 131). However, in the movie Faye Dunaway is bareheaded and sports a bright white dress. Hence, the blood stands out all the more brightly. Also, in the killing of the historical Bonnie and Clyde, both gangsters were trapped inside their car as the gunfire started. In the movie, Clyde is outside the car, in open view as the gunfire starts. These stylistic choices contributed to making the blood appear spectacularly vivid in this scene.

Penn himself has repeatedly referred to the violence prevalent elsewhere in American society and culture, be it at home or abroad, as context for his films. Penn willingly paraphrases American history and more recent and contemporary events such as the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War as examples of what he perceives as the essentially violent character of America (Hillier, 1973, p. 11).¹⁰⁹ Most explicitly and concretely, he draws parallels between stylistic details from the

¹⁰⁸ This departure from strict realism can also be detected from the film’s mise-en-scene throughout the movie. For instance, the styling and costumes of the film’s actors, especially in the case of Faye Dunaway’s portrayal of Bonnie, depart from a realistic 1930s look, nodding instead towards more contemporary fashion trends (Harris, 2008, p. 253).

¹⁰⁹ While Penn was more than willing to interpret the movie in light of current political events and social protests, others involved with the film were less enthusiastic. For instance, screenwriters Benton and Newman expressed surprise regarding the prevalent interpretations of the film as a representation of current social and political events. Their original conception of the film, dating back to 1963-1964 when they wrote “The New Sentimentality,” was far removed from social uprising and geopolitical events (Harris, 2008, pp. 392-393).

Bonnie and Clyde final shoot-out scene and images from the Kennedy assassination, and how in both cases pieces of flesh can be seen flying off the head as the bullets hit (Hillier, 1973, p. 13; also see Harris, 2008, p. 256).¹¹⁰

Responses to *Bonnie and Clyde*

The popular and critical responses to *Bonnie and Clyde* arguably marked a shift in taste, sensibility and attitude to violent imagery on the screen. Critic Pauline Kael describes the film as “contemporary in feeling” (Kael, 1972, p. 195), and markedly different from earlier portrayals of violence in American movies. A generation gap seems to occur here, with implications for the perception of on-screen violence. The emerging youth counterculture in the 1960s was, to a greater extent than earlier generations, defined in opposition to society with its established norms for good taste and conduct.

Bonnie and Clyde managed to profit from this zeitgeist, and its rebel couple became a point of identification for many of the young viewers that the film attracted. Bonnie and Clyde were opposed to established society; they were young, hip, and beautiful. Their victims, mainly bank and law-enforcement officers, are portrayed as representatives of a stale and oppressive system. Although mainly motivated by personal gain, the gangsters are also portrayed with a conscience, expressing solidarity with victims of the depression era. Bonnie and Clyde’s violence and acts of ridicule are directed towards the same forces and institutions in society that keep the poor and oppressed in their state of misery. *Bonnie and Clyde* thus manages to combine hedonism with social conscience and the desire to break free from an established society’s oppressive systems. This combination of desire, social

¹¹⁰ These comments were made in a *Cahiers du Cinema* interview published December 1967, at which time the complete Zapruder tape had not been made publicly available. Penn is thus referring to still images from the Kennedy assassination (Cook, 1999, pp. 141-142; also see Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, p. 16).

justice and politics is to be found in several aspects of 1960s youth culture, and helps to explain the film's capacity to reach out and connect with its audiences.

While *Bonnie and Clyde* had its supporters, it was also roundly condemned. Among critics, the film stoked considerable controversy when it was released, gaining the status of "arguably the Hollywood movie that generated the widest range of responses from reviewers" (Leggett, 2005/2006, p. 1). While *Bonnie and Clyde* launched the career of Pauline Kael, it marked the downfall of another critic, *The New York Times*' Bosley Crowther (Biskind, 1998, pp. 39-40; Leggett, 2005/2006; Haberski Jr., 2007; Harris, 2008, pp. 337-347).¹¹¹ What made critics such as Crowther (1967) turn against *Bonnie and Clyde* was not just its portrayal of violence but rather its farcical elements and juxtaposition of comedy and grisly bloodshed. This juxtaposition became a central point of divergence between critics admiring the film and critics condemning it. As Charles Thomas Samuels puts it in his scathing attack on the film, "[t]he interesting questions to raise about the film therefore are why so many reputable critics condone violence lacking expressive purpose and why customers are willing to pay for a movie both repulsive in its bloodshed and disorienting in its tonal shifts" (Samuels, 1973, p. 87).

What Crowther and others found so appalling about *Bonnie and Clyde* was not just the film itself but also, and perhaps even more so, the responses it incited in its audiences (Haberski Jr., 2007; Leggett, 2005/2006). *Bonnie and Clyde* made people cheer at the sight of violence; audiences would side with the unrelenting killers, and show no concern for the consequences of their acts of crime and violence. For a critic like Crowther, *Bonnie and Clyde* was fundamentally amoral and represented a general trend towards violence in the movies. The same year Crowther published a

¹¹¹ As Raymond J. Haberski Jr. explains, "Kael's review of *Bonnie and Clyde* earned her a home at the cosmopolitan *New Yorker* for the next thirty-three years, Crowther's review of the same movie hastened the end of his career at the [*New York*] *Times*, which had spanned twenty-seven years" (Haberski Jr., 2007, p. 195).

comment in *The New York Times* under the headline “Movies to Kill People by,” stating that

Something is happening in the movies that has me alarmed and disturbed. Movie-makers and movie-goers are agreeing that killing is fun. Not just old-fashioned, outright killing, either, the kind that is quickly and cleanly done by honorable law-enforcers or acceptable competitors in crime. This is killing of a gross and bloody nature, often massive and excessive, done by characters whose murderous motivations are morbid, degenerate and cold. This is killing of the sort that social misfits and sexual perverts are most likely to do. And the eerie thing is that movie goers are gleefully lapping it up (Crowther, 1967).

What Crowther resents is not only what a movie means or says but furthermore what it *does* – how it makes people react. Crowther is just as disturbed by the audience reactions he registers in the theaters, as he is by the film that is being projected on the screen. Audience reactions are likewise a central concern in Kael’s defense of the film. As she describes the film, “[t]he audience is alive to it. Our experience as we watch it has some connection with the way we react to movies in childhood: with how we came to love them and we feel they were ours – not an art that we learned over the years to appreciate, but simply and immediately ours” (Kael, 1972, p. 195).

Bonnie and Clyde appeals to Kael due to its capacity to incite feelings and reactions in the audience. What Kael applauds is not so much *what* the audience feel and experience, but rather the *intensity of* their feelings and experiences. She cherishes how *Bonnie and Clyde* evokes strong responses in the audience. As she further argues,

Bonnie and Clyde keeps the audience in a kind of eager, nervous imbalance – holds our attention by throwing our disbelief back in our faces. To be put on the spot, put on the stage, made the stooge in a comedy act. People in

the audience at *Bonnie and Clyde* are laughing, demonstrating that they're not stooges – that they appreciate the joke – when they catch the first bullet right in the face. The movie keeps them off balance to the end. During the first part of the picture, a woman in my row was gleefully assuring her companions, "It's a comedy. It's a comedy." After a while, she didn't say anything. Instead of the movie spoof, which tells the audience that it doesn't need to feel or care, that it's all just in fun, that "we were only kidding," *Bonnie and Clyde* disrupts us with "And you thought we were only kidding" (Kael, 1972, pp. 197-198).

Kael here describes a certain ambivalence among the initial audiences who saw *Bonnie and Clyde*. They didn't quite know what to make of the movie, and how to connect with it. Audiences were agitated, without necessarily knowing why, or knowing what they were supposed to feel. Was the violence played for laughs, or was it meant to be taken seriously? The film invited the audience to join in on the fun, only to punch them in the face. The initial ironic distance is broken as the violence suddenly turns all too real. In Kael's words, "[a]udiences at *Bonnie and Clyde* are not given a simple, secure basis for identification; they are made to feel but are not told how to feel" (Kael, 1972, p. 199).

Bonnie and Clyde is violent, and, even more importantly, this violence is not anchored in a moral universe. This, rather than the violence itself, was what was so shocking about *Bonnie and Clyde*, and it made many among critics and audiences turn away from the movie. As Kael puts it, "[i]n a sense, it is the absence of sadism – it is the violence without sadism – that throws the audience off balance at Bonnie and Clyde. The brutality that comes out of this innocence is far more shocking than the calculated brutalities of mean killers" (Kael, 1972, pp. 201-202).

The brutality of *Bonnie and Clyde* lacks the gravity and moral righteousness that characterized most earlier films of violence, such as Westerns or World War II epics. *Bonnie and Clyde* offers no clear condemnation, nor any justification, of the

violent acts it portrays. I will discuss this distinction between *Bonnie and Clyde's* ambiguous and aestheticized approach to violence and the moral focus typical of earlier film violence in more detail below, when I compare the final shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde* to the violence in Penn's previous film, *The Chase*. However, in order to trace the constitution and operations of the blood assemblage in *Bonnie and Clyde* I will first explore in further detail how blood is used in this film, and how it functions as an actor.

Blood as actor in *Bonnie and Clyde*

Blood is a central actor in *Bonnie and Clyde*. At certain key moments in the film, blood – through its relations to other elements – takes the centre stage and affects the tone and direction of the film, as well as modulating its affective potentials towards the audience. The stylistic and decorative portrayal of violence was of course nothing new to Hollywood. Examples abound in earlier westerns and gangster movies, where acts of violence are stylistically emphasized.¹¹² What is new with *Bonnie and Clyde* is the lavish bloodshed and graphic details on the impact of bullets on the human body. *Bonnie and Clyde* as such also exemplify a more general trend in how blood came to be portrayed in motion pictures from the 1960s onwards. As illustrated by the quote from Vivian Sobchack in the opening of this chapter, although violence and death had always been part of the movie-going experience, blood used to be relatively absent until this point in time. With *Bonnie and Clyde* blood goes from being a bit-player to becoming a main actor in a Hollywood movie. Furthermore, what makes this film remarkable is not merely its graphic bloodshed

¹¹² For instance, John Baxter describes the portrayal of death in the gangster movies of the 1920s and 1930s in the following manner: "Death in the crime movie had become, as it was in the bull-fight, an excuse for the decorative arabesque. Victims reeled balletically as the bullets struck, their shadows reared against pale grey walls, death became almost totally a matter of décor" (Baxter, 1976, p. 21). See Prince (2003) for a further discussion of the stylization of film violence in American motion pictures during the era of the Production Code.

but, more importantly, how the blood operates relative to the film's narrative and discursive construction.

Blood first appears in *Bonnie and Clyde* early in the film, when Clyde robs a grocery store. A butcher jumps him from behind and attacks Clyde with a meat cleaver. A fight follows and as they both stumble to the ground Clyde knocks the butcher in the head with his gun, leaving a bleeding wound.¹¹³ Blood here operates in a manner familiar from earlier films, where blood make-up is used sparsely, mainly signifying the impact of the hit to the head.

The next spilling of blood is far more spectacular, and marks a turning point in the film. This scene first appears in a comedic light, as Bonnie and Clyde escape from a bank robbery, only to discover that C. W. Moss has found a parking spot for their getaway car instead of waiting for them right outside the bank. Moss has a hard time maneuvering the car out of the tight parking spot and valuable time is lost. A teller runs from the bank onto the street, trying to stop the robbers and jumps onto the car as it passes him by, pressing his face against the window as he clings to one of the backdoors. From inside the car, Clyde fires his gun straight in the face of the teller, whose face explodes in blood, leaving a red smear on the window. All of a sudden, blood becomes the centerpiece of the image as Clyde makes his first kill.

After the comedic parking scene, the audience is not at all prepared for the sudden burst of destruction when Clyde fires his gun and blood splatters the car window. The effect is immediate, and blood comes to the forefront as soon as the gun is fired. There is no narrative build-up to this incident; rather the sudden shock provokes the viewer to respond to what just happened. Up until this point in the movie Clyde has been portrayed in a positive light, restraining himself from undue use of violence. In a blink of a second he is transformed into a killer, and the effects

¹¹³ In Newman and Benton's script Clyde shoots the butcher in the stomach, leaving him behind injured (Newman & Benton, 1972b, p. 62). In the film, a shot goes off during the fight but no clear indication is given whether or not the bullet actually hits the butcher.

of his actions are all too visible, in all its grisly details. Blood here operates in an affective manner. It exceeds its narrative function. In narrative terms, this incident could just as effectively have been portrayed in a more conventional manner where the audience first get to see an image from inside the car of Clyde pointing the gun towards the teller's face, and, as the sound of the gunshot is heard, a cut is made to an image from outside the car, showing the teller falling to the ground. Instead, we see the whole incident from inside the car, where the firing gun and the man being shot appear in the same frame so the impact of the bullet is shown from Bonnie and Clyde's perspective.

The blood appears suddenly and is shocking. Accordingly, the viewer is likely to experience an affective state which then informs and influences her/his understanding of the succeeding images in the film as well as the film's characters. The affective shock triggers emotions, which again impacts the interpretation of this scene and the scenes to follow. The scene challenges the audience's assumption about how to approach the film. The gentle and charming robbers all of a sudden turn into single-minded killers, shooting an unarmed elderly man in the face. When the car window is splattered with blood the audience is no longer watching a comedy, and a very different tone is set. Bonnie and Clyde's robberies are suddenly not innocent fun but bloodily real, with life and death consequences.

A sense of fun and games returns in the scene where the Barrows gang, now joined by Buck and Blanche, is first attacked by the police. This scene is entirely bloodless, despite two police officers being shot. However, the second shoot-out scene is another matter altogether. As explained above, the emotional tone of these two scenes are very different; the first scene is played for laughs, while the second scene has a far more sinister and violent tone. Also in this scene, no blood can be

seen when the police officers are shot,¹¹⁴ but the injuries to the gangsters are displayed in graphic detail. Buck bleeds profusely when he is hit in the head by a bullet, and Blanche's face is covered in blood after a glass splinter flies into her eye. The following sequence, where the gang flees in a car and seeks refuge overnight in an open field, emphasizes the pain and suffering Buck and Blanche undergo. Buck writhes in agony and mumbles incoherently, while Blanche cries in despair. Buck's blood drenches the other gang members as they try to still the bleeding. The situation is chaotic and tensions ride high. The uncontrollable nature of Buck's blood illustrates the hopelessness and chaos surrounding the gang. They are not in control of their bodies, and even less in control of the situation that they are facing.

The next morning the gang is again attacked by the police, who have now surrounded them, and Buck and Blanche are left behind as the others manage to flee. This leads to the sequence where Buck finally dies, after crawling on all fours, covered in blood, while trying to escape. This, at least to me, is by far the most painful sequence in the movie to watch. Buck is totally defenseless, unable to control his bodily movements, before finally rolling over dead. Buck's loss of agency and eventual death stands in contrast to Bonnie and Clyde who both get shot and injured during their flight, yet still manage to escape, with the help of C. W. Moss. Especially spectacular is the image of Clyde being shot in the left arm while driving a car. For this sequence, Beatty's arm is squibbed, and explodes in blood as the bullet hits.

Bonnie and Clyde makes extensive use of explosive squibs in its depictions of the bodily impact of gun shots. Squibs allow the impact of bullet hits to be captured in single takes, as a body is hit and blood suddenly appears and starts spurting. Prior to the use of blood squibs, blood had to be applied by the actor him/herself, clutching the impacted area with his/her hands and at the same time either

¹¹⁴ Indeed, throughout the film, no police officer is seen shedding a single drop of blood. The only victims of the gang that can be seen bleeding are the butcher and the bank teller in the two scenes early in the movie.

puncturing a capsule filled with artificial blood or smearing red make-up onto the area in question. Alternatively, and more commonly, a cut-away would be inserted in-between the shot of the body taking the hit and the shot of the bleeding body – onto which blood had been applied by the film's make-up crew. With the use of squibs the blood assemblage could take on a more active role, interacting with other elements in transformative processes.

Rather than dividing the action into a series of individual operations, blood squibs accommodate an assemblage of simultaneously operating relations and actions. Human actors, blood make-up, and squib technology form an actor assemblage that, through its relations to other elements in the image – as well as preceding and succeeding images – can potentially enact a dynamic performance. This performance can be elongated in time, sustaining a moment, as the body is transformed during its destruction. Neither squib nor actor alone can perform this role; rather the effect is collective and relational.

Squibs allow human actors to continue performing their role, without the interruption of cuts in order to prepare a new take or the distraction of having to apply make-up. This can be seen in the sequence where Clyde gets shot in the arm. The bullet hits in full visibility, while Beatty can keep both hands on the wheel and continue driving, all in the same take. This blood assemblage here operates differently than it does in the sequence where Buck gets shot. No squibs are used and a cut from the frame showing Buck falling as he gets hit to a close-up of him clutching his face with his hand, all covered in blood, allows for make-up to be applied in-between takes. Squibs hence make possible prolonged takes, where human actors and special effects together enact the performance of the blood assemblage. This is most clearly illustrated by the final shoot-out scene of the film, where Bonnie and Clyde are filmed in slow-motion as they are riddled with bullets.

The scene was shot with four cameras, operating at different speeds.¹¹⁵ In his previous television work Penn had also used the technique of shooting with multiple cameras simultaneously (Hillier, 1973, p. 8) but he now brought this technique in a far more advanced and complex direction. The same can be said of the use of squib technology. Although *Bonnie and Clyde* was not the first film to apply this technique, it was now brought to a new level. Holes were made in the car in advance to look like bullet hits, and then rigged with explosives. The actors were wired with squib charges attached to their clothes, with metal plates inside the clothing, covered by a layer of foam rubber, to protect the skin. When the explosives were detonated, the clothing was ripped apart and blood spurted from capsules, mimicking the impact of bullet hits (Culhane, 1981, pp. 120-121; Schechter & Everitt, 1980, pp. 195-197). Beatty and Dunaway were each rigged with dozens of such squibs and small capsules of artificial blood. The special effects team was given cues by Beatty, who would squeeze a pear he was holding in his hand to indicate when the gunfire should start. As the squibs started detonating and the actors convulsed, another member of the make-up crew would pull an invisible string attached to a prosthetic scalp piece on Beatty's head, creating the image of his head being blown apart (Harris, 2008, p. 256). Strings were also attached to artificial pieces of skin, covering make-up illustrating gunshot wounds.¹¹⁶

The characteristics of the squib technology and its execution contribute to the expressive potentials of the blood assemblage and the images through which it operates. Squibs give the blood assemblage a wider acting register, becoming less dependent upon its human co-actors. At the same time squibs allow for special

¹¹⁵ As Penn explains in a 1968 interview with Jean-Louis Comolli and Andre S. Labarthe, he "used four cameras, each one at a different speed, 24, 48, 72, and 96 [frames per second], I think, and different lenses, so that I could cut to get the shock and at the same time the ballet of death" (Comolli & Labarthe, 1973, p. 16).

¹¹⁶ See the documentary *Revolution! The Making of Bonnie and Clyde* (2008) for details on the making of this scene.

effects and human actors to interact and enter new assemblages. The technology is, as such, a factor in the expressive potentials that are constituted, although the special effects do not by themselves determine these potentials. What explicitly is being expressed, and which potentials it carries for affecting the audience are an analytical and empirical issue. In the final part of this chapter I thus turn to this final shoot-out scene, which I compare to some of the earlier sequences from *Bonnie and Clyde* discussed above, as well as to a key scene of violence from Penn's previous film, *The Chase*.

A ballet of blood

In terms of narrative, the ending of *Bonnie and Clyde* comes as no surprise. As explained above, the ending has been foreshadowed earlier in the film. In addition, as anyone in the audience with knowledge of the historical characters of Bonnie and Clyde would know, the outlaw couple's criminal careers did not last long. The question is not *if* they will die but *how* they will die. We follow their final steps into the trap and when the gunfire breaks loose we know they will not stand a chance. Nonetheless, the intensity and excess of violence and bloodshed in the final scene were not something audiences would have expected when *Bonnie and Clyde* was first released.

As the audience has already been informed, C. W. Moss' father has betrayed Bonnie and Clyde, and a trap has been set. Now fully recuperated from their injuries and in a good mood, Bonnie and Clyde are driving along a dusty country road, heading back towards their hideout when they spot the elderly Moss ahead, changing a tire on his truck. Moss waves at them and Clyde turns to the side of the road and stops the car right in front of Moss' truck, before stepping out, walking towards the older man. Moss greets them, then looks startled as a car approaches, driving in the other direction. A flock of birds fly from the bushes on the other side of the road.

Moss dives under his truck, seeking refuge. Clyde is first befuddled, and then, as he looks towards the bushes Moss was staring at, realizes that something is wrong. He and Bonnie look at each other, and the gunfire erupts from the policemen hiding behind the bushes.

The outlaw couple has no time to escape or defend themselves. The gunfire lasts for several seconds, peppering Bonnie and Clyde as well as their car with a wall of bullets. Bonnie screams but the sound of her voice is overpowered by the noise from the guns. Clyde falls to the ground in front of the car, his body jerking from the onslaught of bullets. Bonnie, sitting inside the car, is spasmodically thrown about in her seat, before her upper body slumps over, halfway outside the open car door.

The rapid editing and the mixture of different camera speeds give the scene a dynamic character. Rather than one unified expression, the scene moves in several directions with no clearly defined end point or purpose. Bonnie and Clyde die, while their characters are transformed in this process. They go from being believable figures to mythic beings. Watching Bonnie and Clyde die turns into an aesthetic experience. Their bodies become a tableau to be riddled with bullets and caressed by blood. They take the hits and fall over gracefully, convulsing as one bullet hits after the other. Blood spurts and flows from their bodies. The exploding blood capsules conjoin with the human actors in a portrayal of the characters and the legend of Bonnie and Clyde. The blood underscores who they were and the lives they lived.

This is a very different effect from what happened when blood appeared in the earlier scene, where Clyde shot a bank teller in the face. In that scene, blood appeared as a reality reminder, making clear that being a gangster is not all fun and games. It can have real-life consequences, and real people can get killed. In the final shoot-out scene, on the other hand, the jittery movements and slow-motion blood splatter underline the mythical character of the scene. What we see is not the death of real people but rather the making of a legend. Bonnie and Clyde are transformed

into iconic figures. The death scene becomes a final statement about Bonnie and Clyde. They have been betrayed and die gracefully, as beautiful and glamorous dead as they were alive.

In the earlier scene, where Clyde shoots the bank teller in the face through the car window, blood creates a distance between me as a viewer and Clyde as a killer. His sudden act of violence shatters my feelings of empathy towards his character. However, this trend is reversed in the later scenes. In the scene where Buck gets killed and Bonnie and Clyde escape injured, drenched in blood, I come to empathize with their pain and suffering. Their pain is laid bare, and this strengthens my attachment to these characters. The final shoot-out scene transcends this individual sense of empathy; as Bonnie and Clyde are torn apart they become glorious icons, rather than beings whose pain with which I can empathize. In this scene Bonnie and Clyde bleed and die differently than others in the film. In scenes where the outlaws act violently the emphasis is on the action rather than on the suffering they inflict. Little or no focus is put on the victims. This stands in contrast to the death of Buck. Buck's death is dragged out, as step by step he is dehumanized, reduced to a wounded creature, spinning in circles like an animal. Unlike Buck, who dies in a dehumanized state, calling for our pity, the deaths of Bonnie and Clyde are portrayed with a romantic and graceful glow.¹¹⁷

This difference is underscored by the camera positions. As Buck is blinded and wounded, spinning around on all fours, the camera looks down on him from above. Quite literally, Buck is reduced to something beneath us. Buck's death is portrayed as something distant from us, as something repulsive we can hardly bear to look at. Bonnie and Clyde, on the other hand, are brought even closer to us as they face

¹¹⁷ My sentiments are here shared by Robert Steele, who writes: "When Bonnie and Clyde finally die, their deaths are unlike all the previous deaths in the film, cinematically beautiful; they are shot in slow motion thus making them unreal when contrasted with the rest of the film. Thus the violence of their death becomes legendary and romantic rather than the kind of violence that befell Buck and the victims of the Barrows gang" (Steele, 1973, p. 118).

their deaths. Even in death they have what Buck lacks: style. Buck has blood smeared across his face and body, turning him into a grotesque figure. When Bonnie and Clyde are hit, blood splatters about like an abstract expressionist painting. They are decorated and adorned. Rather than being dehumanized, they are as glamorous dying as they were living. Their bodies convulsing rhythmically to the blasting guns, they remain cool, aloof from their killers. Bonnie and Clyde come out as winners. The slow-motion effect in this scene makes it possible to contemplate the aesthetic forms of their twisting and bleeding bodies. At the same time we don't get to hear their screams and cries of agony. Rather than being debased, Bonnie and Clyde take on almost angelic features in this death scene. They are elevated, and transcend a mere corporeal existence.

To further illustrate what was new about the portrayal of violence *in Bonnie and Clyde*, in relation to previous Hollywood movies, I will compare it to a scene from Penn's previous film, *The Chase*. As briefly mentioned above, *The Chase* was remarkable for its display of violence. The film takes place in a southern small town, run by a local oil tycoon. The oil tycoon's son is having an affair with the wife of a man just escaped from prison. The prisoner is on the run, and the only one to know of his whereabouts is the town's black car mechanic. The mechanic is harassed by an angry racist mob, so the town's sheriff, Calder (Marlon Brando), puts him in a jail cell for his protection. The oil tycoon demands to speak to the mechanic and when Calder refuses to let him do so, the sheriff is jumped upon by a trio of drunken and bigoted small-town vigilantes. They hold the sheriff back and drag him into his office, while the oil tycoon runs down to the jail cell and pistol whips the mechanic into giving up the information. Meanwhile, trapped inside his office, the sheriff is savagely beaten by two of the drunks, while the third keeps guard by the locked door. The beating is excessively brutal, the sheriff's face gets grotesquely deformed and his shirt drenched in blood. The sheriff's wife (Angie Dickinson), hearing the tumult, tries to

stop the beating but is blocked from entering the room and her screams for help are futile. After the drunken brutes have left, she finally reaches her husband sprawled across the office floor. He is beaten to a pulp and unable to control his body movements.

The scene has the potential to make a great emotional impact, intensified by the display of blood and bodily damage. Of course, this was not the first film in which Brando was depicted taking a severe beating; the scene brings to mind similar imagery from his performances in films such as *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961). As in these two films, Brando's character here takes on martyr-like qualities, as he undergoes bodily harm and suffering in the hands of the films' sadistic antagonists. My experience of watching all of these scenes involved similar feelings of anger towards the perpetrators and feelings of frustration towards the torment Brando's characters suffer. These feelings were of a social as well as a more individualized nature for all of these films, as the violence is framed by situations where the individual suffering is associated with a strong sense of social injustice. Besides empathy with the character's experience of pain and injury, my responses are conditioned by discursive knowledge about the unjust reasons for the sadistic acts. This discursive conditioning works on me, directing my feelings of anger towards the perpetrators of the violent acts, as well as generating a strong sense of empathy for Brando in his roles as victims in these films.

Still, unlike *On the Waterfront* and *One-Eyed Jacks*, in *The Chase* Brando is shown as bleeding profusely, and the violence unfolds over a prolonged period of time. The sense of suffering is increased, and my position as a viewer becomes even more unbearable. As the blood flows, I want the scene to stop, the suffering to end, and justice to be restored. Quite literally, I want to jump up from my seat and punch the bad guys in the face in order to make them stop, but also since I now feel that

that is what they deserve. The scene makes me agitated, both due to its discursive conditioning and its visceral impact.

Blood here works along with, and intensifies, the discursive framing of the film. What I experience is, in all likelihood, the reaction intended by the filmmakers, and the blood effectively helps to condition and strengthen this response. The blood intensifies my reaction of anger and empathy. This use of blood and the portrayal of violence are similar to the scene from *The Set-Up*, discussed in Chapter One. The blood evokes affects, but these affects are instantly reintegrated within the films' narrative. Sympathies and antipathies are clearly defined, and the blood assemblage operates in support of these definitions.

This scene affects me in ways different from my experience of watching the death of Bonnie and Clyde. Both scenes are excessively bloody but the blood assemblages operate in fundamentally different ways. Interestingly, this difference in many ways parallels the distinction *Bonnie and Clyde's* screenwriters, Benton and Newman, were drawing between Old and New Sentimentality. Brando's beating affected me as it affronted the moral universe the film operated within as well as my own sense of justice. The beating felt wrong, unjust and sadistic – and the bloodshed helped intensify these feelings. I wanted to jump out of my seat and make the beating stop. But I could only watch helplessly as this brutality unfolded, and my anger intensified as the violence and bloodshed escalated, while I could do nothing to interfere. On the other hand, watching Bonnie and Clyde being peppered with bullets, I could feel no anger. The scene is not horrific to watch, the anticipation and stylization of the scene creates a distantiating effect. The blood is here something to admire, as a spectacular effect and as an aesthetic accomplishment. The sensations I experience are closer to awe than to pain.

Bonnie and Clyde is all about mythic characters, not about a moral universe. The film avoids moral issues in its characterization of hip young gunslingers, whose

appeal as rebels seems to be grounded in the fact that they lack a clear cause or motivation. They do what *feels* right, not what *is* the right thing to do. *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde* thus stand as two opposites. *The Chase* is a social drama, where the affective intensities are evoked by the amoral, unjust and sadistic acts of the films' antagonists. Here the blood assemblage works to enhance these affective intensities. *Bonnie and Clyde*, on the other hand, is a portrait of rebellious and attractive characters, whose appeal lies in their style and coolness, not in the righteousness of their acts.

In *The Chase*, Marlon Brando is the performative centre piece of the scene. He expresses the suffering and pain in the bodily deformation his character undergoes. This performance is supported by makeup, co-actors, and other elements he enters relations with in this scene, but he remains the center of attention. In this scene there's a far greater emphasis on human suffering, and the beating takes place over a prolonged period of time. The consequences are ugly and repulsive. I want to turn away or stop watching. The shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde*, on the other hand, is fascinating and appealing. The experience is stimulating. No pain or suffering is expressed. It's a stylization of death where Beatty and Dunaway are bit players in a distributed network of performative relations.

Technically, the two scenes are executed very differently. The jail scene in *The Chase* follows a more 'conventional' set-up, with cutaways between frames showing Brando being hit and frames showing the effects of the violence. Blood make-up is applied between the takes. The shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde*, on the other hand, is shot with four different cameras, operating simultaneously at different speeds. Blood squibs are used, as well as strings pulling away shreds of flesh. There are no cut-aways between the bullet hits and their impact on the body. Blood appears while the bodies of Bonnie and Clyde are still in the frame. Likewise, the editing is very different. *Bonnie and Clyde* proceeds at a swift pace, and the

shoot-out scene is put together through very short and rapid cuts. Despite these stylistic differences, the scene in *Bonnie and Clyde* appears no more realistic than the scene in *The Chase*, nor is it any more repulsive. Arguably, *Bonnie and Clyde* is no more violent than *The Chase*. Quite the opposite, the violence in *The Chase* can be far more uncomfortable to watch. What differentiate the films is how the violence is situated and how the blood assemblages operate.

Both of these scenes affect me. They do something to me; they transform me and turn me into someone or something else. The violent scene in *The Chase* pulls me into the film's narrative. I care about the characters and what happens to them. I am invested in the film's diegesis. I can empathize with the pain experienced by Brando's character. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, the shoot-out scene has no such effect. I'm affected but these affects are not reinvested into the film's narrative and diegesis. I don't feel any particular sadness or empathy for the characters of Bonnie and Clyde. The scene is not shocking; my experience of watching the death of Bonnie and Clyde is one of awe and it leaves me in a state of resignation, futility and emptiness. The aftereffect of the mayhem is a calming lull, mixed with a certain undefined affective intensity. Unlike *The Chase*, where the blood is strongly tied to the acts of violence and the personified suffering of Brando's character, the blood in the shoot-out scene operates as if detached from its bodies of origin. The blood is added to the characters of Bonnie and Clyde, rather than being intrinsically linked to their death by perforating bullets. Its function is decorative.

In sum, these scenes are both bloody, and none of the scenes would have been the same without the blood. Yet still, the blood operates differently in each scene. It contributes to different responses and affective connections. In *The Chase* blood operates according to a causal logic, which it takes to its fullest extent. It is closely tied up with the narrative of the film, and regulates audience antipathies and sympathies as well as contributing to driving the narrative forward. As I watch the

scene I go from paying attention to the story and the question of what will happen next to being repulsed by the sadistic display of violence, and the immense suffering and distress inflicted by this violence. This affective response makes me want the violence to stop. It becomes overwhelming. Still, when the scene is over and the action can continue, I am even more invested in the story. I now care about the characters. I root for the sheriff and hope the bigoted thugs will get their well-deserved punishment. The affective intensities the film evoked have been reinvested into the narrative.

The shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde* operates according to a different logic. These images are calling for affective responses in the viewer. But these affects are not reinvested into the film's narrative. After watching the death of Bonnie and Clyde, I was left with no feelings of anger towards their killers, and no desire to restore order and justice in the film's diegetic universe. Rather the film leaves me in an affected state without offering a clear sense of direction or purpose.

My reactions are responses to the potentials of the images. These potentials can be actualized differently as the images are perceived by differently situated viewers, but not entirely at random. Some outcomes are more likely than others, or put differently, some images result in more tightly clustered actualized perceptions and affections than others. The blood images in *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde* move in quite different directions in this regard. In *The Chase* sympathies and antipathies are clearly defined, and the blood spill strengthens these relations. It is indeed hard not to empathize with the sheriff's suffering and feel hatred towards the bullies as this scene unfolds. The scene is set up in a manner that narrows down the range of possible emotional attachments and relationships. I do by this not mean that the affective reactions evoked are less intense or less 'authentic.' Nor do I imply that the audience is somehow being manipulated. In both of these cases the filmmakers by all indication had the affective or emotional impact on the viewer in

mind when the films were being produced. The difference is rather a matter of degrees of freedom. *Bonnie and Clyde*, in contrast to *The Chase*, offers audiences greater affective leeway. The shoot-out scene is presented for our contemplation, without explicitly using discursive means to guide audience sympathies or antipathies, or to make viewers involved in the outcome of the scene. There is thus greater room for audiences to diverge on what they may take away from this scene, and how they are moved in terms of potential affective and emotional responses – something that is illustrated by the range of reactions to the film.

By outlining this difference in how the blood assemblage operates in terms of affect in these two scenes I am not intending to give a normative evaluation. One form of affective response is not inherently any 'better' than the other. Such an evaluation is entirely a pragmatic and situational issue. While some situations call for images that evoke uniform and specific affective responses, more open-ended and varied responses can be preferable in other instances. Nonetheless, the contrast exemplified by *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde* leads to a number of challenges and questions which can be explored through a discussion of the film to which I will turn next, namely *The Wild Bunch* (1969). As I will argue in the next chapter, this is a film that struggles with the intersection between constructing a defined moral universe and providing for more open-ended aesthetic contemplation, and where the blood assemblage takes on key roles in aligning and playing out these contrasts.

Chapter 5: Blood and Chaos in *The Wild Bunch*

- Do you really think the general public should be subjected to this kind of garbage?
- I feel purged.
- I have never seen blood squirt out of humans like in this movie.
- Pure unadulterated crap.
- Truly a product of our sick society.
- It's great for morbid people. It stunk!!!!
- Christ have mercy.
- What happened to the old John Wayne movies?
- The only feelings I felt were disgust and outrage that I was a party to this.
- ... This movie was TOO DAMN BLOODY!! One big bloody mess.
- Horrible pictures like this help make the world have more hate! More wars! Terrible.
- No story, just gore, filthy, repulsive = blood, blood, blood!
- This picture is burnt in my brain, I don't think I'm gonna ever forget it.
- I am aghast. Your film leaves me shaky. I can't say more.
- ... I'm sure many mental degenerates will enjoy it.
- Very strong stuff. I was repulsed by the quantities of blood. But it was all so real + vivid. Powerful film.
- Must be the definitive, or last of Western (or all) violence. I'm bleeding, and hope someone can carry me out. I hope it is the director's attempt to tell people what violence is in reality, what a bullet does to a man's body, and how many times he can bleed before he dies. My bloodlust for authentic westerns has been satisfied for a life time, and I hope this was the director's intent. I think I'll dispose of my rifles.
- If this is the kind of movies you are showing in 69 think how bad they will be when my children are going to movies.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ These comments, as well as those in the text below, are all from the MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folders 984-997.

As the last comment illustrates, it is hard today to imagine the uproar created by *The Wild Bunch* in 1969. Its stylization and display of violence have long since been common fare in contemporary cinema. After *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and many other violent movies, it is today impossible to see *The Wild Bunch* as it first confronted audiences. In part, this is due to the very influence of *The Wild Bunch* itself. Perhaps more than any other movie, *The Wild Bunch* remains the epitome of film violence, providing templates for innumerable later films for their displays of bloodshed in slow-motion and glorious detail. Nonetheless, *The Wild Bunch*, like the other films discussed in this dissertation, can still pack a punch, evoking affective responses as they engage contemporary viewers, such as me. These responses are of course not identical to the responses evoked upon the films' initial releases. As I have argued throughout this thesis, no two processes of perception are alike, and one affective response will always differ from the next. These differences will be even greater as films are viewed across historical, cultural and paradigmatic distances, connecting with different strata of standards, expectations, norms and values, stylistic points of reference, real life experiences, and so on. Seeing *The Wild Bunch* today indeed *is* not the same as seeing it in 1969. The film no longer appears as shocking and overwhelming, as its cinematic techniques for displaying violence and bloodshed have today become common fare (see e.g., Prince, 1998).

But let me first return to the quotes above, which are comments made on reaction cards from the previews of *The Wild Bunch* in Kansas City and Fresno in the summer of 1969. Unsuspecting audiences were invited, without any advance information about the film they were about to see. The reactions on the mail-in cards to Warner Bros offer strong evidence that a considerable segment of American cinema goers were not prepared for the sensory assault and vivid imagery offered by this film. Both the positive as well as the negative responses indicate a cinematic

style unlike earlier movie fare. American cinema goers had never seen anything like *The Wild Bunch*.¹¹⁹ Still, the responses vary immensely, both in terms of whether the preview audiences liked the movie or not, and in terms of their interpretations of what the film is about. The reactions tend towards the extreme. On the one hand, several viewers note that this is the best movie they have ever seen,¹²⁰ but on the other hand, a far greater number makes the opposite claim that this is the worst movie experience they have had.¹²¹

Many of the negative responses have an agitated tone. Examples include phrases such as "Sick," "Crap," "BAD," "Garbage," "Boo!!," "Rotten," "Ugh" or "Damn art theatre" scribbled in large letters across the entire card. Several cards also express hostile reactions like: "It should be banned from every screen in America" or "Do the world a favor and burn it!"¹²² Several vent their aggression towards the filmmakers and exhibitors, with statements such as: "I wish I had some dynamite and blow up the whole theater" or "You ought to be shot for making it!"¹²³

¹¹⁹ "In thirty years of going to movies I have never seen anything like but would love to see any like it again."

"Nothing to compare it with."

¹²⁰ "It is the most honest and accurate film of human nature I have ever seen."

"Loved it! The ultimate in blood, guts, and gore."

"Gripping. Greatest drama I have ever seen."

"Greatest western war-fare ever filmed. A bloody, realistic, vivid look in to the futility but meaningful picture of violence."

"Beautifully filmed – acting superb – best movie I've seen."

¹²¹ "It is the lousiest damn movie I've ever seen."

"This may be my last movie. I was so utterly revulsed [sic] and sickened."

"I have never been so sick when I left a picture before."

"This is the worst show I have ever seen. It should be banned from every screen in America. Our morals are already corrupted enough without trash of this sort."

¹²² Other examples include:

"Hopefully will never be permitted to the public. Is SICK, SICK & SICK again."

"A thrill for sado-masochists. No redeeming social value. If this is what the public wants then I am not of this world any longer. Go fly a kite!"

"Nauseating. I'm going to write to my congressman."

¹²³ Other examples include:

"If you honestly feel that this is what the American people are hungry for then you are no better than the dirty animals you portrayed in your so called motion picture!"

"Kill the producer!"

"... a sick film made by sick people ..."

"... I really feel sorry for you and I'll remember you in my prayers."

The comments illustrate, on the one hand, the audience's affective and physical reactions to the film, and on the other, their moral verdict on how the violence relates to the film's meaning and message, or lack thereof. Many members of the preview audience report being viscerally affected by the movie. The affective intensities could become overwhelming and for some even too much to bear, resulting in people leaving the theater and/or becoming physically sick.¹²⁴ The majority of the preview audience seemed to downright reject the film both in terms of its copious amounts of blood and violence and in terms of what audiences took to be its (lack of) theme or meaning. The film was deemed far too violent and bloody, and many in the audience could not find any way of making sense of the mayhem.¹²⁵ Hence, several viewers rejected the film as overtly sensational or sadistic.¹²⁶

Others in the audience vividly describe their exhilarating visceral experience of watching the movie in more positive ways.¹²⁷ For instance, one woman in the 17-25 age category, who rated the film as "Outstanding," writes: "... I saw the picture with one eye at times, from behind arms and fingers spread in fright. But I must admitted [sic] I am excited, repulsed, and at the same time drawn to what I saw on

¹²⁴ "I walked out after 20 minutes!!"

"I walked out after 16 minutes, 405 murders, 3,569,751 gallons of blood hit the ground."

"I could not sit through it."

¹²⁵ "I find violence of this type in films revolting and pointless."

"WHY?"

"There is no theme except bloody senseless violence and killing."

"I detest killing. The movie is nothing but mass murder."

"A series of actual car accidents would have been more interesting."

¹²⁶ "The movie seemed to be based on sensationalism as its main selling point. Most decent people will get sick."

"Worst, sadistic movie ever seen."

"Vicious, cruel, disgusting, savage, brutal, completely horrible."

"You ought to be ashamed of showing senseless genocide; and call it entertainment."

"I have never seen a more brutal, sadistic film ..."

"Blood! It's rotten! ... It's plain sadism. Only a sadist or one who is mentally deranged would enjoy this film."

¹²⁷ "A shocking movie – I would like to see it again ..."

"I thought it was very realistic, and true to life of the time period it depicted. I would not cut or censor any part of it!"

"Bloodshed not spared – but this is the way it was so it's about time we see it this way."

"Good ending, good acting, lots of Blood."

"Bloodiest damn movie I've seen in years. Very realistic. Darn good."

the screen. I felt something of mental, orgasm like release in the final shoot-out scene. I thought the film was exceptional." Another woman, in the 31-45 age bracket who had attended the preview together with her teenage daughter, rated the film as "Excellent," and covered the entire preview card with enthusiastic comments about the movie and her own responses. As she explains, "I perspired quite a bit through the movie! It was good – the realism made me feel involved." Nevertheless, despite her enthusiasm, she states that she found the blood squirting to be overdone, and too much of a good thing. Others describe their experience in entirely negative terms, as for instance another woman in the 26-30 age category, who rated the film as "Rotten to the core,"¹²⁸ states: "This picture made me want to PUKE – I actually felt nausea." Several others in the audience similarly express their visceral repulsion towards the film, resulting in nausea or even vomiting.¹²⁹

These quotes describe various overwhelming affective experiences. Audiences were given clues and intensities but no clear sense of how to map them together. The comments reveal an experience of chaos, where an affective overload is not given any clear direction. This chaos and intensity, I will argue, characterize *The Wild Bunch's* mode of operation and affective appeal. For some, these overwhelming sensations were pleasurable, for others, the majority, the experience turned negative, even revolting. *The Wild Bunch* indeed did offer something completely different than earlier John Wayne westerns, where violent ruptures would be resolved and order restored before the end of the movie. Unlike earlier movies, *The*

¹²⁸ The five rating categories offered on the card were "Outstanding," "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," and "Poor," as well as an "Other" category. Several people in the preview audience rejected the categorization system and invented their own bottom tier category in the "other" field. Examples, besides "Rotten to the core," include "Worse," "a rating lower than poor," "blaugh!," "Shitty," "Rotten," "pffft!," and several more.

¹²⁹ "... I vomited."

"It made me want to vomit. I could almost smell the people. Gory detail & earthy vocabulary overdone."

"... I was physically sick ..."

"Pure trash! I'm shaking and would like to throw up."

Wild Bunch offered no resolution but rather presented violence as senseless mayhem.

Violent intensities in *The Wild Bunch*

The Wild Bunch can be described as two massive gun battles, with a narrative unfolding in between. The film is set in Mexico in the early 20th century, at the start of the Mexican revolution. The film opens as a gang of outlaws, the wild bunch of the film's title, rides into a small American border town. The gang aims to rob the town's railroad office but unbeknownst to them, a trap has been set by the railroad company. Deke Thornton (Robert Ryan), the former partner of the gang's current leader Pike Bishop (William Holden), leads the ambush posse who are hiding on rooftops awaiting the gang's arrival. A gunfight ensues, involving the gang as well as several innocent bystanders before the surviving gang members take off with their loot. On their way out of the town, one of the gang members, Buck (Rayford Barnes) falls off his horse. He was shot in the face and blinded during the gunfight. His face covered in blood, he eventually gives up and begs Pike Bishop to finish him off. Without a word, Pike pulls his gun and kills Buck with a single shot. Pike decides that there is no time to give Buck a burial, and the bunch moves on. The five remaining members of the bunch – Pike, Dutch (Ernest Borgnine), Angel (Jamie Sanchez), and the brothers Lyle (Warren Oates) and Tector (Ben Johnson) Gorch – join up with their elder companion Sykes (Edmond O'Brien) to divide the loot. However, the loot turns out to be nothing but a sack of worthless washers, and the gang is forced to go into hiding as they flee Thornton and his group of bounty hunters.

The bunch escapes to Mexico and becomes caught up in the turmoil surrounding the revolution. They seek refuge in the home village of Angel, the gang's Mexican member. The villagers are undergoing hardship, being exploited by the Mexican general Mapache (Emilio Fernandez). Mapache's army holds the fort in Agua

Verde, a nearby town completely under the rule of the cruel general. The bunch visits Agua Verde to sell horses to Mapache, where Angel spots his former girlfriend, Teresa, who is now one of Mapache's lovers. Angel shoots Teresa dead while she's in the arms of Mapache. The gang manages to calm down the ensuing chaos, and they end up striking a deal with Mapache where he will pay them \$10,000 to steal a load of rifles from a US army train. The gang manages to steal the rifles, despite being attacked and followed by Thornton and the bounty hunters. However, Angel insists on giving his share of the rifles to the people in his village, to help them fight Mapache's army. The remaining rifles are turned over to Mapache. Meanwhile, Angel is betrayed by the mother of Teresa, the girl he killed, who informs Mapache about Angel's theft. Angel is then captured by Mapache, and his companions have to leave him behind in Agua Verde. The remaining four members of the bunch, fleeing Thornton and his posse, eventually return to Agua Verde for protection. As they arrive, they witness Angel being tortured by Mapache's soldiers as he is dragged behind a car, still alive. Pike offers half of his share of the payment for the rifles to free Angel but Mapache refuses the offer. The bunch spends the night in Agua Verde, drinking and frequenting prostitutes. The next morning, Pike gathers the other three remaining members of the gang to set Angel free. They walk up to Mapache and demand that he hands over Angel. Mapache accepts but then cuts Angel's throat as he drags him to his feet. The bunch opens fire and shoots Mapache dead. A moment of silence ensues, before a frantic gun battle follows, where the bunch manages to take out Mapache's army, before they are themselves killed. After the battle, Thornton and his posse arrive, only to find the town in ruins, littered with corpses.

As mentioned above, it was the film's opening and closing battle scenes that were most remarkable about *The Wild Bunch*. Furthermore, as is evident from the preview comment cards, it was these two scenes that evoked the strongest responses from the film's audiences. I will thus start my analysis by addressing the

question of what it was that made these scenes to have such a strong affective impact. This will set the stage for my argument that *The Wild Bunch* operates more as violence than as a representation of violence, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

The first battle scene in *The Wild Bunch* takes place before the audience has been properly introduced to the film's characters or plot. The opening segment of the film, during the title sequence, gradually builds momentum as the bunch, dressed as American soldiers, rides into the town. They pass a group of children, who at first appear to be happily playing, until it is revealed that the children's play involves torturing scorpions by placing them on an ant hill. The children watch with fascination as the scorpions fight in vain for their lives. The footage of the children is intercut with the gang riding into town, interspersed with still black and white photos displaying the film's titles. As the bunch enters the town they pass by a temperance union meeting before dismounting from their horses and walking towards the railroad administration office. Footage then shows the waiting posse of bounty hunters on the roof, led by Deke Thornton and the railroad detective, Pat Harrigan (Albert Dekker). As the gang enters the office, and starts roughing up the office personnel, Pike Bishop utters the classic line "If they move, kill 'em," before the image of Bishop turns into a black and white still photo, with the title "Directed by Sam Peckinpah" displayed in the bottom left corner. Next, three different narrative lines lead up to the gun battle. Inside the office, the robbery proceeds; on the rooftop outside the posse awaits the bunch to step outside so that they can shoot them from above; at the same time, the temperance union starts marching in front of the railroad office, blocking the line of sight from the rooftop. As the parade marches by, playing "Shall We Gather At The River?," the bunch inside the railroad office spots the posse on the rooftop outside. Tension is built by intercutting between the marching temperance union, the restless posse on the rooftop who eagerly

anticipates the opportunity to open fire at the bunch, and the bunch inside the office getting ready for their escape. The soundtrack adds to the tension, juxtaposing the music of the temperance union with a pulsating rhythm, resembling a heartbeat, which grows in speed and volume until the point when Bishop throws a railroad clerk out the door onto the street. Immediately, the posse on the roof starts shooting, and the first victim is the innocent clerk.

In the ensuing gunfight numerous bystanders are killed as the men on the roof shoot into the crowd. In this scene chaos unfolds. It is not clear to the audience for whom to cheer and where to direct their sympathies. A prolonged sequence of affective turmoil ensues, where the bloodshed still does not make much sense in terms of narrative or plot. The experience is overwhelming and many in the preview audience left the theater during the first 15-20 minutes of the film. The remainder of the film, I will argue, can be experienced as an attempt to make sense of this chaos. *The Wild Bunch* can be seen as a film about violent men in violent times, striving to find a sense of meaning and direction in their chaotic existence, and the audience is taken along on an explorative journey through a violent and tumultuous process, towards an understanding of the function and direction of violence. However, the film never comes up with a final answer to the violence it portrays, and viewers are not offered any position from which they can make any straightforward judgments about the film's events or characters. Nor is any solution offered as to the nature or purpose of violence itself.

The ending of *The Wild Bunch* is even more violent than its opening.¹³⁰ The difference is that the violence is here given a moral rationale. The phrase "Let's do it" – uttered as the remaining four members of the bunch make the decision to stand up

¹³⁰ Unlike the opening scene, which was the first scene on the production schedule and that had been planned ahead, the ending battle sequence (which also happened to be later in the shooting schedule) was largely improvised by Peckinpah on the set (see Weddle, 1994, pp. 340-345; Seydor, 1999, pp. 71-72).

for their comrade – is not merely a call for action but also a call for moral redemption. In a familiar cinematic trope, the outlaws walk towards their deaths justified.¹³¹ The bunch is driven to the concluding battle by their sense of futility, and now seeks to accomplish some sense of order in the amoral universe in which they are operating. Still, as the scene unfolds, the violence runs amok. What starts as a call for moral redemption ends in a senseless bloodbath that leaves all the members of the bunch and large numbers of soldiers as well as some civilians dead. The resolution is, at best, partial. The final bloodbath provides no narrative closure but it still *feels* like a resolution: after the prolonged intensity of the battle, eventually it ends in a calming lull. The outcome offered by *The Wild Bunch* (and by the wild bunch) is an *intensification* of affect – not an inscription of meaning. In this mode, the film can be seen as an affective overflow in search of a meaning. This is a key point that I will return to later in this chapter, offering a closer analysis of the key battle scenes in the film and its utilization of blood and violence. However, first I will briefly discuss the film's chaotic production history and how this impacted the characteristics of *The Wild Bunch*.

***The Wild Bunch* and Bloody Sam**

If there is one person that more than anyone else is associated with bringing blood onto American cinema screens it is Sam Peckinpah – or “Bloody Sam” as he was nicknamed after securing his reputation by way of the massive bloodshed in *The Wild Bunch* and *Straw Dogs* (1971). Stories, myths and opinions flourish, and Peckinpah remains a legendary and contested director. Criticized for glorifying bloodshed and lauded for staunch moral tales against violence (see e.g., Prince, 1998), Peckinpah remains a divisive figure.

¹³¹ Numerous films follow a similar plot-line where morally questionable characters achieve a sense of redemption by sacrificing their lives for a greater cause. Examples from this period include *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), which was a remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), and *The Dirty Dozen*, discussed in Chapter Four.

Like Herschell Gordon Lewis, Sam Peckinpah is a director who is often remembered chiefly for his on-screen display of blood. Still, in many respects Lewis and Peckinpah could not be further apart. Lewis, shamelessly commercial and void of artistic aspirations, would always seek the most efficient and cost-saving solution, never wasting a foot of film on a retake unless absolutely necessary. Peckinpah, notorious for fighting studios and producers over the direction of his films, would refrain from nothing in his often confused quest for artistic perfection, always willing to try another take and another camera set-up, and to introduce another perspective (see e.g., Weddle, 1994; Fine, 2005; Simmons, 1982). In terms of directorial styles and personnel management Lewis can be compared to a mild-mannered school master, while Peckinpah more closely resembles Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, obsessively driving his crew onwards, often without a clear destination in sight.

What Lewis and Peckinpah have in common is a certain lack of control over the operation of blood in their films. Lewis basically knows in advance what he wants to accomplish but has to rely on a certain element of chance in order for the scene to work out in the few takes his budget allowed for. Peckinpah, on the other hand, would often experiment on set and try out a number of solutions, and then assemble the final version in the editing process. While Lewis would reduce the number of variables operating in the production of his films, to ensure greater control and efficiency, Peckinpah took the opposite route, and sought to set in motion a complex multitude of variables and then sculpted some sense from the ensuing chaos.

Lewis found his niche within a commercial film business. Shedding artistic aspirations, and making movies allegedly for the sole purpose of profit, his blood splatter served a specific function, putting on display what other more prestigious or extravagant filmmakers could not offer. Peckinpah, on the other hand, ranks among the least commercially oriented operators within the Hollywood film industry. *The Wild Bunch* marked Peckinpah's return to movie making after being shunned by the

studios following the tumultuous productions of *Major Dundee* (1965) and *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965). During the production of *Major Dundee* the erratic behavior of Peckinpah contributed to numerous conflicts with cast, crew, and production company alike, best illustrated by the well-known (and apparently true) anecdote where principal actor Charlton Heston chased Peckinpah on horseback with a raised saber (see e.g., Weddle, 1994, p. 242). Peckinpah was eventually allowed to finish the shooting of the *Major Dundee* but he was excluded from the film's post-production. *The Cincinnati Kid* would prove even more disastrous for Peckinpah. He was fired mere days into the shooting of the movie and replaced by Norman Jewison. Quite literary an outcast, Peckinpah was out of work until his comeback with the television production *Noon Wine* in 1966, which led to his assignment to direct *The Wild Bunch*. Following *The Wild Bunch*, Peckinpah was at the height of his career, marked by films such as the controversial and hyperviolent *Straw Dogs* and the commercial success of the more straightforward action movie *The Getaway* (1972).¹³² His downfall would then be marked by the disastrous production of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), where Peckinpah's quarrels with the film's producer would ruin his Hollywood reputation for good, which was helped along by his unpredictable behavior and substance abuse.¹³³ His remaining productions were all on small budgets, with limited commercial success, and the director faded into obscurity before his death in 1984 at the age of 59.

Although the violence in *Bonnie and Clyde* provoked controversy upon its release in 1967, reaction was mild compared to the storm raised by *The Wild Bunch* two years later. The studio and the film's producer deliberately sought to push limits in terms of displaying violence on American cinema screens. Even during its pre-

¹³² In addition, Peckinpah would in this period direct two of his most gentle films, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970) and *Junior Bonner* (1972).

¹³³ Peckinpah's biographies flourish with anecdotes of his antics and antagonisms of this era, see Weddle (1994), Fine (2005).

production phase, producer Phil Feldman would deliberately seek to stir controversy and adverse reactions from the MPAA. As the correspondence between Peckinpah and Feldman reveals, Peckinpah was encouraged to push borders in the portrayal of violence with *The Wild Bunch*. For instance, a memo from Feldman to Peckinpah, dated February 9, 1968, runs as follows:

Dear Sam:

I am sending you a copy of the MPAA report from Shurlock. I think you can disregard this on the whole. As a matter of fact, I am rather pleased, as I am sure you are, that he finds it objectionable. The only thing I do suggest is that the word 'goddamned' wherever it is used, and I think there are about five or six places, should be covered without the 'God' in it. Not that I am very religious, but I think sacrilege may be one touchy point.

Congratulations on arousing the MPAA (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 963).

The MPAA report to which Feldman here refers addresses several concrete violent episodes and asks for these to be toned down and handled with discretion, or removed from the picture (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 963). But as Feldman's letter clearly demonstrates, in the new ratings climate (see Chapter Four) the MPAA no longer had the authority to enforce such changes. The producer could encourage the director to push against the restrictions set by the MPAA, confident that this would not prevent the film from being made and would not hurt its commercial appeal.

Internal memos also make clear that the producer paid close attention to the violent imagery in other contemporary films, to ensure that the film would keep up with competition and what audiences anticipated. Feldman advised Peckinpah to check out other recently produced violent movies for comparison. Peckinpah was told

to especially study in detail the 1968 western *100 Rifles*,¹³⁴ as well as the Italian westerns directed by Sergio Leone that were doing good business in American theaters¹³⁵ (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 963).

The preview version of *The Wild Bunch* ran two hours and 31 minutes. In May 1969 this version was shown in Kansas City, in Fresno, California (Peckinpah's home town) and in Long Beach, California (Weddle, 1994, pp. 362-363). As demonstrated in the quotes above, these previews were disastrous, with overwhelmingly negative audience reactions. Many found the film too bloody, even among those in the preview audience who actually liked the movie. These reactions led to a reedit of the movie in order to soften its impact.¹³⁶ Six minutes were cut before the film's official premiere, with Peckinpah's approval (Weddle, 1994, p. 364). This version was released in Europe, initially as a 70mm stereo print, distributed as a road-show with an intermission. However, the American distributors rejected such an extravagant

¹³⁴ *100 Rifles* is directed by Tom Gries whose earlier television work included directing and writing episodes of *The Westerner*, which were produced by Peckinpah. The film is stylistically modeled on the Italian spaghetti westerns that were at their commercial peak at this time. Starring Jim Brown (*The Dirty Dozen*), Burt Reynolds and Raquel Welch, *100 Rifles* is a western action adventure set in Mexico in the early 20th century, the same setting as *The Wild Bunch*. The film is violent, and features several massive battle sequences as well as individual killings and executions. Stylistically, the film mixes together a number of different modes of portraying violence and bloodshed. In most cases, the victims of gun shots fall over without spilling any blood – in the traditional clutch-and-fall vein, as described in the previous chapter. Slow motion and squibs are used occasionally in shoot-out scenes, especially early on in the movie.

¹³⁵ As Stephen Prince argues, "Leone's Westerns did not feature much spurting blood or squib-work, but they piled up a huge number of bodies on screen and cut Western violence loose from the moralizing that had always accompanied it in the pre-Leone Hollywood period" (Prince, 1998, p. 18). Leone's westerns, such as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), did not feature much graphic display of violence (also see Cook, 1999, pp. 136-138). Rather, what characterized the films was the offhand cold-bloodedness of the films' characters with regard to their violent deeds. Murder and brutality is portrayed as commonplace, and without being positioned within a clearly defined moral universe.

¹³⁶ An inter-office memo from Feldman to Peckinpah, dated May 13, 1969, makes this point explicit. As Feldman here states: "One other consideration which you have to give is that many of the outstanding and excellent, perhaps as many as half and certainly a good half of the good even in the 17 to 25 category, found it was too bloody and gory. If, therefore, we are to give the public, even our public, close to what it wants without affecting the artistic integrity of your picture too drastically and if we are to give Warner Bros.-Seven Arts what they want, which is a return of their money, without affecting the picture too drastically, I think we both know what we have to do" (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 964).

approach, and preferred to give the film a regular release as a 35mm mono print, with no intermission. Eventually a compromise was made, where the film would be given a limited 70mm distribution, without the intermission, in some select northern theaters, alongside a regular distribution in the south. Also, a further one minute and 26 seconds was cut from the American version, in order to shorten its length (Weddle, 1994, p. 365).

The film officially premiered in Bahamas, June 28, 1969, in a promotional film festival hosted by the film's production company, Warner Brothers. The film caused an immediate stir, evoking hostility as well as praise from critics and audiences alike.¹³⁷ However, the controversies stirred by the film did not pay off at the box office, despite the producer's attempts to utilize the controversies in terms of publicity.¹³⁸ While the film did very well in New York and Los Angeles, it bombed in the Texan theaters where it was given a wider release (Weddle, 1994, p. 368). With disappointing grosses and complaints from exhibitors that the film ran too long, the studio ordered Phil Feldman to immediately cut another 10 minutes from the movie. Peckinpah was at this time busy editing his next movie, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970), so Feldman himself took on the task of editing *The Wild Bunch* without informing Peckinpah. Feldman ended up cutting over eight minutes from the film, just enough to satisfy the studio heads. However, at this time the film was already in distribution, with numerous prints spread across the country. Instructions on making the additional cuts were sent to Warner's regional shipping houses across the nation.

¹³⁷ Roger Ebert, one of the critics who fiercely defended the film, described the reaction to the screening in the following manner: "The audience reaction was extreme. Some people walked out. Others closed their eyes. When the lights went up, the applause was matched by boos and hisses. And then the arguments started" (Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 29, 1969).

¹³⁸ In a letter dated July 14, 1969, addressed to Ben Kalmenson, chief of the film's distribution, Feldman argues vehemently that the calamities surrounding the film should be confronted head on and that these controversies, if anything, could help the picture. In an inter-office memo to Peckinpah, dated July 21, Feldman states more bluntly: "I am writing Judith Crist [film critic in *New York* magazine] today to try to stir her up so that she can write a full length article about how much she hates the picture. I think controversy helps us" (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 965).

The film prints were thus to be cut as they arrived from one theater, prior to being shipped to the next. Predictably enough, the end result was chaotic. While some prints were cut strictly according to Feldman's direction, others diverged more or less from the directions given, while some prints were left untouched. The result was that the film was distributed in a number of different versions (Weddle, 1994, pp. 368-371).¹³⁹

The Wild Bunch was released in an era of violent turmoil in American society. As the comment cards illustrate, audiences often drew parallels between the violence of the film and the violent scenes taking places in American society and in Vietnam.¹⁴⁰ Demonstrations, police beatings, urban riots, and Vietnam news reports all resonated with the violent tensions of the film. Just months after the film's release, in the fall of 1969, the American public learned of the My Lai massacre that had taken place on March 16, 1968. In the months that followed, details from the massacre were unveiled. Publications such as a December 1969 story in *Life* and the 1970 release of Seymour Hersh's book *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and its*

¹³⁹ This chaotic situation ensued all the way up to the release of the misleadingly titled "director's cut" version of *The Wild Bunch* in 1995. This version is a restoration of the film as it was originally released in 1969, prior to Feldman's intervention. The restored scenes are thus the same as those ordered cut by Feldman. Mostly, these scenes are not of a violent nature. They add atmosphere and dialogue to some of the film's middle sequences. There are also some flashback sequences, and a battle scene between the Mexican army and the soldiers of Pancho Villa (Weddle, 1994, p. 370). Whether this "director's cut" version is Peckinpah's preferred version of the film remains an unanswered question. What can be said with certainty is that the director was furious over the cuts Feldman made following the orders of the studio. Over the years he would repeatedly return to his feelings of betrayal over Feldman's actions (Weddle, 1994, pp. 371-373), feeding into his recurring antagonism against film studios and producers.

¹⁴⁰ "With Vietnam, school riots, police & gang murders, I don't like to pay \$2.00 to witness more violence. That's entertainment?!!!"

"Shows great analogy and comparison with the Viet Nam war."

"Many, many overtones of Viet nam war, very symbolic of war in Nam."

"... If the average person enjoys this movie, then our society is certainly sick, police riots, Mayor Daley's, George Wallace's, John Birch societies, & this movie! SICK."

"Hurry up and bring it to the ghetto. Send it to the Black Panther Party."

Aftermath, would describe in words and illustrate with photographs graphic details of the killing of 347 Vietnamese men, women and children by American soldiers.¹⁴¹

These resonances with current events added to the relevance and immediacy of the film but did not necessarily increase its audience appeal. Although the film would eventually make a profit, *The Wild Bunch's* box office performance was below expectations, and the film lost out to 1969's big hit, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, as well as to several other noteworthy films from this year, such as *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy*, and the old fashioned John Wayne vehicle *True Grit* (Weddle, 1994, pp. 373-374). *The Wild Bunch* was met with hostile reactions across the political spectrum. Conservative critics and audiences lambasted the film's lack of moral anchorage, and conservatives and liberals alike attacked the film's excessive brutality. Left-wing critics and audiences furthermore condemned the film's bleak portrayal of mankind and the ever-present threat of violent outbursts. The film did not tie in with the burgeoning hippie movement and a message of "make love, not war."¹⁴²

When later confronted with hostile reactions to the violence of his films, Peckinpah would repeatedly raise the question as to why outrage was directed towards his films rather than towards real-life atrocities such as My Lai (Prince, 1998, p. 36). Still, as Stephen Prince points out, unlike Arthur Penn, Peckinpah was unable or unwilling to articulate his display of violence within a socio-political context (Prince, 1998, pp. 47-48). Nevertheless, he would react strongly towards accusations that he used violence for the sake of sensationalism or entertainment. He would often argue that his aim was to show the true horror and ugliness of violence. This

¹⁴¹ The May Lai massacre made a lasting impact upon Peckinpah, who over the years would return to this incident as an example of human atrocity and hypocrisy. Peckinpah was furious over what he saw as a whitewashing of the incident in its aftermath, something that contributed to his vehement hatred of then president Richard Nixon (Weddle, 1994, p. 459; Prince, 1998, pp. 34-37; Seydor, 1997, p. 303).

¹⁴² Or, as a young woman commented on her preview card: "We need love today not killing."

can, for instance, be seen in the replies Peckinpah sent to people who had written to him complaining about the violence of *The Wild Bunch*. In one undated letter Peckinpah writes:

Unfortunately, violence in motion pictures is usually treated like fun and games. To negate violence it must be shown for what it is. A horrifying, brutalizing, destructive ingrained part of humanity. All too often, misguided motion picture censors and hysterical pressure groups turn a blood bath into a parlor game. Entertainment it might be. Truth it is not!

When the truth of violence is shown on the screen, it is frightening – disgusting – it makes people sick. It should make them sick.

I attempt to portray violence for what it is. We are violent people and have been since the beginning. We should understand the nature of our affliction and channel it – not close our eyes and hope that it will go away. Because it won't – not ever (MHL Special Collections, Sam Peckinpah papers, folder 1011).

As this letter suggest, Peckinpah had an agenda behind his portrayals of violence. He deliberately sought to portray violence in what he believed to be a 'truthful' manner. As he explicitly states, violence should make people sick, in order to further some understanding about the nature of violence. Peckinpah's position is central to the critique of film violence raised by Stephen Prince, and in my next section I will address Prince's critique and argue for a shift of focus in discussions about film and violence.

Prince's Peckinpah

My arguments in this chapter are to a large extent shaped in response to the position on film violence taken by Stephen Prince, a leading scholar both on the topic of film violence generally (Prince 2000b; 2003) and on the films of Sam Peckinpah in particular (Prince 1998; 1999b). Prince is, on the one hand, a fierce critic of gratuitous movie violence, while, on the other hand, a staunch defender of the films

of Peckinpah. As Prince argues, "Peckinpah did not merely attach a new level of violence to screen images but exploded the moral absolutes that had given shape and meaning to screen narratives for decades" (Prince, 1998, p. xv). Peckinpah's style and content has been influential for later filmmakers, especially with regards to their displays of gratuitous and graphic violence. But Prince argues that there is a central difference between Peckinpah and his followers. In his study of Peckinpah's films, one of Prince's main agendas is to "differentiate his [Peckinpah's] films' focus and moral attributes from the unfortunate tradition of movie violence that they have helped inspire" (Prince, 1998, p. xvi). Prince makes the claim that "for the most part, Peckinpah was rigorous and systematic in excoriating violence by showing the emotional pain that is its consequence. Peckinpah claimed that he wished to use cinema to warn viewers about the terrible nature of violence and to produce a cathartic experience that would have beneficial social effects" (Prince, 1998, p. xix). Hence, "Peckinpah's films embody an alternative, more humanistic moral sensibility" than the work of later directors such as Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone or Quentin Tarantino (Prince, 1998, p. xix). In this regard, Prince locates Peckinpah as "the crucial link between classical and postmodern Hollywood, the figure whose work transformed modern cinema in terms of the stylistics for rendering screen violence and in terms of the moral and psychological consequences that ensue, for filmmaker and viewer, from placing brutality at the center of a screen world" (Prince, 1998, p. 2).¹⁴³

Prince contrasts Peckinpah to Arthur Penn. For Prince, Penn's work lacks the intensity of Peckinpah's movies in their exploration of violence. Thus, "Penn's very

¹⁴³ Prince's argumentation follows a different logic than Linda Williams' claims about *Psycho* as the first postmodern blockbuster (see Chapter Four). Unlike Williams, Prince focuses explicitly on violence and is far less sanguine about the direction of contemporary (postmodern) cinema, which he describes as an "uncommonly savage place" (Prince, 1998, p. 2). Williams' concerns, on the other hand, are not normative or moralistic, but rather analytical, in her delineation of a shift towards spectacular cinematic attractions as constituting the main audience appeal of what she labels postmodern cinema.

precision and control as a filmmaker give his work a cooler, more distant tone than is characteristic of Peckinpah" (Prince, 1998, p. 48). Interestingly, Prince states that "[t]he only Penn film whose violence comes close to the heated grotesquerie of Peckinpah's work is *The Chase*" (Prince, 1998, p. 48). This statement locates Peckinpah in an interesting position relative to the distinction between *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde* outlined in my previous chapter. Whereas *The Chase* reintegrates the affective intensities within the film's narrative, and *Bonnie and Clyde* ends with an open-ended affective event laid bare as aesthetic contemplation, *The Wild Bunch* balances between these alternatives. In a sense this balancing act can be seen as a central thematic for the film. The film portrays scenes of graphic bloodshed, evoking violent affective intensities. The experience of witnessing the bloodshed can be uncomfortable, even nauseating, at least for the film's initial audiences who experienced the film while its characteristic stylization of violence was unprecedented. The violence has a physical impact; it's revolting. While watching the death of Bonnie and Clyde creates a sense of distance and contemplation, the closing battle scene of *The Wild Bunch* draws the audience into its intensity. *The Wild Bunch* instills a sense of loss and sadness absent from *Bonnie and Clyde*. Unlike the aloof coolness of Bonnie and Clyde, the members of the bunch embody a certain gritty humanity. The preceding torture and killing of Angel grants the bunch's act of revenge some sense of moral justification. Furthermore, as discussed above, the characters of the gang members are transformed as they stand up for their friend. They take on a shine of honor and moral responsibility. Still, the scene does not work towards a moral and narrative resolution. As I have argued, unlike for instance Brando's beating in *The Chase*, the final battle scene in *The Wild Bunch* does not have a clearly defined conflict and points of audience identification. Although the initial killing of Mapache restores some sense of justice and retribution, the ensuing battle comes across as total overkill. It by far exceeds its narratological and moral

function. Violence is presented as an irresolvable moral problematic. The blood adds intensity to this problematic, and makes it even more unbearable. It is not merely a complicated intellectual puzzle but an experience of tension and agony.

For Prince, the overwhelming excess of *The Wild Bunch* means that the film is ultimately a failure. Unlike his later films such as *Straw Dogs*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), Prince argues, Peckinpah did not manage to resist the pull of the artistic potential of the film medium to flamboyantly stylize violence in *The Wild Bunch*. The spectacular montages of the opening and closing gun battles demonstrate to Prince “the excitement and thrill of a filmmaker no longer in moral control of his material to the viewer” (Prince, 1998, p. 99). The intensity and energy of these scenes incite and trigger violent fantasies and tendencies in the audiences, and thus work against Peckinpah’s humanist and anti-violent intentions (Prince, 1998, pp. 98-101). According to Prince, “[t]he tendency for his montages to aestheticize violence, to turn it into an exciting visual spectacle, worked at cross-purposes with his didactic intentions to drive home for viewers the horrifying and ugly nature of violent death. ... Peckinpah’s brilliance as an editor threatened to undermine his laudable intent to desanitize screen violence” (Prince, 1998, p. 103).

Prince here makes three implicit statements: 1) A factual statement that Peckinpah’s didactic purpose was to desanitize violence and make it appear ugly and horrific to the viewers; 2) An analytic statement that Peckinpah’s style turned out to portray violence in an aesthetically pleasing manner; 3) A theoretical statement that there is an inherent contradiction between the first two statements. For Prince, Peckinpah’s stylistic tendency to aestheticize violence in *The Wild Bunch* acts in contradiction to his stated purpose to desanitize violence and make it appear unpleasing to the audience. Prince’s position here operates within a binarism where screen violence is either *good* – i.e., ugly and meant to evoke negative reactions in

audiences, or *bad* – i.e., aesthetically pleasing and appealing to the audience. Hence, for Prince screen violence has to *feel* bad in order to *be* good. It either *does* something good to the audience (by making them feel repulsed about violence and realize that it is bad), or it makes the audience *feel* good (and thus also make them energized and enthusiastic about violence). Prince thus finds Peckinpah to be at times incoherent and confusing in his portrayal of violence. Peckinpah's aesthetics tended to undermine his didactic critique (Prince, 1998, pp. 103-104). Prince criticizes *The Wild Bunch* for its lack of restraint and moral integration in its scenes of violence. Unlike his later films, such as *Straw Dogs* or *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, Prince argues, Peckinpah here fails to demonstrate that violence does not pay, that it is a disruptive and destructive element.

Peckinpah was a keen reader of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and, according to biographer David Weddle, "became a strong believer in the philosopher's theory that great drama provides an audience with a catharsis through which they can purge their own pain, rage, and fear" (Weddle, 1994, p. 73). Prince criticizes Peckinpah's adherence to the catharsis theory, and claims the theory does not hold up to scientific scrutiny (Prince, 1998, pp. 108-113). As Prince argues, when reviewing empirical studies on media violence "the evidence strongly points toward a link between viewing film or television violence and aggressive behavior" (Prince, 1998, p. 113, also see Prince, 2000a, p. 20). Prince rejects the catharsis theory, since contrary to its claims, the scientific evidence shows an opposite reaction, namely "a correlation between viewing film violence and increased antisocial behavior" (Prince, 1998, p. 116).¹⁴⁴ The catharsis theory, Prince argues, falsely operates on the premise that aggression is a drive (like hunger or sexuality), a fixed desire in search

¹⁴⁴ Or as Prince states elsewhere: "Screen violence provokes an inherently volatile set of viewer responses. These do *not* include catharsis, and they should make us pessimistic about the psychological health promoted in viewers by much contemporary visual culture" (Prince, 2000a, pp. 1-2, emphasis in original).

of fulfillment or outlet. According to such a drive model, aggression will eventually be expressed, one way or another, and this is beyond conscious control. Hence, the release of aggression through mediated and aesthetic experiences can serve as a social and psychological good, as aggression here can be given a non-harmful outlet. Accordingly, exposure to aggression-enhancing media representations will lead to less actual violence in society. Watching violent sports or movies, for instance, will discharge the organism of its surplus aggression and thus lower its tendency to actually perform violent acts.

Prince argues against this view of aggression as a drive, and states that “[t]he traditional view of aggression as a fixed current of energy that needs periodic draining—the terms through which Peckinpah conceived the value of his work for viewers—fails to take into account that which separates humans from animals: the ability through cognition and culture to modify the biological bases of behavior” (Prince, 1998, p. 116). Instead, Prince argues that aggression is determined by social learning (Prince, 1998, pp. 116-117). This goes together with Prince’s preference for understanding films in cognitive terms, a view he has repeatedly argued elsewhere (see e.g., Prince, 1996). When Prince advocates seeing aggression as an outcome of social learning, rather than an innate biological drive, this is not to be conflated with a radical social constructivism that would explain our responses to an experience such as watching a movie solely through the social and cultural construction of the viewing subject and the wider framework and context of perception. Rather, Prince takes on a scientific cognitive position that opposes the tendency to see film in semiotic, linguistic or psychoanalytic terms – theoretical paradigms more often associated with a constructivist perspective. Following from his formalist and cognitive theoretical position, for Prince, films do have certain characteristics that are prone to induce specific effects among certain viewers, and this includes aggressive and ultimately violent responses. As Prince states:

Based on the empirical evidence, it is now possible to specify the program characteristics that are most implicated in the findings of aggression inducement. These involve violence that is relatively free of pain and suffering victims who deserve what they get, stories that postulate scenarios of righteous, justifiable aggression, and a match between the cue properties of situations and characters on screen and the viewer's real-world situation (Prince, 2000a, p. 21).

According to these findings, exposure to mediated violence might in certain cases teach viewers patterns of cognition and behavior that make them more prone to aggressive and violent behavior. Prince stresses that film violence is not to be understood as generating universal and mechanistic effects but rather depends on "personality variables" that "may interact strongly with program content and genres to produce undesirable effects." Furthermore, he argues that the viewers' reactions "have strong cognitive components [that] may operate to reinforce undesirable effects" (Prince, 2000a, p. 23). Thus, according to Prince, film violence contributes to inducing aggression, real-life violence and antisocial behavior in some viewers. Film violence alone cannot explain such effects but operates in combination with personality variables and through viewer reactions that involve cognitive components.

Prince further questions whether the film medium can at all be used to offer a message against violence (Prince, 2000a, p. 29), and claims that "[t]he medium inevitably *aestheticizes* violence" (Prince, 2000a, p. 27, emphasis in original). According to Prince, filmmakers cannot easily avoid offering the audience "sensory pleasures" in the depiction of violence, and furthermore, filmmakers have no control over the diverse audience responses (Prince, 2000a, p. 29). Prince goes on to cite several anecdotal examples where audiences have reacted inappropriately to movie violence, for instance, by laughing during scenes of violence in Steven Spielberg's

Schindler's List (1993).¹⁴⁵ Thus, Prince argues that even skilled filmmakers, like Spielberg or Peckinpah, cannot control how audiences will react to their displays of violence.

In sum, Prince's position is that although there are certain factors in a movie that are prone to induce real-life violence, it is still impossible to fully control how the medium will affect its viewers. Thus, following Prince's logic, all displays of violence in a film may have harmful effects. Prince as such concludes that:

Coupled with the findings in the empirical literature about the effects of viewing violence and with theories which hold that aggression, in many manifestations, is a socially learned response, the film industry's continuing investment in violent spectacle does not leave one very sanguinary about the social health of contemporary culture. Viewer reactions to screen violence are volatile, and filmmakers cannot reliably control these responses, that is, they cannot craft their scenes so as to eliminate the variant reactions (Prince, 2000a, p. 32)

These are several aspects of this argument that I find problematic. While I agree with Prince that viewer reactions are volatile and cannot reliably be controlled, I find his theoretical model questionable, for several reasons. First of all, Prince here seems to undermine his own position, stated above, that "it is now possible to specify the program characteristics that are most implicated in the findings of aggression inducement" (Prince, 2000a, p. 21). Prince seems to stick to a model of causality while at the same time admitting that causality cannot be determined. Although he maintains that some portrayals of violence are more likely than other to incite aggression and real-life violence, he implicitly admits that the process of

¹⁴⁵ Prince claims that "such laughter can signal a failure of empathy, an inability (or an unwillingness) to imaginatively place oneself inside the fiction and relate to the pain or violence on an immediately personal level" (Prince, 2000a, p. 31). Prince does here not consider the possibility that such responses might be expressions of counter-hegemonic or subversive viewing positions or strategies.

reception is too complex to allow any clear prediction as to which responses will be provoked by any given film or image.

What I find problematic is that Prince operates with a causal model where aggression and violent behavior is seen as an effect that can be traced back to given determinate causes, such as the specific formal characteristics of a film or an image. Prince maintains his belief in this model despite its failure to produce valid and reliable results. As Prince implicitly admits, it becomes impossible in advance to determine a specific film's violent or aggressive "effects." Only in hindsight can a film's behavioral "effects" be determined with anything resembling accuracy.¹⁴⁶

As pointed out by John Protevi in a discussion of the Columbine high school killings on April 20, 1999, music and video games might well have played a role in this massacre but

not simply as causal factors that triggered their behavior. We must avoid the search for unidirectional causality, whether the causes proposed are genetic predispositions or bad social environment, or a blended interaction of the two. It is not so much the number of causal factors put forth that we object to but the linear causality attributed to them (Protevi, 2009, p. 143).

What Protevi denies is not that media might play a role in violent events but rather the simplistic and linear cause-and-effect models that operate under the assumption that it is possible to reach a full understanding of such events by tracing them back to a number of causal factors. What's missing is an understanding of the complex operations of affect (Protevi, 2009, pp. 143-144).

This adherence to causal models and missing attention to affect also characterize Prince's understanding of aggression. In his critique of the catharsis

¹⁴⁶ My arguments can here be traced back to Raymond Williams who in his book *Television: technology and cultural form* (1974) criticized "simple cause-and-effect identifications" of the agency of television in "social and cultural change" (Williams, 1974, p. 119). As Williams argued, "there are very few such effects which come near to satisfying the criteria of scientific proof or even general probability" (Williams, 1974, p. 119).

theory Prince claims that aggression is not a biological drive but rather a product of social learning. As stated above, this emphasis on social learning goes together with Prince's cognitivist approach to the study of film. Contrary to Prince's position, I will argue that the affective responses to movie violence, including aggression, cannot be understood in solely cognitive terms. Aggression is not a biological drive, in the sense that it is not, like hunger or (to a lesser extent) sexuality, a given need that must be fulfilled in order for the organism to sustain itself. However, this does not by default mean that aggression is a product of social learning or cognitive responses. Rather, aggressive responses to media consumption and image perception can also be understood in terms of affect. What's missing from Prince's perspective is a concept of affect as neither a drive nor a product of cognition or social learning.¹⁴⁷

My agenda here is not to disregard any links between viewing mediated violence and aggressive or violent behavior. I don't deny that media has effects, and that among those effects we can find instances where media contribute towards aggression and violent acts. I can myself recall numerous instances when I have experienced anger and aggression when viewing films or engaging with other media forms, as for example demonstrated by my reaction to *The Chase*, as discussed in the previous chapter. To the best of my recollection I have never actually performed any violent acts towards others after watching violent imagery but this does not by itself act as a counterargument to Prince's position. The possibility that after watching violent or aggressive imagery people may themselves act violently is something I find very likely, and I do not wish to deny that the imagery may have contributed to these acts.

¹⁴⁷ Several theories of affect clearly distinguish affect from biological drives as well as from effects of cognition or social learning. In a Deleuzian model affects are fundamentally a-subjective, and have no designated direction or purpose. In other perspectives, such as the affect theory of Silvan Tomkins (1995), the affect system is biological but clearly distinct from the drive system.

For example, I can often experience intense aggression while watching television news or political debates. Watching commentators, for instance Glenn Beck, can often evoke vivid emotional responses in me; sometimes I find it amusing, other times I respond with rage and aggression. Another example pops up right as I'm writing this. I see a news media report on a Wisconsin man being arrested after shooting up his TV set with a shotgun after watching the show *Dancing with the Stars*. Allegedly the man became enraged after watching Bristol Palin's performance on the show.¹⁴⁸ Similar anecdotal reports are common, often related to sports, where violence ensues as people watch mediated events. However, such episodes are most commonly explained in terms of specific pathological characteristics of the individuals or social or cultural settings involved (e.g., people with mental illnesses undergoing social or economical turmoil, or simply over-enthusiastic sports fans), not as reactions to specific media content. For instance, in cases where adolescents commit violent acts reminiscent of scenes in a violent film, these acts tend to be explained by the violators' exposure to violent media.¹⁴⁹ Other incidents, for instance the example of the man shooting up his TV after watching *Dancing with the Stars*, tend to be explained by factors specific to the individual or context in question. The first of these instances describes cases where the violent acts to some degree correspond with mediated images that supposedly represent violence. It thus seemingly appears plausible to make a causal link between behavior and media exposure. However, such links are not made in other instances where there is no apparent correspondence between the behavior and what the mediated images can be said to represent. My examples point towards what I see as a blind spot in debates around

¹⁴⁸ http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-31749_162-20023083-10391698.html (viewed November 19, 2010).

¹⁴⁹ An example to which Stephen Prince repeatedly refers is the 1995 incident where a New York Subway clerk was doused with highly flammable liquid and set on fire, mimicking a scene in the movie *Money Train* (1995) that had just opened in theatres (see Prince, 1998, p. 114; 2000a, p. 21; 2003, p. 279).

mediated images and violence, and the potential impact these images can have on audiences. What is taken for granted is the assumption that any correspondence between violent acts and mediated images operates by way of representation. When aggression and violence occur in response to a wide array of images, it is, I think, worthwhile hesitating before drawing the conclusion that the images are a causal factor in those cases where the acts committed can be said to mimic mediated images representing violence, while no such conclusions are drawn in other cases where no such representational links can be found.

As argued above, my point here is not to deny that film and visual imagery may be a mediating factor when violent incidents occur. Rather, my argument is that we ought to shift the focus towards the key question of what is it we react to in our encounters with (violent) images? Is it what the images *say* (represent) or is it what the images *do*? If we change our focus towards the performative and affective aspects of images the question is no longer what the images mean and whether this has any impact upon us. Rather, the assumption becomes that all our encounters with images affect us. The question that emerges from this is *how* we are affected. My argument is not that Beck's agitation or Bristol Palin's dance moves are inherently prone to induce violence but rather that these audiovisual images, like all images, perform affective intensities, with unpredictable, and at times violent, outcomes.

My position here ties in with the view on film violence found in Marco Abel's book *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation* (2007). Abel explicitly distances himself from Prince and other scholars on film violence who approach violence as representation. Abel states up front that "unlike other critical studies of violence in literature and film, mine does not frame the encounter with violent images in terms of signification and meaning (mediation) but, instead, in terms of affects and force—that is, asignifying intensities" (Abel, 2007, p. x). With

this Abel distances himself both from Prince's "post-theoretical" (see Bordwell and Carroll, 1996) empiricist approach and from interpretative approaches to violent images. Both of these orientations, Abel argues, see images as representations. Both approaches assume that they know what violence is, and that it can be represented in images. The difference is that a social scientific approach, exemplified by Prince, focuses on the behavioral effects of representations of violence, while interpretative approaches tend to focus on the ideologies and the political implications of the "realities" presented in the images (Abel, 2007, pp. x-xii).

The problem, Abel argues, is that "[b]ecause of the assumption of established studies—social scientific and interpretative alike—that (violent) images are *representations* of something else, critical practice ends up, in one form or another, laying claim to what they believe to be a well-founded position of *judgment*" (Abel, 2007, p. xii, emphasis in original). Rather, Abel, following Spinoza and Deleuze, starts out from the premise that we do not know what violent images are, and we do not know how they work and what they can do (Abel, 2007, p. x). Hence, for Abel, "the very recourse to images qua representations *is* itself a form of violence" (Abel, 2007, p. xiii, emphasis in original). Seeing images as representations of violence does violence to the images in the sense that it reduces the images and turns them into representations of something else. This violence cannot be escaped; any image analysis or criticism is itself a form of violence, and the question Abel poses is that "given the inevitability of violence that criticism does to that which it encounters (i.e., *any* criticism is selective and thus omits, paraphrases and thus changes, translates and thus alters, cuts into the object and thus extracts), is it possible for criticism to mark its violence not immediately as judgment?" (Abel, 2007, p. 33, emphasis in original).¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, it is not only criticism that is an act of violence but furthermore, following Deleuze's Bergsonian model, so is perception itself.

The alternative to judgment Abel outlines is to bring into existence, to explore capabilities (Abel, 2007, pp. 34-35). The question that arises from the encounter with violent images is not a matter of judgment but of ethics, where the question does not concern the truth of the image in terms of what it represents but rather as “the engine of *experimental* endeavor” (Abel, 2007, p. xiv, emphasis in original). Hence, images are understood as forces that act upon the world, in a violent manner. As violence, ontologically speaking, is inescapable, the question is not how to do away with violence but how to engage with it, and turn it into other uses, for other means. All images are violent, only differently so. As Abel states, “the hope to escape violence as such is an impossible one—because ontologically violences are everywhere and inescapable” (Abel, 2007, xiii). Hence, the question is not what violent images “mean and whether they are justified but *how* they configure our ability to respond to, and do things with, them” (Abel, 2007, p. xiii, emphasis in original).

I should here pause for a moment to elaborate the theoretical position that violence, ontologically speaking, is everywhere and inescapable. In his early book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, originally published in 1962, Deleuze in a key section discusses Nietzsche’s understanding of the body:

What is the body? We do not define it by saying that it is a field of forces, a nutrient medium fought over by a plurality of forces. For in fact there is no ‘medium’, no field of forces or battle. There is no quantity of reality, all reality is already a quantity of force. There are nothing but quantities of force in mutual ‘relations of tension’. Every force is related to others and it either obeys or commands. What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body – whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship (Deleuze, 1983, pp. 39-40).

Deleuze here outlines ontological principles, which came to influence his later philosophy, where the basic foundations of reality are relations between forces. Such force-relations constitute any body – i.e., any mode of organization – that comes into existence. Relations between forces can never be neutral; forces always enter relationships of domination, where “active” forces dominate “reactive” forces (Deleuze, 1983, p. 40). What follows from this ontological principle is that domination and as such also violence, can never be escaped. Any formation of a body, indeed any relation at all, is constituted by the domination of some forces by other forces. As such, “an equilibrium of forces is not possible” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 47).¹⁵¹

Violence in this perspective is an ever-present outcome of the relations of forces operating across any level of scale. Hence, “the task is not to escape violence but to regulate it differently” (Abel, 2007, p. 85). Rather than a judgment of violence, Abel asks us to explore violence’s enabling capacities – that is, to follow the effects produced by the violence of film or an image, to ask “what it does and how it does it” (Abel, 2007, p. 85). Just as affect is always already there, so is, in effect, violence. As affect always makes a difference, even when this difference is imperceptible, it operates in terms of violence. Relations are shifted about, and some forces come to dominate others.

The political implications of this should be obvious. In the perspective promoted by Prince, violence is a threat from the outside, tearing apart the social order and well-being. Violence for Prince is something that can ultimately, and all for the better, be avoided. His agenda is to minimize the occurrence of real-life violence, and thus also the prevalence of images that incite aggression and violent behavior. Prince argues that media violence can instill real-life violence and “is an attribute

¹⁵¹ For discussions on how these Nietzschean perspectives influence Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) approach to anthropology and social theory, see Jensen & Rodje (2010) and Viveiros de Castro (2010).

unlikely to be conducive to the general well-being or social health of our society” (Prince, 2000a, p. 40). His arguments adhere to a model described by Raymond Williams, which assumes that “violent behavior is undesirable, in that it contradicts the norms of accepted social behavior” (Williams, 1974, p. 122). However, as Williams argues, “it must be immediately evident, if we look at real societies, that this is not the case” (Williams, 1974, p. 122). The distinction, Williams claims, is rather about the authorization of violence in actual societies, where certain forms of violence are permissible, while other forms are not (Williams, 1974, p. 122). Hence, the question of violence in the media is itself inherently entangled with political formations and processes in society.

Contrary to Prince, my position is that it is not possible to make a distinction between violent and non-violent images. All images perform violent effects, in the sense that they affect viewers and the social formations these viewers are situated within. The question is not *if* an image promotes violence but *how* it acts violently. And furthermore, the question that follows from this is which potentials for social or political change or differentiation an image brings about. I should stress that I do not claim that all images are equally forceful and that they carry the same violent potentials. Nor do I wish to overstate the force or violent potentials of images. That all images affect us does not mean that all images partake in any significant change; most often they don't.¹⁵²

¹⁵² As stated by W. J. T. Mitchell, “[i]mages are certainly not powerless, but they may be a lot weaker than we think” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 33). Mitchell here warns against the tendency to overstate the impact and determination of images, and suggests to “shift the question from what pictures *do* to what they *want*” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 33, emphasis in original). In Deleuzian terms, Mitchell here implicitly shifts focus from the actual to the virtual; that is, rather than asking what pictures are already effecting, the question addresses which potentials pictures bring about.

My argument should not be conflated with a psychoanalytic critique of the cinematic medium and how it conditions the spectator-position of the audience.¹⁵³ My argument is not a negative critique of how the cinematic medium affects the viewer, but rather that all images are violent, in one form or another, in the sense that they affect, in a potentially destructive manner, the relations they enter. Violence allows for new relations and assemblages, as much as it tears apart what already exists. This violence is not necessarily motivated by a desiring subject but operates through multitudes of fleeting processes, where images as they are perceived and as they enter relations affect these relations and the wider assemblages of which they are a part. These assemblages include, but are not exclusive to, what we understand as human subjects. The violence of images is not merely a violence acted upon the audience but involves the reassembly of social and material networks of which the images and their viewers are part. Images operate collectively, rather than just on an individual, psychological basis. Viewers do not connect with images as isolated beings but as parts of wider networks that are also affected as connections are made with perceived images. Furthermore, images affect also, as argued above, other images to which they are linked. A film like *The Wild Bunch* not only violently affects its audiences but also the wider field of image production and perception. It affects the field of what (violent) images are and how they are perceived. What is changing is not merely the perception of images but also the images themselves.

In this constantly shifting and evolving terrain, responses to images cannot be fully determined or controlled. Nor do such responses work according to simple and linear relations of cause and effect. Affective responses will always introduce elements of the unknown, being unpredictable and open-ended. Any prediction about how images will affect viewers and social formations will always remain tentative and

¹⁵³ The classic text is here Mulvey (2001). For a Deleuze-inspired critique, see Studlar (1988). However, Studlar still operates within a psychoanalytic framework that locates the specific violence of the cinematic medium in its relation to the spectator.

on the level of speculation, more or less based on prior data and experiences. Thus, images operate in far less clear cut ways than how Prince would have us believe.

Prince does operate with a fairly sophisticated model and takes into account how social scientific accounts of media violence include other variables that might inflict upon violent behavior and likewise do separate between short term aggression and long-term increase in being prone to violence.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the problem remains that no clear justification exists for why specific forms of media content are singled out for analysis. As Abel argues, the research rests on the premise of images as representation, where images depicting violence are automatically seen as more prone to induce violent behavior. However, this selection of what constitutes images worthy of further investigation is not itself something that can be empirically proven. Rather, this assumption rests upon certain theoretical, as well as political, premises.¹⁵⁵

While Prince might be correct that *The Wild Bunch* does not succeed on a didactic level, if its aim was to make viewers refrain from violence, this does not necessarily make the film a failure. Other qualities can be found in the film. Perhaps the main *strength* of *The Wild Bunch* is its affective intensity. Violence remains ever

¹⁵⁴ For reviews of the social scientific literature on media violence, see Berkowitz (2000); Felson (2000).

¹⁵⁵ J. David Slocum, in his essay "The 'film violence' trope: New Hollywood, 'the Sixties,' and the politics of history" (2004) presents a critique of how "the trope of 'film violence' has emerged as a shorthand that circumscribes meaning and authorizes delimited explanations for a wide range of phenomena" (Slocum, 2004, p. 29). The academic and policy discourses about film violence, Slocum argues, itself became a phenomenon from the 1960s onwards, as a result of the predominant discourse on media "effects" in (American) communication studies, supported by a theoretical paradigm of social learning and behaviorism (Slocum, 2004, pp. 22-23; also see Williams, 1974). Slocum argues that this "film violence" trope, which has been embraced by social scientists, the government and the public alike, has served to circumscribe alternative models for explaining and analysing violence and power relations and furthered a narrow and normative understanding of film violence and its effects. Slocum opposes Stephen Prince's urge for replacing "interpretative" approaches to film violence with an approach anchored in social scientific and empirical research on the effects of film violence. Slocum's essay counters Prince's critique of interpretative approaches, and attempts to expose the ideological implications of Prince's social scientific approach to film violence. While I myself am highly sympathetic toward Slocum's argument in this regard I should stress that his agenda still differs from mine in its adherence to an "interpretative" approach to film violence.

present, yet still a mystery. Violence operates as an uncontrollable force that the film's characters (like Peckinpah himself) never manage to fully control. Viewers take many different things from *The Wild Bunch*, leading in different directions. The film is perhaps first and foremost a violent *experience*, rather than a film *about* violence. At least that was how the film was met by its initial audiences in 1969. How audiences then make sense of this experience is another matter. As illustrated by the preview responses, audiences could make sense of these experiences in very different ways – or simply reject the film as the experiences could not be made sense of.

Although the film probably does not function as an anti-violence statement, in the sense that it does not make the viewers themselves less prone to commit violent acts, it might still have something to offer in its take on violence. The question raised by *The Wild Bunch* is not how to do away with violence but rather how to live with violence.¹⁵⁶ A simple binarism where aggression, violence and antisocial behavior are automatically deemed as bad, and something we ultimately can and should do away with, implicitly works as a defense of the present social order. Yes, watching *The Chase* makes me angry, and I feel like jumping up and punching the racist and sadistic thugs in the face. But is my anger and aggression here necessarily something we ought to condemn? The scene may make me more prone towards violence but it furthermore directs the evoked aggression and violent tendencies towards certain specific characters and situations. I want to punch racist thugs, not innocent children or sweet little kittens. This difference is not to be neglected. My aggression is not politically and socially neutral, as arguably no aggression is ever

¹⁵⁶ In an interview with Stephen Farber, during the editing of *The Wild Bunch* in 1969, Peckinpah makes explicit that although an anti-violence film, *The Wild Bunch* is not a call for an end to violence: "Actually it's an anti-violence film because I use violence as it is. It's ugly, brutalizing and bloody fucking awful. It's not fun and games and cowboys and Indians, it's a terrible, ugly thing. And yet there's a certain response that you get from it, an excitement, because we're all violent people, we have violence within us. Violence is a part of life, and I don't think we can bury our heads in the sand and ignore it. It's important to understand it and the reason people seem to need violence vicariously" (Farber, 2008, pp. 39-40).

neutral as soon as it enters a social setting. Aggression, violence, and antisocial behavior affect the relations and strata that they enter. Questions of 'good' or 'bad' can thus only be determined locally, and from specific view points. While it might be possible to reach something resembling a general consensus that images inciting viewers to abuse children or torture sweet little kittens are something we can better do without, the situation often becomes much more delicate and controversial when dealing with more complex images and social and political situations.

What makes it possible for me to defend the violent scene in *The Chase* is not so much that the scene makes me abhor violence; rather, I would argue that what in hindsight I find appealing about the film is that it makes me feel bad about social injustice. But what about a more complex and controversial film, like *The Wild Bunch*, that many viewers see as a glorification of violence without any redeeming social value, and where the violence is to a far lesser extent reintegrated within the film's narrative?

I would argue that, unlike both *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Wild Bunch* is fundamentally centered on violence.¹⁵⁷ The central aspect of the film is not its plot, and neither is it its style and aesthetics. Rather, *The Wild Bunch* is a film of and about violent intensities. It assaults the audience. The graphic bloodshed makes the violent impact even more unbearable.

As argued by Bernard F. Dukore (1999, p. 73), Peckinpah does not foreshadow the displays of violence. Audiences are not given any advance warning and a chance to look away or close their eyes. Rather, the violence appears as a full frontal attack. Audiences are drawn into an overwhelming multisensory experience, where style and content merge to create a chaotic yet interconnected whole. The sound is loud and comprised of gun shots, shrieks and screams – a cacophony of

¹⁵⁷ As argued by Wheeler Winston Dixon, "violence in *The Wild Bunch* is insistent and omnipresent, not episodic or sporadic" (Dixon, 1999, p. 156).

noises where audiences are not provided any clues for making sense of the unfolding chaos. This is accompanied by a frantic pace of editing, juxtaposing shots from different perspectives, at various speeds.

What many in the audience found disquieting, disturbing, and even nauseating, was not merely the content of these images – scenes of violence – but just as importantly the sensory overload itself, where the viewer was offered no moment of rest or contemplation. The breakneck speed offers no opportunity to pause and reflect on the events unfolding. The viewer is moved along rather than given a chance to make sense of these sensory impressions.

There is nothing to linger upon in these images. No single image stands out. Indeed, it can be hard to remember any individual shots from the battle scenes after having seen the movie.¹⁵⁸ The sensory and affective impression is made from the connections between images, and between images and sounds, rather than by any stand-alone image. The lingering impressions in the aftermath of witnessing the battle scenes are of exhaustion, ebbing sensations of excitement, and perhaps torment – impressions that can be described physically and viscerally, rather than in visual terms. The scenes act *as* violence, rather than as a representation *of* violence.

As John M. Gourlie and Leonard Engel argue:

Peckinpah's best films portray deep emotion with a visual and dramatic intensity that few filmmakers achieve. Significantly, the violence for which Peckinpah is infamous is an intrinsic part of his artistic achievement. As he links his story and its themes to imagery of violence, the real power of

¹⁵⁸ Despite having already seen *The Wild Bunch* at least three times prior to revisiting it for my research on this project, I could not clearly recall any specific images from the battle scenes. Rather, the one image that most clearly stuck in my mind was the footage of children torturing scorpions, from the opening of the movie. This sequence also appears to be the one that is most frequently referred to in the preview cards. Little mention is made of specific blood images in the preview cards. The one blood image that is occasionally mentioned is the slitting of Angel's throat. However, this sequence was edited before the final release of the movie, and the bloodshed was toned down.

Peckinpah's filmmaking becomes visceral. As he dramatizes violence so that it reverberates throughout a film, the violence energizes perception.

Thus Peckinpah's best films are vehicles of perception. But in their violence, they often hit the viscera even before they hit the emotions, and certainly before they register on the mind. But once raised, Peckinpah's issues are raised for both character and viewer alike (Gourlie and Engel, 2003, p. 15).

Gourlie and Engel here point out key factors that make Peckinpah's images capable of evoking rich and intense affective responses. Violence is not a stand-alone element but rather interlinked with the films' stories and themes. Through these linkages violence "reverberates throughout a film," while viscerally energizing perception. Violence ebbs and flows throughout a film like *The Wild Bunch*, reaching peaks of intensity as well as calmer interludes. The images hit the audience violently, generating visceral responses before these register as emotions, and "certainly before they register on the mind."

The violence of *The Wild Bunch* can be made sense of only in hindsight. The bloodshed registers experientially, contributing to experiences that can be pleasurable or disturbing, even overwhelmingly nauseating. The audience is thus left to make sense of their experiences, as well as of the movie. The experience of watching the film will by necessity intermingle with processes of interpretation and sense-making. These processes of interpretation and sense-making will go on continuously as the audience watches the movie, intermingling with the visceral responses and evoked emotions. Affective intensities and signifying processes entangle and continuously enter new combinations. This process never enters a state of rest, only different speeds and modulations.

Violence is ever-present in the movie, and not restricted to images representing explicitly violent acts. Indeed, one of the most violently intense sequences in the movie, both in terms of what happens on the screen and in terms

of how the images encounter the viewer, is the sequence immediately following the bunch's first arrival into Agua Verde. The bunch gathers around an outdoor table, right below the terrace where Mapache is dining with his fellow officers. Then two women arrive, calling out to the general, who greets them. One of the women is Angel's former girlfriend Teresa (Sonia Amelio), and Angel rises from the table and calls out her name. Teresa recognizes him, and Angel walks towards her. They have a brief interaction before Teresa rejects him and proceeds towards Mapache, while Pike drags Angel away. The dialogue between Angel and Teresa is in Spanish, without subtitles, but the meaning of what's being said is still all too clear, even to a non-Spanish speaker like me. The violent intensities are here performed through series of relations, most obviously between Angel and Teresa but perhaps even more intense are the conflicting relations tormenting Teresa, which here are performed by her facial expressions. As Teresa rejects Angel, and sees him being dragged away, her face expresses complex and conflicted emotions. Her eyes turn watery and she bites her lip, before immediately feigning a smile and forcing herself to laugh at Angel as she turns and walks towards Mapache. Angel is made to suffer but so is Teresa, and likewise, the sequence can be painful to watch. Teresa's face performs tensions and intensities which are unbearable for her, and potentially also for the audience. This sequence is, I argue, as violent as the sequence that follows, when Angel shoots Teresa dead while in the arms of Mapache. Hence, I argue that the violence *of* the images does not depend upon what is being represented but rather upon the tensions and intensities being expressed. In line with my argument above, violence is here a matter of the potentials expressed by these images, not a matter of what is being represented in the images. Although it is often the case that images that performs violent intensities also represent violent acts (like when Angel shoots Teresa dead), this need not be the case, as demonstrated by Teresa's expressions.

What is particular about *The Wild Bunch* is its resistance towards rest and contemplation. Even the calmer sequences of the film, at least when you watch it for the first time, are filled with lingering violent intensities. As the audience knows only all too well, the calming lull is only temporary. The film operates through modulations of intensity, and I will now discuss in greater detail how this takes place in the film's key scenes of violence and bloodshed.

Death in slow-motion

The one cinematic technique that more than anything else has been associated with Sam Peckinpah is the use of slow-motion. In Peckinpah's movies people don't just drop dead; they fall over in slow-motion, prolonging the moment. Slow-motion sequences of violence had already been deployed by directors such as Akira Kurosawa¹⁵⁹ and Arthur Penn.¹⁶⁰ Peckinpah himself had earlier used this technique, most extensively in *Major Dundee*,¹⁶¹ but what he now explored further, as had Penn and his editors to a lesser extent in *Bonnie and Clyde*, was the combination of footage shot at different speeds. In Peckinpah's films, most notably the battle scenes in *The Wild Bunch*, slow-motion is not used as a standalone effect. According to his biographer, David Weddle, Peckinpah deliberately sought a young editor without ties to the Hollywood studios and conventions for *The Wild Bunch*. His choice was Lou Lombardo, who had worked on the camera crew on Peckinpah's television production *Noon Wine*. Lombardo had done some editing work on television but had never before edited a feature film (Weddle, 1994, p. 333).

¹⁵⁹ Techniques such as slow-motion, multi-camera filming, and use of telephoto lenses were all characteristics of Kurosawa's filmmaking that Peckinpah explored further in his own films. Especially Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* was influential on Peckinpah's intercutting of footage filmed at different speeds. Kurosawa had used these techniques as early as his first film, *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943) but as Prince argues it is highly unlikely that Peckinpah had seen this film (Prince, 1998, pp. 51-59).

¹⁶⁰ For a brief overview of earlier uses of slow motion in depictions of violent action in American cinema and television, see Cook (1999, pp. 138-142).

¹⁶¹ Besides *Major Dundee*, Peckinpah had also used slow motion in two television productions in 1962 and 1966 (Seydor, 1999, p. 74n10).

According to Weddle, it was Lombardo who introduced Peckinpah to the technique of intercutting slow-motion with faster footage when editing together sequences of violent action. Hence, for *The Wild Bunch*, Peckinpah would film the shootout scenes with six different cameras, operating at different speeds. Lombardo would then further manipulate the speed of the footage in the post-production (Weddle, 1994, pp. 333-334).

Stephen Prince repeatedly states that Peckinpah's innovative portrayal of violence was not a step towards a greater sense of realism (Prince, 1998, p. 49; p. 71). In his analysis of Peckinpah's use of slow-motion, Prince, I would argue correctly, claims that the main focus in Peckinpah's slow-motion inserts of bodies that are hit by bullets is not the spurting blood but rather "the body's loss of volitional control over its actions" (Prince, 1998, p. 63). The slow-motion footage does not linger upon blood or images of bodily destruction but rather emphasizes the distorted movements of the body. The bullet hits set the body in motion. This technique is familiar from the 'ballet of death' in the final shoot-out scene in *Bonnie and Clyde*, where likewise bodies lose control of their movements in their final twisted movements. But unlike *Bonnie and Clyde*, the distorted movements in *The Wild Bunch* do not look pretty and glamorous. Nonetheless, as the bunch finally succumbs towards the end of the battle, they reach a certain heroic state.

The body not only loses control of its movements as it is hit by bullets in *The Wild Bunch*. It also loses control of its shape. *The Wild Bunch* went one step further than *Bonnie and Clyde* by emphasizing the exit wounds as the body is torn apart by bullets. As David Weddle explains in his Peckinpah biography, the director urged his special effects crew to push the limits of the established techniques for portraying the effects of bullet hits on the body. They would increase the size of the squibs and load them with artificial blood and pieces of meat. Squibs were used for both entry wounds and exit wounds, in addition to small charges on the actors' stomachs to

trigger bodily responses to the detonations (Weddle, 1994, p. 329). The effects were to picture a convulsing body ripped apart by bullets, losing its physical composure and integrity. Unlike *Bonnie and Clyde*, these bodies were not adorned like a canvas. The violence of *The Wild Bunch* performs a transformation through destruction, not a decoration for aesthetic contemplation. Audiences are viscerally confronted, and, as illustrated by the preview cards, often experienced this as an overwhelming sensory assault.

In the shoot-out scenes in *The Wild Bunch*, slow-motion and editing cannot be seen separately.¹⁶² The effect is not so much to dwell on details, as it is to manipulate and integrate various perspectives and timelines. As Bernard F. Dukore argues,

The various slow-motion speeds represent different viewpoints, as does normal speed, and their juxtaposition creates yet another viewpoint. Through these contiguities, Peckinpah creates distinctive aesthetic experiences. The shocking and beautiful contrast of realism and aesthetic stylization jolt each other, the one preventing empty artiness, the other suppressing exploitative violence, and both averting easy empathy with the victim and sympathy for the victimizer (Dukore, 1999, pp. 74-75).

What the technique creates is not merely a slowing down or diffraction but rather a relational multiplicity. However, rather than just a multiplicity of viewpoints, what is generated is a multiplicity of speeds and intensities. Audiences are not given the opportunity to contemplate the images, and the effect is all the more

¹⁶² The rapid editing of *The Wild Bunch* was unprecedented, yet still part of a more general trend in American cinema during the 1960s towards shorter shot lengths and corresponding greater amounts of edits. By comparing a sample of one hundred American films from each six year period, Barry Salt demonstrates that the average shot lengths (AVL) for the periods 1958-1963 and 1964-1969 were 9.3 seconds and 7.7 seconds respectively, while for the previous period (1952-1957) the AVL was 11 seconds (Salt, 1992, p. 265). In his detailed analysis of the first battle sequence of *The Wild Bunch*, Bernard F. Dukore breaks the sequence, totalling approximately 3 minutes and 48 seconds, down to 209 shots, averaging 1.09 seconds in length (Dukore, 1999, p. 79). Of the 209 shots, 27 are in slow-motion (Dukore, 1999, p. 81). The final sequence lasts 5 minutes and 10 seconds, and consists of 340 shots, with an average length of 0.9 seconds (Dukore, 1999, p. 87).

overwhelming. The intensity of these sensations are made all the more present by the vivid bloodshed, as blood bursts from the bodies being torn apart by bullets.

By far the most common phrase to appear in the preview comments is “too much blood,” or variants thereof. In her interpretive study of *The Wild Bunch*, Sylvia Chong makes the observation that when *The Wild Bunch* was initially released the critical response to the film illustrated “the primacy of blood in the film’s perception” (Chong, 2004, p. 254). Reviews of the film, positive as well as negative, frequently highlighted the film’s visual display of blood. Chong further makes the point that blood in *The Wild Bunch* not only “appears in copious amounts” but is furthermore “seen to exit the body” (Chong, 2004, p. 254, emphasis in original). Chong sees this as analogous to ejaculation shots in hardcore pornography, as analyzed by Linda Williams. As Williams argues, the ejaculation shot brings into the frame “the woman’s invisible and unquantifiable pleasure” (Williams, 1999, p. 113). Chong argues that “[b]lood in screen violence enacts a similar transference of affect, with the blood spurting out of the victim standing in for the sadistic delight of the aggressor. However, blood also *transforms* affect, by changing the victims’ pain into the aggressor’s visual pleasure” (Chong, 2004, p. 254, emphasis in original).

Chong proceeds with an analysis of the opening of the final battle in *The Wild Bunch*, where Mapache is killed after having slit Angel’s throat. Chong argues that the slow-motion shots of blood spurting from Mapache’s body as he is hit with bullets transfers affect from Mapache to his killers, Pike Bishop and Dutch. Furthermore, the visual display of blood transforms the affect from the pain of Mapache into the pleasure of Pike and Dutch, as well as of the audience. In this analysis affect operates through signification. The sight of blood stands in for, and intensifies, Mapache’s pain as well as the pleasure of the killers (and the audience). As spurting blood is made visual it signifies the pleasure of the subject taking in this sight. Blood operates as an externalization of affect (Chong, 2004, pp. 254-255).

However, Chong's scheme collapses if we attempt to expand it to the sequence that follows next in the film, as the final massacre unfolds, and the bunch is killed off, one by one. The spurting blood that here occurs does not signify any pain or pleasure, as Chong suggests, but rather directly performs bodily destructions and affective intensities. Thus, rather than an externalization of affect, where blood signifies the pain of the victim's body and the pleasure of the viewing subject, affects cannot in this massacre sequence be located in any individual relation between subject and object. Furthermore, the blood does not represent, intensify, or transfer, any preexisting affect but allows for the expression of new affective experiences and sensations. Although the violence of the bunch can here perhaps be seen as performing or expressing some form of orgasmic intensity, as Chong's analysis alludes, such an interpretation will eventually be reductive, as it reduces the affect to an expression of some preexisting desire, where the audience ends up feeling relieved or satisfied. Chong's conceptualization does not account for how watching *The Wild Bunch* would be a shattering experience for many viewers. What furthermore separates the bloodshed in *The Wild Bunch* from Chong's ejaculation metaphor is the suddenness and openness of the scene. Although violence is anticipated, the form it will take, and its eventual victims, is not made clear to the audience. Furthermore, I would argue blood never appears as a climax in *The Wild Bunch*. Rather the film oscillates between various violent modes and intensities, where the blood sharpens and crystallizes the affective impacts but never finalizes any momentum.

The problem with Chong's explanation is that affect is reframed in terms of meaning and representation. In her framework the pleasure made possible by the bloodshed is a fulfillment of a preexisting desire. The blood externalizes affects that are already in operation. In Deleuzian terms, what takes place is a realization, rather than an actualization. The bloodshed provides satisfaction, by fulfilling a lack. It

confirms possibilities that are already there. As such, the killing of Mapache is satisfactory since the bunch, and presumably the audience, already feel hatred towards this character. The killing of Mapache is motivated by the film's narrative. He is the film's main antagonist, and the killing happens at a moment of heightened intensity, as a just retribution for slitting Angel's throat, after having already subjected him to sadistic torture. Nonetheless, the images never dwell on the killing of Mapache. Although the shots of Mapache being hit run in slow-motion, the editing is very rapid, juxtaposing shots of Mapache taking hits in slow-motion, Pike and Dutch firing their guns at him, and reaction shots from the onlookers. However, after Mapache falls over he is quite literally out of the picture. The attention is on the bunch and the surrounding soldiers, raising their hands. A moment of silence ensues, until Dutch bursts out laughing. Dutch, Pike and Tector knowingly exchange glances without saying a word, and then Pike turns and fires his gun at Mapache's co-conspirator, a German officer, killing him instantly. Next the final battle breaks loose. Rapid cuts between different camera angles and film speeds give the sequence a dynamic intensity as the bunch meets their demise. The prolonged blood spill does not necessarily make sense yet feels intense. Meaning gives way to sensation: the main appeal of the battle is affective, rather than being based on systems of signification.

Blood in *The Wild Bunch* is not so much observed as felt and experienced. Still, blood and violence are not inherently connected. What make the appearance of blood so violently intense in *The Wild Bunch* are the relations it enters by connecting bodily destruction and agony to the sensory overload of the film's audiovisual style. My argument is that the bloodshed was experienced as an assault on unprepared audiences in 1969 precisely because in many cases viewers could not compartmentalize the experiences into recognizable moral or aesthetic categories. The combinations presented were radical and foreign, and thus the sensations were

all the stronger in their affective impact. Insofar as *The Wild Bunch* today doesn't evoke the same visceral responses as those recorded in the preview comments presented above, something has changed. The stylistics of violence and bloodshed presented in *The Wild Bunch* have become all too familiar and ritualistic, and thus devoid of its intensity and radical impact.

My conclusion in this chapter carries a nuanced tone. Contrary to Stephen Prince, I have argued that *The Wild Bunch* operates through affective intensities, not rationality and order. *The Wild Bunch* performs sensations; it does not deliver a message. The film does not add up, it doesn't cohere into a didactic position. Rather, the film is all about tensions. Violence is always already there. The bunch does not abhor the violence that surrounds them and that defines their lives. They don't leave violence behind. Rather, they seek to redirect violence, to orient it towards other means. Non-violence is never even an option in *The Wild Bunch*. Rather, violence is ever present, lurking behind every corner. The direction of the film is not towards rationality and order but towards new modes of violence.

The final killings in *The Wild Bunch* take place off-screen. After the massacre, Deke Thornton and the bounty hunters ride into Agua Verde, as the wounded are carried away and the buzzards start arriving. The town is in ruins and bodies are scattered everywhere. Thornton finds the dead body of his old friend Pike but refuses to take part in the scavenging and does not join the bounty hunters when they leave Agua Verde. Saddened by the massacre and the deaths of his former companions, Thornton stays behind alone, leaning against the town walls as the civilians and wounded soldiers are leaving. Gunshots can be heard from afar, and a short while later Sykes rides into town together with the rebel fighters from Angel's village. Sykes has joined the rebels, and they have killed the bounty hunters. Sykes greets Thornton, and asks if he would like to join them. As Sykes puts it, "It ain't like it used to be, but, it'll do." This is the final line in the movie, as Sykes and Thornton

starts laughing, having been brought together again. Their violent lives continue, only in a new direction and in a new form. They don't reject violence but find a new mode of living through violence. And by joining the Mexican rebels they perhaps have found some purpose after all.

The Wild Bunch is a confused film,¹⁶³ and this is likely the reason I find the film all the more interesting each time I watch it. Rather than providing solutions each viewing brings about further nuances and conflicted impressions. If anything, the main problem I have with *The Wild Bunch* is that it is not intense enough in its violence.¹⁶⁴ Despite its intensity and brooding violence, the film at times strays back to conventional approaches. Especially some of the lighter and comedic sequences can appear heavy handed and seems to retreat back to western movie clichés. Although I still find the film enjoyable and stimulating, at the same time I realize that I will never be able to see it the same way as the preview audiences in the summer of 1969. Something has changed. Nonetheless, after watching *The Wild Bunch* I feel bruised. We might not agree with what the film has to say, or maybe not even make much sense of it at all, but it packs a punch.

¹⁶³ For a further discussion of the confusing nature of *The Wild Bunch*, see Stephen Farber (2008). As Farber states: "There are no easy interpretations of *The Wild Bunch*. Peckinpah is feeling out his own responses to his characters' way of life, and he is asking us to struggle with him to make sense of the experiences on the screen. For all of its technical assurance, this is an unfinished open-ended film, a tentative exploration of a peculiar, vanishing way of life, rather than a clearly formulated thesis film. Peckinpah has not resolved his own feelings about the masculine code of honor or the Westerner or about the violence of the outlaw, and *The Wild Bunch* reflects his confusions. We rightly demand more clarity from an artist, but at the same time, the genuinely agonized temper of *The Wild Bunch* makes it a searching, unsettling film" (Farber, 2008, p. 34).

¹⁶⁴ To some extent, I agree with Devin McKinney in his claim that "although the violence as artistic form and expression stands up, it stands too much alone. The bloodshed is not as integral to the film that surrounds it as it may seem. The world of *The Wild Bunch* is a world in which violence occurs, but it isn't, as it has to be, a violent world. The violence of it has been referred to as 'spectacular,' and it is; but were it truly integral, it would not be so much a spectacle as an intensification of emotional tones and existential fears already present in the most dispensable mundanities of dialogue and set design, the length of a shot or the cinematographic play of light on water" (McKinney, 1999, p. 190). Although I think McKinney here raises a valid point, especially when the film is seen from a contemporary perspective, I still would argue that the violent intensity of the film's opening reverberates throughout the succeeding sequences and instills a sense of ever present violence.

In *The Wild Bunch* blood strikes a discord, as one of several relational elements that perform the violent intensities of the film. Blood modulates these violent intensities, in various combinations and constellations, throughout the film. It takes part in differentiating violence, intoning its various aspects and directions. Blood is a bit player in a larger ensemble, where it joins forces with other actors, other performers, other sets of relations. But it makes a difference. *The Wild Bunch* would have been an entirely different experience without the presence of blood. Like in all films where it appears, the blood assemblage joins with other cinematic assemblages, and performs through its relations with these assemblages. Blood is not integral to violence, but it takes part in the specific relations that make up the violent intensities of cinematic images and the affective potentials of these images. Or, to state it another way, blood in and of itself does not bring about violence, but its specific operations can influence and modulate how images perform violent intensities that can affect viewers and audiences.

Conclusion: An End

This dissertation has followed a trail of blood through American cinema starting in the 1950s and ending in the late 1960s. During this period blood appeared in various forms, with often very different effects and modes of operation. Within classical Hollywood cinema blood predominantly operated as a signifier, integrated within a film's narrative, providing viewers with information regarding characters or plot development. This function of blood within a film has not vanished and is still in operation today. However, from the late 1950s onwards, this model has been challenged by blood images taking on other roles and functions, evoking affective encounters.

In the 1950s a new breed of low-budget movies emerged, combining a generic narrative format with easily exploitable elements of attraction. In this terrain, films such as *The Return of Dracula* and *The Tingler* made use of blood as a sensational spectacle. These films provided rather crude shock effects where blood images in stark color stood out from the rest of the film, addressing the audience in a direct manner. Into the 1960s, blood was utilized commercially by low-budget filmmakers, such as Herschell Gordon Lewis and David F. Friedman, to offer what more mainstream studio productions would not or could not put on display. Although not necessarily intentionally so, Lewis and Friedman explored how sensational blood images can provide for new and productive connections with other elements in a film, with different potentials for affecting audiences.

At the same time, more graphic blood images started appearing also in Hollywood productions, taking on various forms, performing different modes of intensities. Throughout the 1960s more complex and nuanced blood images emerged. In a film like *The Chase*, blood intensifies the antagonisms established by the film's plot and diegesis. As the town sheriff is being beaten by racist thugs,

audiences are invited to empathize with the sheriff's pain and his wife's distress, while feeling hatred towards the thugs. This can be contrasted with the final scene of *Bonnie and Clyde*, where blood operates as an aesthetic element, adorning the title characters as they meet their deaths. Blood provides for affective intensities in *Bonnie and Clyde*, while the film does not necessarily give these intensities any clear direction or narrative integration. The film evoked strong emotional responses, though viewers encountered and responded to the movie in very different ways. This differentiating aspect of the affective intensities is even more prominent in *The Wild Bunch*. I argue that this film operates *as* violence, although it at the same time seems to seek a way of inscribing some meaning to the seemingly senseless violence it portrays. Blood here modulates these violent intensities, which never reach a state of rest or resolution.

It is never a question of whether an image operates discursively *or* in terms of affect. Each image enables, performs, and provides for different constellations of attractions and narrative integration, of discourse and affect, with different potentials for affecting viewers who encounter these images. It is always a matter of both/and but for each image this constellation of affect and discourse is constituted differently. Images show and tell, shock and mean, it's always a matter of *and*. Analytically, the task becomes to add layers and provide for new relations, new encounters with images. There is always more to say, more to show. Thus, my story has no clear and definite ending. Rather than a paradigm shift, it is perhaps more fitting to talk of a *diversification* in how blood is displayed and used in cinematic images. Blood did become a sensational element of attraction in American cinema from the late 1950s onwards, explicitly operating in terms of affect. But this was not one uniform movement. Different films utilized blood images very differently, with very different potentials for affecting their viewers and audiences.

At another level, my position in this thesis has been to step aside from the binarisms of violence/non-violence, affect/not-affect. Affect is always already there. All images affect us, violently, even when they don't evoke noticeable responses or even register in the mind. As we encounter images something happens. Yet still, each image affects us differently. The question is always *how*, not *if*, an image affects us. Most images we barely notice, we have grown accustomed to them, and they reaffirm and consolidate who we are, what we do, and what we know. However, at other times images make a noticeable difference. My focus on blood has allowed me to pin down instances where the affective impact of images makes such a difference, where images affect us in ways that make us respond and make us aware that something is happening to and with us. Despite my rejection of any attempt at generalizing the effects of these images, I will make the general claim that all images have the potential to make a difference. And this is what makes this study relevant beyond its particular focus on blood in a given historical era; the performative potentials of images are not fully dependent on content, meaning, or matters of representation. As argued in my previous chapter, images need not represent violence in order to perform violent affects. Blood is never in itself a sufficient, or even necessary, ingredient for images to operate in terms of violence. These effects are always relational, distributed across wide-reaching and transient networks and assemblages.

What I have attempted in this thesis is to write a historical account of affective potentials of images, as seen in the portrayals of blood in a given period of American cinema. A number of factors were crystallized in these blood images during this period. In Chapter One I argued that this appearance can be understood in light of the fundamental changes in the American film industry during the 1950s. The earlier three-tier division between A movies, B movies, and exploitation movies collapsed, and as the American systems of film production were reassembled new

forms of low-budget exploitation cinema emerged. The new low-budget operators sought to find a way to get their films onto the market and make a profit, and eventually the attention turned towards blood and gore. Of course, this doesn't answer the question of exactly why blood. Here most likely no definite answer can be given but several mediating factors can be mentioned: blood and gore effects are cheap and readily available; like sex, blood has a visceral appeal that requires little in terms of interpretation and cultural context; mainstream films would at the time stay away from explicit and graphic violence, which opened a niche for the exploitation filmmakers; gore movies make low demands for skilled actors and personnel so the blood assemblage could become the performative centerpiece; audiences became accustomed to seeing blood and graphic violence in other media; the increasing availability of color film made the display of red blood all the more visually striking; the ongoing war in Vietnam provided for a steady supply of graphic newsreels and photos; movies were now to a lesser extent family-oriented and targeted towards a general public but were increasingly oriented towards specific demographics and market segments; younger generations increasingly came to seek out forms of entertainment and cultural expression that stood in opposition to 'adult' tastes and values; political assassinations and social unrest brought violence to the forefront in 1960s culture; the 1960s youth culture and radicalism explicitly sought out transgressive and formally experimental forms of artistic expression. I could go on but what is clear is that no single explanation can here be found. Blood gradually became common-fare as a cinematic attraction but this did not happen in a uniform and ordered manner.

As a cinematic attraction, blood operates in terms of affect, and what I have tried to accomplish is a study of these operations, and how affects are actualized through encounters between images and audiences. Furthermore, I have tried to trace how these images resonate against social and discursive formations. The

images are themselves part of social and discursive strata and are again perceived by audiences that are situated socially, culturally, and discursively. Our perceptions are social, although never merely social. Every image is different, with different potentials for affecting viewers, and as these potentials are actualized each image perception and encounter is again different from the next.

As I have further tried to argue, some images bring about potentials for greater variation than others; not all images operate with the same degrees of freedom. Whereas the early uses of blood for shock effect in, for instance, *The Return of Dracula* did not leave much room for variation and resonances with wider social formations, the situation is very different with a film like *The Wild Bunch* where it is hard to discern what exactly the blood is doing and how to respond to and make sense of the bloodshed you encounter as a viewer. In *The Wild Bunch* blood is not so much a direct cause as a modulator of the affective impact of cinematic images. The operations of the blood assemblages are here more elaborate and intricate, closely intertwined with other cinematic elements, such as sound, editing, camera positions, footage speeds, human actors, and so on. Blood, as a relational element, interacts with a multitude of other factors and is a bit player in cinematic assemblages that perform these images and that constitute the potentials that can be actualized in encounters with situated viewers and audiences.

As described above, this thesis provides an exploration of a specific historical movement, in which images of blood in American cinema came to take on new features and potentials. At the same time, it presents a theoretical exploration of how images operate, and how the affective potentials of images intersect with, resonate with and work against, discursive formations. In this regard I have sought to work with certain perspectives from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, both in terms of his Bergsonian theory of cinematic images and in terms of his approach to affect. I have explicitly sought to work with Deleuzian ideas and concepts

empirically. Thus, my approach is fundamentally different from Deleuze's philosophy of cinema. Following from this, another key contribution of this study is methodological. The recent turn to affect in cultural studies has to a large extent been framed philosophically and theoretically, in an attempt at conceptualizing what affect is and how a turn towards affect differs from earlier theoretical and epistemological paradigms. Thus far, less emphasis has been put on questions of how to *do* affect research – how to study the specificity of affect and its effects. I think this study has pointed out some possible directions in this regard.

My focus has been on affective potentials as well as specific actualizations of these potentials. As I see it, both of these aspects are necessary in a concrete empirical study that focuses on affect. In my case, I have sought to combine a close analysis of specific films, scenes, and images with a focus on how viewers encounter and respond to these (audio)visual expressions. What this entails is a close focus on processes and relations, rather than on given entities or qualities. Although affects are always already there, they cannot be located but are rather always in-between. Images in and of themselves do not contain affects. Rather, images perform affective potentials. What makes images violent is not what they represent but what they can do – how they can potentially affect other sets of relations and make things happen.

To study this empirically it is necessary to engage with the processes through which images are encountered and perceived. This means to move further than merely locating some affective potential in an image. What is called for are descriptions of affective encounters, of processes of actualization where images and viewers intersect and where concrete affective and emotional responses are evoked. There's no template as to how this can be done but my study provides some examples that may prove relevant for further studies, involving other materials.

What I have done is to engage with my materials and follow the networks of relations that are evoked or that can be untangled by these encounters. I have

sought to provide an overview of the factors and conditions that made the American film industry, exhibition practices and film genres undergo drastic changes in the 1950s. These changes, inadvertently, paved the way for new modes of sensational imagery, such as blood, in motion picture features. When watching these films and reading about them, I have tried to pay attention to what stirs my interest and fascination, as well as what I find troublesome or repelling. My personal encounters with these films are interwoven with historical data documenting how these films have resonated with other, and differently situated, viewers and audiences, both at the time when these films were first exhibited and in terms of later responses and commentaries. During the course of tracing and mapping encounters with images a number of fascinating and inspiring questions emerged that have further guided this study: Why do I find the exploitation films of Herschell Gordon Lewis so much more engaging today than when I earlier attempted to see such films through a lens of irony? Why do I react so differently to the bloodshed in *The Chase* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, two violent films that both evoke affective responses in me? What made preview audiences react so strongly to *The Wild Bunch* in 1969? These are merely some of the questions that have emerged through my work on this project. In addressing such questions, I have tried not so much to achieve definite answers as to unravel the mediators that made these questions emerge, and to trace the affective processes and resonances that follow from the phenomena these questions address. Following an actor-network approach, these specific processes have unraveled complexities and bifurcating relations that point towards more general concerns; be it in terms of violence in the media, potentials for (often unintentional) creativity and innovation within the commercial exploitation film industry, radical potentials of humorous strategies, or quite simply questions related to how we derive pleasures from encountering mediated images – even when the images can be uncomfortable to watch. These are all concerns and questions of key relevance to

communication and media studies, and where this study might have contributed with original perspectives worth following further.

My focus on affect has allowed for engagements *with* materials that have provided for productive encounters. This can be contrasted with interpretative or formalistic approaches that seek a critical *distance* from the objects under study. By seeking to engage with my materials I am not implicitly celebrating the films I study but rather have allowed for a certain curiosity to guide my research and questions, and to open up to the possibility that the contradictory and often confused relational processes that follow may yield new insights or ideas.

What can be taken from this method in terms of the potential relevance for further research that is guided by curiosity and what draws a researcher's attention? In this project, my attention has been directed towards what moves me, what makes things happen, as well as towards movements that can be documented through historical sources. With this approach, my analytic focus is less on the before-and-after than on the processes themselves, the unfolding of events, transformations and shifting relations. The movements are where the interesting things happen. But at the same time, the movements are what cannot be grasped. Like film itself, if you freeze a frame or extract a series of images, something is lost, and that something is the very essence of cinema: the in-between, the relations that connect.

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