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Extended Essay in Film Studies

The Relations between Aesthetics and Immorality in Film

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As objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself more numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible.

—Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Questions concerning aesthetics and ethics have accompanied art throughout its history. When art is both immoral and 'aesthetic' it presents a dissonance, a dilemma before the observer. This dilemma stems from the deeply imbedded disposition that aesthetics is identified with ethics. Film specifically has brought the various issues surrounding these two philosophical realms to an apex due to the medium's capacity for intense engagement and also its wide engagement. This extended essay's primary purpose is to explain how film aesthetically and ethically challenges its spectators and why the medium has the particular capacity to do so.

The extended essay includes the analysis of three films: *Badlands*, *Rope* and *Funny Games*. All three films depict visually or through the narrative different forms of immorality whilst proving to be beautiful, 'aesthetic' wholes. The first section of the essay introduces a thematic overview of the many philosophical dispositions regarding aesthetics and ethics. The second section analyzes the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, the philosophical dispositions *within* each film. The final section of the essay discusses how the dispositions that arise from the films challenge the aesthetics and the ethics of the spectators.

The research concludes that the intense engagement emotionally subjects the spectator to experience the philosophical disposition that ultimately indentifies between ethics and aesthetics. Therefore, the medium, within its emotional engagement, compels spectators to reevaluate the immoralities that they view.

Contents

Introduction

The first real and personal encounter with the ambiguities of 'ethical criticism' was when reading Nabokov's *Lolita*. As a novel that has been both acclaimed for its lyrical prose and condemned for its polemical content, the novel inevitably places itself in the midst of the 'aesthetics and ethics' discussion. This discussion has many spheres of inquiry however for reasons of uniformity, the extended essay will focus on ethical issues in aesthetics or in the practice of art.[1] If we grant that art, and in particular film, can be subject to ethical criticism,[2] one central question titles this sphere of inquiry: whether the ethical value of artworks conditions their aesthetic value? Meaning, does a moral flaw detract or, alternatively, enhance an artwork's aesthetic value?

I have chosen to examine the relations between aesthetics and ethics through the medium of film and specifically, through three films: *Badlands*, *Rope* and *Funny Games*. All three films are attributed with apparent aesthetic qualities and are considered in film criticism as 'aesthetically significant', 'classic' or an 'artistic triumph'. These aesthetics appraisals are set beside the intrinsic evil that is exhibited throughout the visuals and narrative. This extended essay will attempt to explain how (in terms of filmic devices) these three films, aesthetically and ethically, challenge the viewer. However, the essay's primary purpose is to disclose the philosophical infrastructures that make the films challenging in the first place. Moreover, this essay attempts to ascertain how the medium of film is unique in the presentation of these challenges to its viewers. The formal objectives of the essay are summarized here:

1. To answer if and how the film medium is unique in the 'aesthetics and ethics' discourse? Namely, does the medium call for a particular discussion and if so in what ways?
2. To analyze the aesthetic dispositions that characterize the three films. Is the relationship between aesthetic and ethics uniform or does it vary from film to film?
3. To examine the relationship between aesthetics and ethics with regard to the audience. Do these aesthetic dispositions, when they arise, challenge the Moderate Moralist standpoint? Do they also challenge other aesthetic dispositions?

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[1] Jerrold Levinson. "Introduction: Aesthetics and Ethics." Introduction. *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. Ed. Jerrold Levinson. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998. 1.
[2] Assuming that the reader is in agreement to the relevance of ethics in fiction.

The first chapter is primarily a thematic overview of the varying positions addressing the aforementioned question, whether the ethical value of artworks condition their aesthetic value? The chapter also includes the grounds that are provided for ethical criticism and a hypothesis to why film is unique to the 'aesthetics and ethics' discourse.

Chapters two, three and four analyze the three films. Each chapter includes a short introduction to the director and historical and technical aspects surrounding the production of the film. These chapters, as opposed to what is written in the proposal for this extended essay, do not include a straightforward analysis of the characters, plot and filmic devices. They focus on the philosophical and at times the historical contexts of the films, whilst integrating the analysis of content and form. The films are examined as case studies of particular dispositions in the 'aesthetics and ethics' discourse and representatives of the film medium as a whole.[3]

The three chapters on the films can be roughly divided up into three parameters: (i) cinematography (ii) content and (iii) the relationship between the film and the audience. Each film is predominantly examined through the lens of one parameter. Terrence Malick's *Badlands* juxtaposes visual and sonic beauty with the killings of the characters. Due to the fact that visuals and sound are central to the film, its chapter is primarily dedicated to the analysis of the cinematography and voice-over in context to historical and cultural influences. In contrast to *Badlands*, the act of violence in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* ends in very first few minutes of the film. Murder in *Rope* is an attempt to commit the 'perfect crime'- the 'art of murder'. Acknowledging the fact that *Rope* centers itself round philosophies such as of Thomas De Quincey and Friedrich Nietzsche, the chapter focuses less so on the film's formal features but rather on the content and dialogue. The third and final film, Michael Haneke's *Funny games*, purposely tests the audience's reaction to the immoralities that they view; the film places the audience not as passive spectators but as active 'consumers' and perpetrators of the violence. *Funny Games* is discussed in order to analyze the different filmic devices which are utilized in order to prescribe to the audience a particular aesthetic response.

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[3] It should be noted that the films are three representatives of narrative cinema. This study does not include the research of documentary or experimental film.

The final chapter systematically answers the three objectives indicated in this introduction. The chapter ties in together the different components and dispositions that the case-studies present in the ultimate attempt to distill the complex relationship of audience to immoralities on screen.

Aesthetics, Ethics and Film

Ethical Criticism

There are many grounds where one can ethically criticize art. The primary reasons where artwork can be ethically meritorious or defective can be divided into three claims.

The first is the 'causal claim': literary or narrative art and morality should be concerned with the possible effects those works would have on their audiences, i.e. whether or not the work encourages and causes anti-social, undesirable and morally questionable behavior. The 'causal claim' has not been highly figured in ethical criticism because it is an area where empirical research is required. For example, social scientists and psychologists carry out studies to confirm the correlation between television violence and the increase of street violence. These kinds of studies have been criticized for being inconclusive. Considering the multiple variables: social context, psychological abnormalities, genetics, and family violence, the correlation is far too difficult to determine. In the debate of ethical criticism and art, each aesthetic disposition relates differently to the 'causal claim'.

The second claim calls an artwork to be morally defective insofar as it "endorses" a certain attitude - the work prescribes a response that is ethically questionable. Again, using television as an example, the film does not necessarily have to condone violence on the streets in real life. It is enough that it is, and is seen as, an endorsement through glorification, stylization and *'aestheticization'* of street violence. Opposing this is the criticism that this claim is methodologically problematic regarding interpretation.[4] Is the artwork necessarily endorsing or merely depicting an ethically perverse situation whilst keeping neutral towards it?

The third claim is a relatively new direction and generally categorized under 'virtue theory'. An artwork is subject to moral criticism on the basis that it helps or undermines moral development; there is a certain educational element to the claim.[5] A work is to be commended ethically if it is instrumental in the development of sensitivity towards different situations and if it helps foster

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[4] Folke Tersman. "Ethics and Film." *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. ed. Paisley Livingston and Carl R. Plantinga. London: Routledge, 2009. 116.

[5] This claim is also seen as an extension to the 'cognitive argument' which will be discussed further on.

stable character traits or virtues. For example, a political film that portrays 'both sides of the conflict' is of higher ethical standard than a film that propagates and indoctrinates one view point. This is because the former instigates discussion on different perspectives and thus develops an empathy for the 'other'.

To return to the second claim of 'endorsement', I would like to contend the criticism made concerning the claim. Although acknowledging the difficulties in distinguishing between depiction and endorsement as two domains that are in tangent to each other, these difficulties do not minimize the grounds for ethical criticism. Berys Gaut addresses ethical criticism of art by the "intrinsic ethical value",[6] in what he defines as the "attitudes the works manifest towards their subjects".[7] This attitude is ultimately what the work of art *aims* to do (to corrupt, to celebrate, to portray positively/negatively). Gaut's point can be taken even further in that the claim of what a work 'aims to do' or 'prescribes' is even more relevant to film because of its very nature as an art form. This ultimately presents the question as to why film is unique to the ethics and aesthetics debate. Moreover to establish why cinema, artistically performed and visually perceived, is, and should be, considered an embodiment of this discussion.

Why film?

The medium-specific thesis of film has many apparent disagreements which range from varying view points within the discourse, including dispositions that critique the very nature of medium-specific claims. The two central contrasting views in film theory are those of Rudolph Arnheim and Andre Bazin. Arnheim's position, considering its historical context, was developed as an attempt to counter claims that film was a mere automatic record of reality and has no credibility to be called 'art'. Arnheim's theory, in response to these claims, places its emphasis that photography and film have the potential to transform reality:[8]

"No representation of an object will ever be valid visually and artistically unless the eyes can directly understand it as a deviation from the basic visual conception of the object."

Arnheim, as a central figure informative tradition, viewed film's essence as its conscious ability to distort reality, to bring attention to the object - to *defamiliarize*. He praises films that

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[6] Berys Nigel Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford, 2007. 9.

[7] Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. 229.

[8] Rudolf Arnheim. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: U of California, 1974. 92.

emphasize the process of 'defamiliarization' and the filmmaker that utilizes intelligibly the techniques and agents (editing, montage, framing) to transform reality in a meaningful and expressive way. Andre Bazin's position differs completely from that of Arnheim. Bazin sees the central functions of art and film are to immortalize the past. Film's eminence lies in "the absence of convention, in the self-effacement of the artist, in the inchoate virginity of the raw material".[9] Bazin has high regard for long-naturalistic films that do not impose the preconceptions of the human mind, films that applied the potential of film technology to capture and illuminate reality.

A modern-day philosopher of art, Noel Carroll, challenges medium specificity and in particular criticizes the positions of both Arnheim and Bazin. Although differing strongly in content, Carroll states that both positions are a result of prior normative judgments about the types of films are to be preferred (Bazin prefers realistic films, whereas Arnheim prefers 'montage films').[10] Carroll goes against these preferences and advocates that the 'essence' of a medium is not to be minimized to one particular type of film. On a wider scale, Carroll argues that art should not be valued by the single criteria of exploitation of their medium's capabilities. Moreover, medium-specific claims are soon to be irrelevant due to the supposed gradual evaporation of boundaries between art-forms and their mediums.[11]

Despite the varying dispositions and objections, there is a uniform agreement among film theoreticians (even Carroll who claims the contrary) that there are features employed for purposes of emotional engagement that are unique to film. Film is an experience and emotion, whether pleasurable or not, that plays a fundamental part of the phenomenological experience of cinema.[12] The director can be described as an 'experience architect': using various filmic strategies and agents to design hypothetical scenarios as emotionally engaging narratives. Carroll proposes that the power of film[13] draws from two components: "the intense engagement of the spectator and the widespread engagement [of the larger audience]".[14] These two components are

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[9] Dudley Andrew. *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*. London: Oxford, 1976. 168.
[10] Jonathan Frome. "Noël Carroll". Livingston and Plantinga 335.
[11] Carroll Noël. *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Malden: Blackwell, 2008. 51.
[12] Carl R. Plantinga. "Emotion and Affect". Livingston and Plantinga 94.
[13] Film in Carroll's terminology is the 'moving image', which in his definition includes all moving images (CCTV camera or video for example). Therefore what he refers to is "movies", a particular genre within the 'moving image' that generates the medium's unique emotional qualities.
[14] Noël Carroll. *Theorizing the Moving Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996. 80.

ascertained by multiple explanations and I would like to argue that both are also conditional as to why film is unique to the aesthetics and ethics discussion.

The pictorial nature of cinema is an inherent contributor to a spectator's intense engagement. Pictorial representation differs radically from linguistic representation. Picture recognition, as an early developmental acquisition, unlike language, does not demand a learnt symbol system and therefore is more immediate. A person witnessing a house on fire has a more immediate emotional response than if he was notified by a literary equivalent- a newspaper. Undoubtedly, the psychological inner-workings that allow for rapid process of sensory data also contribute to the immediate and more visceral emotional impact cinema has on the spectator.[15] The films of Alfred Hitchcock are classic examples for this case and Hitchcock himself is nicknamed the 'master of suspense'. In the famous shower scene of *Psycho*, although the knife is never seen penetrating the flesh, the multiple close-up shots of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), the instant high pitched-scream and music for dramatic effect, directly induce a startle effect. The shower scene in *Psycho* the novel would of course have a similar effect on the reader, however because the literary scene involves cognitive higher functions and no sensory input, the knife's shadow or for that matter the stabbing is not instantaneously construed as a threat. The Hitchcock's scene provoke and cater for the primitive emotional functions of the mind and automatic bodily reaction of the spectator (see Figure 1.1).

Hitchcock's scene, apart from the image, owes its effect to articulate editing and cinematographic decisions. Editing can serve different purposes, among others, it can heighten tension, cause claustrophobia and bring images together that are thematically connected (montage). Moreover, it dictates the division of time and movement; the ability to slow down or to speed up action. Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein in his film *Strike* (1925), as part of his wider film philosophy, exploits editing in order to imbue emotional qualities onto the spectacle and reshape the spectator's reflexes into a set of new responses.[16] Eisenstein used parallel editing in order to juxtapose footage of butchering a bull with the massacre of strikers. This montage was set from the idea that the images would create a metaphorical synthesis; the revulsion from the butchering would stimulate and reinforce a parallel revulsion of the massacre. In consideration that this film

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[15] Berys Nigel Gaut. *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2010. 250.
[16] David Bordwell. "Sergei Eisenstein". Livingston and Platinga 364.

came out during the silent era, Eisenstein viewed montage as a means to substitute plain image whose emotional effect was weakened due to the lack of sound.

Figure 0.2: Shadow of a knife (Psycho)

Figure 0.1 Emotional identification through close-up (Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence)

Although, film and theatre undoubtedly share many similarities in terms of strategy, the cinematographic options before the filmmaker give him far more potential control. As opposed to the felt distance of a theatre, the film-camera, can take on the human qualities, to roam around a room or contrarily to situate itself in a godlike position, viewing vast landscapes from above. When the variable framing options and editing that enables seamless flow between shots are employed in tandem, they afford powerful control over the audience's attention. A good example is in *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983), when Maj. Jack 'Straffer' Celliers (David Bowie) at a certain point is completely buried in sand. In the scene, the camera zooms in from a wide shot to a close-up of the Maj. Jack's head propped out in anguish. The close-up establishes emotional identification and the zoom-in to a sudden and different framing, accentuates the feeling of suffocation (see Figure 1.2).

The two final key factors to be taken into account are sound and time. For the former, the sensual nature of film appeals to the senses of both sight and hearing. Sound in film is the direct and equal partner of the image, even during the silent era, sound was employed to highlight and draw emphasis on specific points in the film: romance, the suspense of a car chase, death, etc. Instrumental music and sounds have great expressive power; they establish immediately a mood or even convey an emotion. In Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), the invasion of the helicopters is set to Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The score itself possesses epic qualities, however the fact that the scene was edited in correlation with the tempo (the gradual rise of the helicopters), only maximizes the emotional affect. Music with words juxtaposed against image also serves as symbolic functions and are intrinsic to the content of the film; serving as leitmotifs and

establishing new emotional associations in accord with the narrative. The song 'Blue Velvet' in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) is a *double entendre*, taking what was originally a suave pop song and turning it into the leitmotif of a psychotic criminal with a sexual fetish for - blue velvet.
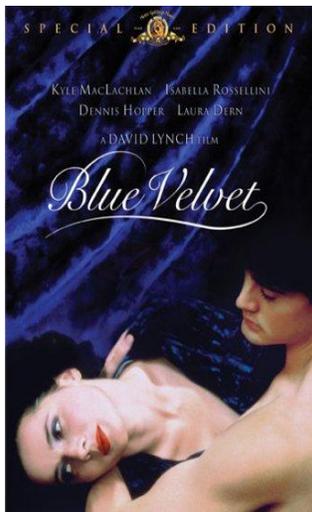
Figure 0.4 Above. 'Fetishization'(Blue Velvet)

Figure 0.3 Left. 'Fetishization' (DVD cover for Blue Velvet - Special edition)

In terms of temporal qualities, film is similar to theatre or performances of any kind because they all have a 'work time', a length of performance.[17] Unlike novels and other arts, the director/choreographer dictates the pace of the work. Therefore for film, the director can precisely control the emotional effects of the film. For example, by flashing multiple images, the director can create a sense of time 'unwinding' or bewildering chaos. The film is a 'one sit' experience, the narrative is concentrated into a short time period, making the viewing an emotionally dense and intense engagement.

The intense engagement of cinema, and the many examples mentioned above, are to make the case that film is innately an audience-oriented art form. The director and production team have overt control over the design of the film's experience. Complications of interpretation (if the film endorses...X?) cannot dismiss grounds for ethical criticism because film, more so than any other art form, prescribes a particular response to the audience. The cognitive or naturalistic approaches to how film confirms or alters our values and beliefs are still a developing branch of research. Carroll introduces a term called 'criterial pre-focusing' which he defines as "what

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[17] Gaut. *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*. 250.

predisposes us to variety of emotional arousals that ideally the moviemaker intends to illicit".[18] The term refers to the notion that the filmmaker can generate emotion through the many different agents, according to a certain moral criteria. The most developed examples of 'criterial pre-focusing' would be in feminist film criticism. Laura Mulvey, a pioneer in feminist film theory in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' argues that the various features of cinema and in particular 'classical' Hollywood assume a male spectator. Those films facilitate not only in narrative but also to the spectator, the objectification and *fetishization* of the female body - images lingering over the female curves, close-ups of the neck. Women in film are in relation to 'the controlling male gaze'. Meaning the woman is presented as the 'image 'and the man as 'bearer of the look' (see Figures 1.3-1.4).[19]

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[18] Noël Carroll. *Minerva's Night out Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013. 91.

[19] Terje Steinulfsson Skjerdal. *Laura Mulvey against the Grain: A Critical Assessment of the Psychoanalytic Feminist Approach to Film*. n.p.: University of Natal, 1997. PDF.

Aesthetics, Ethics and the Film Medium

The foundations of ethical criticism have been presented, however, yet to be answered is how the film medium is unique to the aesthetics and ethics discussion? Presented below is a hypothesis that will be further developed in the discussion and conclusions of this extended essay.

Film can introduce many different functions both of image and sound in order to prescribe an intense emotional engagement. This engagement, as all artwork, can be morally questioned. The different functions and agents (music, cinematography, lighting, etc.) are a basis for the film's aesthetic criticism. There can be a scenario where the cinematic 'form' is applauded, however the product experience and the content is morally condemned. For example, a horror film that prescribes suspense is commended for the intelligible use of filmic agents yet is criticized for its masochistic, torturous content. Moreover, as opposed to literature, the relations between aesthetics and ethics, if conflicting or harmonious, are not acknowledged by intellect but through *emotion.* The intense engagement that makes film powerful is that it heightens and construes more visceral immediacy in the relationship between the two philosophical domains.

Furthermore, in film, there are many components to take into consideration and therefore, the relationship between aesthetics and ethics take place not only within the film as an 'aesthetic whole' but on multiple platforms. There can be points of 'friction' between the music and the image, the color and the narrative, the cinematography and the content and so on. There are many examples, for instance Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. In the film, Alex masturbates to Beethoven's 9th symphony whilst intensely gazing into eyes of the composer whose poster has been pinned up as an icon on the bedroom wall. As the music plays, the films zooms into a chorus line of plastic Jesus figures and a snake crawling up a painting of a woman with her legs straddled open. Alex narrates through voice-over his ecstasy:

> "Oh bliss! Bliss and heaven! Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeousity made flesh. It was like a bird of rare best-spun heaven metal or like silvery wine flowing in a spaceship, gravity all nonsense now. As I slooshied, I knew such lovely pictures."

The end of the narration immediately queues in a montage of video clips of a bride being hung by rope, a vampirish face and mass explosions. These many points of 'friction' include the use of Beethoven (whom Alex refers to as *Ludwig Van)* and thus introduce the contradistinction between 'high culture' and the violent, sexual context. Likewise, the articulate space-age prose

counters the images and the seamless editing of the montage to the symphony that signified both Alex's climax and the crescendo in the music. Ultimately, all the different accumulated elements are brought together to uphold an asymmetry between refined 'taste' and morals; between the beautiful and the good.

Figure 0.5 Alex's masturbation montage accompanied by Beethoven's 9th symphony. View from left to right. (A Clockwork Orange)

Before this discussion ends, the wider engagement of film is yet to receive attention. If one agrees to the consensus that film prescribes an experience, one should also agree that it does so to a broad audience. Film is a mass art. The medium, particularly in the past two decades due to advances in technology, namely the internet, has amplified its distribution. Of course, these technologies have also widened the accessibility of paintings, sculpture and filmed performances; however, unlike other forms of art, the experience of film stays intact. To experience the Sistine Chapel ceiling in reality is undeniably different than to view Michelangelo's masterpieces online.[20] However, as long as there is a screen, the experience of film remains nonetheless unchanged; the place and sound system are only to enhance the experience, not alter it.

The precision and mass audience attribute of film experience inevitably has both social and ethical significance. Film, as a mass art regulates morality and makes a certain moral system persuasively attractive through the pleasures of sensory experience.[21] The conclusions that this essay will attempt to ascertain is that film, because it caters for a wide body of people - a

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[20] Michelangelo Di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni. *Sistine Chapel Ceiling*. Digital image. *Vatican Museums*. Vatican Museums, n.d. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

[21] Carl R., Plantinga. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Berkeley: U of California, 2009. 189.

collective as a whole - as opposed to individuals or a specific demographic, has a dimension of objectivity.

The Debate

Traditionally there are two opposing evaluations in respect to the relationship between art and morality: 'Moralism' and 'Autonomism'. 'Lolita' for purpose of clarity will be used to demonstrate the opposing arguments of these two views in the broad sense, since the tension between the two have been penned in the novel by Nabokov himself. In a post-mortem analysis of the book Nabokov himself introduces a fictional professor, John Ray Jr., who analyzes the novel and describes it as a "shining example of moral leprosy".[22] Ray though sympathetic and appreciative of the prose, hails that the novel's perversions will lead "unswervingly to nothing less than a moral apotheosis". Nabokov's own postscript counters Ray's argument and parodies those (critics and readers) who 'trivially' criticize the novel. Nabokov affirms that "a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm".[23] Ray's position equates 'Moralism', meaning that the ethical flaws ultimately detract from the novels aesthetic value. Contrarily, Nabokov himself appears to adopt a staunchly Autonomist view: that ethics is *autonomous* and inappropriate to be applied to aesthetic evaluation.

Radical Moralism and Radical Autonomism

Radical Moralism views ethical merits as the supreme determinants of aesthetic merit. Aesthetic value is reduced to moral standards, both universally and those of society ('social reductionism'). Advocates of Radical Moralism are criticized for blatantly ignoring what is called the 'formal features' of art or the essential nature of art. Radical Moralism questions how we distinguish one work of art from the other, or even from 'non-art', if the unique aesthetical features are not taken into account? Moral criteria can be universally applied and is not intuitively definitive and unique to art. Moreover, moral criteria seem to be counter-intuitive and problematic when applied to art forms such as music or abstract art.

Radical Autonomism is equal in its essence to 'Aestheticism'. It holds the belief is that the aesthetic value of art is autonomous of all other evaluations including moral evaluations.

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[22] Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov. *Lolita*. New York: Knopf, 1992. 3.

[23] Nabokov. *Lolita*. 358

'Aestheticism', an art movement of the 19th century, inter alia, advanced the autonomy of art. Supporters of the movement such as Oscar Wilde and Samuel Taylor Coleridge opposed the search of moral grounding and as an alternative contemplated beauty for beauty's sake. French politician and writer, Benjamin Constant, first used the phrase 'l'art pour l'art' in 1804; a catchphrase that bannered the 'Aestheticism' movement and its hostility towards the instruction or consolation of morality, politics and to an extent, pleasure.

One further concept is Formalism.[24] Advocates of Formalism in the analysis of art, in most cases, will tend to be Autonomists as they both evaluate the aesthetic value of art irrespective of historical, social and moral conditions. However, it is important to note that Formalism does not prohibit moral issues to be a part of a work's subject matter, but simply claims that any moral issues that arise from its content is irrelevant to the aesthetic value and should not influence the critic's aesthetic response to the work.

In this respect, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a documentary of the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party rally is one of cinema's greatest challenges to the Formalist claim. *Triumph of the Will* is argued to be at once devoted to beauty and evil; a documentary that is as much an aesthetic exercise as it is a political exercise. Mary Devereaux argues that *Triumph of the Will* challenges Formalism precisely because the content and form, both beauty and evil seem inseparable.[25] Devereux argues that Formalism is an inadequate approach to the film because its power derives from, and demands, both aesthetic appreciation and analysis of its content. To value the film merely by its form (cinematography, composition, etc.) is to ignore its content and the fact that its form is central to the film's intention - the propagation of the Nazi ideals.

The film form is inherent to the experience, to the narrative and to the prescription of an emotion or ideology - the content. Moreover, the symbiosis between form and content of the film medium is unique in relation to other performing arts. On this basis, the Formalist argument and for that matter, the Autonomist argument is weakened. To radically separate form from content is to minimize the many potential ways which art and especially film can be aesthetically valued.

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[24] Formalism is the emphasis on the form as opposed to content and meaning. In the arts, Formalism focuses on the visual aspects such as style, composition, colors.

[25] Mary Devereaux. "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will." *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. Levinson 242.

Moreover, Formalism is unable to take into account that certain forms of art are bound to their social and cultural values.

Moderate Moralism and Moderate Autonomism

The flaws of Moralism and Autonomism at their extreme have ultimately led the current discourse to seek alternatives of different strengths. The less extreme are Moderate Moralism and Moderate Autonomism. Moderate Autonomism (hereafter MA) does not deny the ethical assessment of a work, however, as its extreme counterpart, it still maintains the position that ethical judgment is autonomous of aesthetic judgment. A work's moral attitudes or views cannot be counted for or against its aesthetic value. Moderate Moralism (hereafter MM) agrees that the moral dimension is not the sole determinate of the aesthetic value. However, MM does hold that ethical evaluation is a necessary criterion for aesthetic evaluation; that a work is aesthetically flawed insofar as it is ethically flawed.

MA and MM: Points of Conflict

Points of conflict between Moderate Autonomism and Moderate Moralism:

1. It is crucial to understand that MA differs from Radical Autonomism in the respect that moral features may possess and instigate other qualities, such as complexity or coherence and intensity, which contribute to the aesthetic worth of works.[26] For example, if a film endorses ethically commendable attitudes, it does not entail that the work is to any degree aesthetically meritorious. Despite the film's intention, it may present a reality or ideology which is too simplistic or contrarily too dense and thus incoherent. Likewise, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is morally highly problematic due to its suggestion that the Klu Klux Klan "restored order" in the post-war South with justice. According to the Moderate Autonomist, truth and moral dilemmas are irrelevant to aesthetic merit, however they do instigate the complexities and intensity of the film - aspects that are aesthetically relevant (see Immoralism pp.22-24). The 'virtue theorist' would argue against this claim and state that the intensity, coherence and in particular the complexity is not only an aesthetic virtue or vice but an ethical one. A work that presents a situation without its complexities does not endorse critical, nuanced thinking or broaden

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[26] Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. 77.

understanding and therefore is subject to ethical criticism. Furthermore, the Moderate Moralist can argue that there are attitudes such as 'killing for the sake of killing' that are immensely and blatantly evil to the extent that they cannot accommodate aesthetic value to any complexity.

2. Radical Autonomism and MA both hold an 'anti-consequentialist' objection. Both dispositions claim that there is no evidence towards the harmful or edifying effects of art (the causal claim). Although MM too distances itself from the negative causal thesis (that bad art corrupts), it does defend its counterpart, a version of the positive causal thesis, that good art morally improves its audience. Martha Nussbaum is the strongest advocate for the positive causal thesis; that good art has the capacity to play an important role in moral education. Nussbaum, as other Moderate Moralists, agrees that some works of art such as abstract formalist paintings can be aesthetically contemplated without asking ethical evaluation. However, Nussbaum asserts that it is "highly unlikely that a responsive reading of any complex literary works is utterly detached from concerns about time and death, about pain and transcendence from pain - all the material of 'how one should live' questions as I have conceived it".[27] One must apply moral knowledge in order to fully appreciate and understand a literary or narrative work. Literature, film, or any form of narrative art cannot be neutralized from ethical questioning and moreover narrative art plays a role in perpetuating the education of this questioning.

3. An argument for MM is the 'Common Reason Argument' which is mainly advocated and established by the Moderate Moralist, Noel Carroll. Carroll argues that in some cases, a moral defect in an artwork will prevent full engagement with the work and thus count as an aesthetic defect.[28] According to Carroll, the graphic brutality in Bret Ellis's *American Psycho* prevents the reader from reading the book as intended, i.e. to be comical and as a parody.[29] In this case, moral judgment determines artistic judgment: the moral disgust that prevented the intended, the prescribed experience of *American Psycho* is as much as an ethical defect as an aesthetic one- they are due to a common reason. Carroll's claim is based upon the premise that aesthetic value, the 'success' of a work, is partially determined by the empirical experience of it.

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[27] Ella Peek. "Ethical Criticism of Art". *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ISSN 2161-0002, n.d. Web. 21 Dec. 2014.
[28] Noël Carroll. "Moderate Moralism" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.3 (1996): 223-38. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.
[29] Carroll. "Moderate Moralism". 223-38.

4. James Anderson and Jeffery Dean argue that the 'Common Reason Argument' is not sufficient to establish neither moral defectiveness nor aesthetic defectiveness.[30] In the case of *American Psycho* the fact that the vulgarity, when read by an empirical audience, subverts the possibility of uptake, is not sufficient to be counted as an aesthetic defect. In other words, the fact that that the audience did not find the novel comical or could not fully engage in a film because of its morality is not sufficient for it to be considered aesthetically defective. The demographic profile of audiences of change: maybe now or 20 years later, the novel may be claimed as a comical success. Carroll counters Anderson and Dean's argument and states that a claim does not need to be a sufficient in order to be relevant.[31] There is certain pluralism in the MM view; ethics is not the sole criterion for aesthetic value. Although ethics plays a central role, it is only one among many other criterions in the aesthetical assessment of a work. Carroll articulates specifically that some works of art may be evaluated morally (contra Radical Autonomism) and that sometimes the moral defects and/or merits of a work may figure in the aesthetic evaluation of the work.[32] In the case of film, the 'common reason argument', can be specific to the medium because it centralizes 'experience' and 'engagement'. A film that does not succeed in engaging its audience for moral reasons has sufficient grounds for aesthetic defectiveness.

5. The main and maybe strongest argument of MM, tackles MA specifically but it also tackles all dispositions that are characterized by Autonomism. Anderson and Dean, in defense of MA present a taxonomy of works such as *Triumph of the Will* where moral flaws override aesthetic virtues or contrarily *The Merchant of Venice* where aesthetic virtues override the moral flaws. Moreover, they give the example of *Lolita* where there is no verdict regarding virtues and vices but rather where "one's moral sensibilities and one's aesthetic sensibilities are in conflict". Moreover, they claim that "these are no cases in which there is a conflict internal to one's aesthetic dimension".[33] The Moderate Moralist claims that there is an aesthetical flaw insofar that the work has an ethical flaw

[30] James C. Anderson and Jefferey T. Dean. "Moderate Autonomism". *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38.2 (1998): 150-66. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

[31] Noël Carroll. "Moderate Moralism Versus Moderate Autonomism." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38.4 (1998): 419-24. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

[32] Carroll, "Moderate Moralism". 236.

[33] Anderson and Dean. "Moderate Autonomism". 164–6.

and therefore in contrast to MA, the conflict is also present in aesthetic dimensions. MM establishes the internality of the conflict by pointing out that the Moderate Autonomist cannot account for conflict if they deny that that the conflict is internal. If external to each other, on what grounds does the conflict aesthetic and ethics take place? How can aesthetics 'override' ethics and vice versa if there is no basic presumption of a dependency between them? We are conflicted with the morally problematic content of Lolita because we assume, even if unconsciously so, that the moral flaws condition the aesthetics of the novel. The tension, the conflict is internal to aesthetic judgment.

6. 'Aesthetic attitude' has long been the springboard for MA. 'Aesthetic attitude' is generally defined in terms of disengagement or detachment from practical concerns.[34] This notion is not concerned with the existence of the object, but adopts a purely contemplative attitude towards it. Morality concerns the practical, it serves as a standard that governs actions and therefore does not apply or is irrelevant to the contemplative, aesthetic attitude. Gaut personally argues against the notion that aesthetic attitude is merely a contemplative attitude.[35] He claims that to adopt an aesthetic attitude is to adopt a practical one; an artist makes practical artistic decisions according to an aesthetic attitude. Moreover, canons (what is considered as 'classics') of every medium and field are defined inter alia by aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment practically has influence on education, culture, politics, etc. Furthermore, even if one is to adopt a purely contemplative attitude towards art, this does not dismiss moral evaluation. For example, our attitudes towards historical figures such as Stalin or Napoleon is not practical for their pasts cannot be altered, however, this does not minimize our ethical criticism of them.

Ethicism

In Gaut's version and defense of ethical criticism, 'Ethicism', he holds that: "the ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works, such that if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious".

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[34] Berys Nigel Gaut. "Art and Ethics". *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. ed. Berys Nigel. Gaut and Dominic Lopes. London: Routledge, 2001 341-52.
[35] Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. 82.

Distinguishing Ethicism

How does Ethicism differ from or is similar to MM? The MM mainly differs from Ethicism in scope. The difference and complication between the two dispositions are presented below:

1. In terms of scope, Carroll himself states that his case is more limited in scope than Gaut's. Carroll states that "Gaut seems willing to consider virtually every moral defect in a work of art an aesthetic defect, whereas I defend a far weaker claim – namely that *sometimes* a moral defect in an artwork can count as an aesthetic defect".[36] MM is genre-relative. Carroll claims that only for "certain genres, moral comment, along with formal comment is natural and appropriate...".[37] MM concentrates on narrative works of art, works of art that have the capacity to engage our 'moral powers'.

2. MM applies its claim to 'morally sensitive audiences'. Carroll gives a clarification as to how his version on Moralism is moderate: [38]

   > "Artworks can be immensely subtle in terms of their moral commitments. Morally defective portrayals may elude even morally sensitive audiences and may require careful interpretation to be unearthed. But the Moderate Moralist will not, in addition, criticize them aesthetically if they are so subtle as to escape a morally sensitive audience. Moderate Moralism is not, then, committed to the proposition that every moral defect in an artwork is an aesthetic defect."

   The 'common reason argument' of MM is built upon the premise that the failure or success of a narrative to engage and to move is aesthetically relevant. In order to strengthen and uphold this claim, MM applies the argument to an ambiguous 'morally sensitive audience'. This 'audience' not only is capable of detecting ethical status in narrative works but also responds in ways that are ethically appropriate. MM minimizes the spectrum of people to which ethical criticism is relevant. Meaning, the type of person that relishes, enjoys and engages in brutal violence on screen and the person that leaves the cinema after any hint of violence are both extremes that are excluded from the spectrum of the 'morally sensitive'.

   Due to the fact that the 'morally sensitive audience' is a central in the MM argument, scholars consider that Carroll's concept introduces an Autonomist element into the claim

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[36] Carroll. "Moderate Moralism versus Moderate Autonomism". 419.
[37] Carroll. "Moderate Moralism". 229.
[38] Peek. "Ethical Criticism of Art".

or otherwise allows MM to collapse into Ethicism altogether. In accord with this claim MM takes into consideration works of art that embody moral defects in such subtle ways that morally sensitive audiences will not be able to detect them. Allowing these moral defects as exceptions, amount to introducing an element of Autonomism into Carroll's Moderate Moralism.[39] Furthermore, although distinguishing a 'morally sensitive audience' helps avoid relativism and explaining moral and aesthetic value in terms of popular opinion, Oliver Conolly points out that MM's reliance on a normative element leads to a collapse of MM into Ethicism.[40] The ideal audience is defined by their ability to detect moral virtues/defects and to respond accordingly, hence, "... 'morally sensitive audiences' will always react favorably to moral virtue and unfavorably to moral vice. That, is therefore, what makes them morally sensitive".[41] In taking caution and enclosing an ideal audience, the moral features *will always* be aesthetic features and thus eliminates any moderate components of the thesis.

Although Conolly does point upon problems that are inherent to the Moderate Moralist claim, MM does not completely 'collapse' into Ethicism because MM includes the causal thesis, a component to which Ethicism adamantly objects. Carroll's 'common reason argument' depends on an ideal audience and the effects a narrative has on the 'morally sensitive audience'. Ethicism, contrarily, does not contain the causal thesis; it does not depend on an actual or ideal audience. Gaut's Ethicism is construed by the response that the audience ought to give, hence the response the narrative deserves is independent of whether it in fact receives them. Ethicism makes every attitude that is manifested towards some object or affair artistically relevant.

In terms of similarities between the two dispositions, MM is similar to Ethicism as they both deny sufficiency claims. Ethicism is based upon a *pro tanto* principle: the ethical dimension counts towards the aesthetic evaluation, but is neither necessary nor sufficient to account for it. Gaut states Ethicism makes an 'all-things-considered judgment' and that "one should hold that works are aesthetically flawed in so far as they have an aesthetically relevant ethical flaw, but

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[39] Alessandro Giovannelli. "Artistic and Ethical Values in the Experience of Narratives." Diss. U of Maryland, 2004. 156. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.
[40] Peek. "Ethical Criticism of Art".
[41] Peek. "Ethical Criticism of Art".

they may have other, compensating aesthetic merits, which outweigh these defects."[42] In order to make judgment of an art work, one must take into consideration a complete set of prescriptions in order to discover what attitudes manifest. The audience's response prescribed by an individual character may differ from the overall attitude of the work. The *pro tanto* articulation of Ethicism allows a flexibility and grants the freedom to claim works that are tainted morally as aesthetic successes.

Immoralism

The taxonomy of positions presented thus far leave for one final logical position -Immoralism. Immoralism, in contrast to Moralism, holds that the ethical defects of an artwork contribute to the aesthetic worth of the work and conversely that works are aesthetically worse as a result of their morally virtuous features. For example, Quentin Tarantino's films are regarded as aesthetic successes predominantly because of the immoral attitudes presented towards their visual violence. Furthermore, overly pedagogical or morally virtuous works of art are considered as aesthetic failures.

The 'cognitive argument' for Immoralism claims that the imaginative experience afforded by immoral artworks can be more rewarding because of their immoral nature. The cognitive responses to artwork, especially narrative fiction differ from the way one responds to situations in real life. Violence in film can be considered funny or even strangely appropriate, however, if one is to witness the same scenes of violence in real life, it would be highly unacceptable, callous and horrifying. Therefore, in the interaction with fiction one is able to imagine, engage with and approve of many counter-factual and immoral characters and situations that we would not approve of in normal life.[43] Fiction allows one to momentarily suspend oneself from the beliefs and desires that one holds in real life and explore through the imagination the beliefs of others. Immoral art, not only can explore the belief of others but allows one to attain perspectives that are radically different from one's own, thus creating an experience that is both liberating and cognitively beneficial. The 'cognitive argument' claims that the immorality of some artworks

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[42] Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. 79.

[43] A.R. Duckworth. "Moral Evaluations of Artworks Part VI – Immoralism". Web log post. The Motley View: The Journal of Film, Art and Aesthetics. Wordpress, 4 Nov. 2011. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

directly contribute to the aesthetic worth because the immorality offers a distinct experience that is aesthetically merited.

Criticism of Immoralism

Critics of Immoralism challenge the notion that the relationship between the immorality and aesthetic is linear. Does one enjoy the aesthetic experience precisely because of its immorality? Earlier in this chapter, it is noted that the Moderate Autonomist claim is familiar to the Immoralist claim. MA states that aesthetics and ethics are still autonomous, however, there are qualities such as coherence and complexity which ethics can instigate, that are under aesthetic judgment. Coherence and complexity are midway agents between aesthetics and ethics whilst each philosophical realm keeps individually autonomous. According to Immoralism, the violence in Tarantino's films can be considered as one of the reasons for its aesthetic success. However if one is to establish this claim on the 'cognitive argument', the violence does not cause aesthetic merit but rather it is the 'cognitively-beneficial' experience (the midway agent) which conditions the aesthetic merit. The cognitive argument for Immoralism ultimately collapses into a version of the Moderate Autonomist claim, as they both employ a midway agent. For example, considering the term 'kitsch' as a classic example of Immoralism:

a. According to 'virtuest' ethical criticism, a one-dimensional perspective is a morally defective perspective.

b. One criterion for Kitsch art is that it "evokes emotion and is enjoyed in an effortless way".[44]

c. A one-dimensional perspective contributes to the immediacy and the effortless enjoyment of the kitsch art.

From 'a, b and c', a morally defective perspective contributes to the aesthetic success of kitsch art. If the perspective was complex, multi-faceted and difficult to understand, it would undermine one of the main criteria for kitsch art.

Even in the example of kitsch, it is not the one-dimensional perspective that is directly under aesthetic judgment but rather the immediacy and effortlessness of emotional effect. The deployment of the midway agent keeps the aesthetics and ethics autonomous and therefore the Immoralist claim falls again under Moderate Autonomism. The Immoralist claim, however, does

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[44] Tomáš Kulka. *Kitsch and Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State, 1996. 37.

deserve a place in an individual subcategory under MA because MA does not specify whether an ethical or unethical perspective is more apt to instigate qualities under aesthetic judgment. This is contrary to Immoralism, which claims that it is specifically the immoral perspectives that instigate the qualities under aesthetic judgment.

Furthermore, Stecker and Harold claim that the qualities that make works aesthetically better are not as Immoralists think, morally bad.[45] According to the 'cognitive argument' for Immoralism, the immoral perspectives in artwork offer a distinct imaginative experience unavailable to morally correct artworks. The distinct ability to experience perspectives that differ from one's own is considered under 'virtue theory' as actually morally virtuous. What Immoralists consider as morally bad is established in the cognitive argument as morally good. In Tarantino's film, the morally defective disposition towards violence forces the viewer to momentarily experience the mindset of a serial killer, a slave trader or a ninja. It is the psychological, cultural and ethical understandings and the virtues that one fosters from these characters that make the films aesthetic successes.

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[45] Sondra Bacharach and James Harold. "Aesthetic and Artistic Value". *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*. By Anna Christina Ribeiro. London: Continuum, 2012. 110.

Summary: Aesthetic Dispositions

The different aesthetic dispositions that have been described above will be discussed in context of the three films that are the subject of this extended essay. The summary below and the chart (see Figure 1.6) serve as a quick reference to the complex and multiple dispositions cited in this chapter.

Short definitions of all the aesthetics dispositions discussed:

- **Radical Autonomism** or '**Aestheticism**' - ethics and aesthetics are completely autonomous from each other.
- **Radical Moralism** - ethics is the super determinant of aesthetics. If a work of art is not ethical, it is not aesthetic.
- **Moderate Autonomism (MA)**- aesthetics and ethics are autonomous from each other. However, ethics can instigate qualities such as coherence and complexity which are subjected to aesthetic judgment.
- **Moderate Moralism (MM)** - ethical defects are aesthetic defects and ethical virtues are aesthetically meritorious. However the ethical defects does not make the artwork aesthetically defective as a whole. Ethics is only one among many aesthetic criterions.
- **Ethicism -** if a work 'manifests' an ethically defective reprehensible attitude it is to that extent aesthetically defective.
- **Immoralism** - a work is aesthetically meritorious if aesthetically defective and aesthetically worse as a result of moral features.
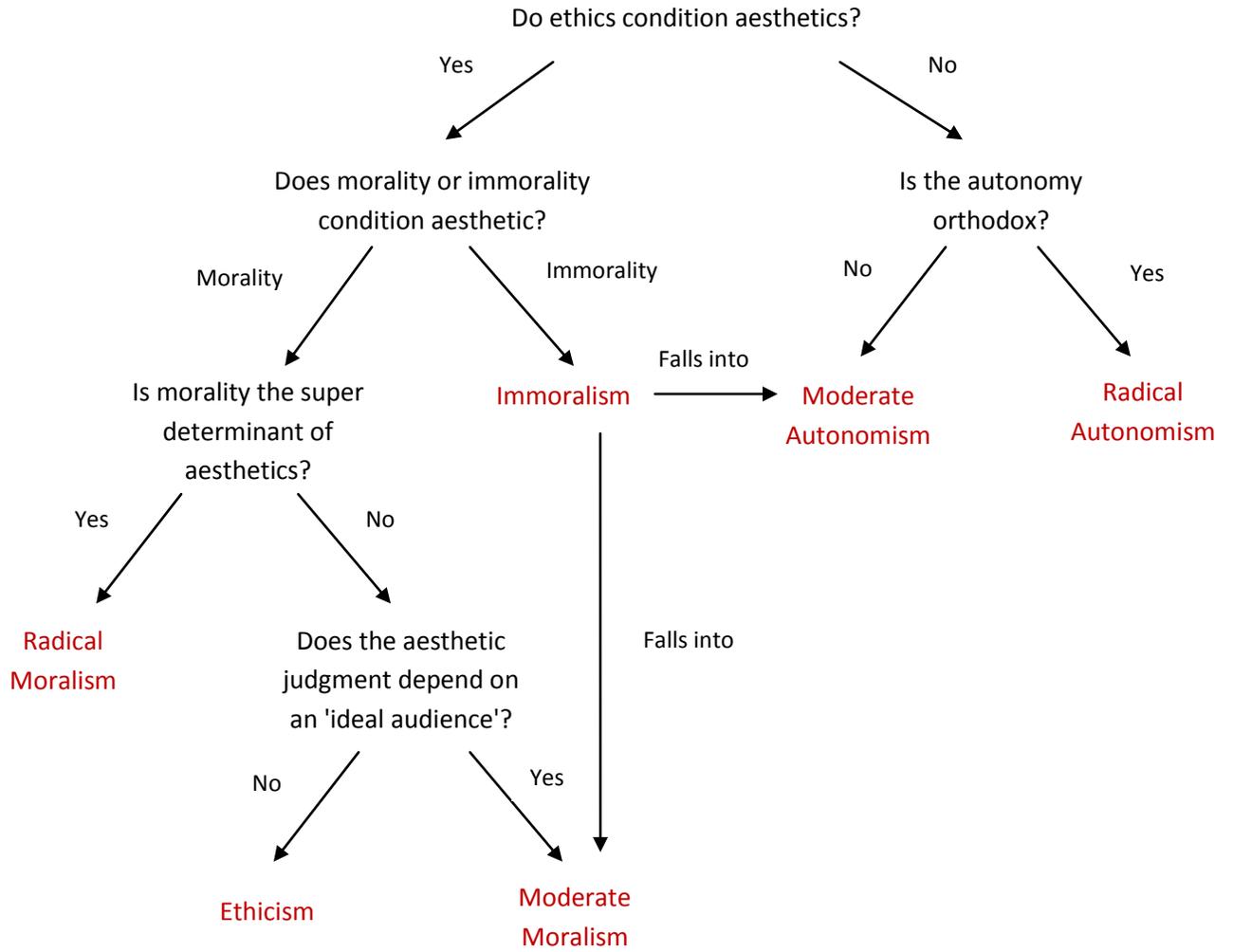
Figure 1.6 Aesthetic dispositions

Badlands: Casual Violence

Terrence Malick

The 1970s in North America opened the decade with an epitaph to the monetary woes of the nation as a whole during the first half of the decade. With U.S theatres facing a financial slump, filmmakers were obliged and felt compelled to produce films that transcended the standard Hollywood fare. Bloated epics, mindless star vehicles and juvenile musicals were no longer satisfactory for the changing demographic; an audience, younger, affluent, college-educated and culturally conscious of cinematic retrograde.

With *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* as the initial shocks to the system along with the cultivation of film-school educated, counter-culture bred, young filmmakers - renaissance was under way. Influenced deeply by European art film, Japanese cinema as well as the 'avant-garde' and documentary techniques, new filmmakers rose to prominence, nourishing their audiences with films that were political and engaged. Terrence Malick's debut with *Badlands* in 1973 stands out from the growing repertoire of these young filmmakers. The film possesses a poise and magisterial fluidity that contrasts with its raw, powered and restless contemporaries in the coined 'New American Cinema'.

Terrence Malick's films vex viewers and critics alike, due to the breach in their technical details and thus their enigmatic nature. Malick's films are at once extremely fecund and extremely reticent, and a similar comment may be said about the filmmaker himself.[46] The films, with the exception of *Badlands*, did not attain any promotions, nor any form of commentary or documentation upon their release. Set out on a 'Kubrickian' high road, Malick receded into an unconventional vow of silence, allowing no further cameos, interviews or photographs. In a case where viewers are left to approach film without any authorial instruction, biographical details inherently contextualize and with instances, misleadingly, all interpretation.

From the very few interviews with the director, Malick shares that he spent many summers working as a farmhand in harvests and oilfields (both experiences that he would draw

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[46] Thomas Deane Tucker and Stuart Kendall. Introduction. *Terrence Malick: Film and Philosophy*. ed. Thomas Deane Tucker and Stuart Kendall. New York: Continuum, 2011. 3.

extensively in his films). Moreover, when asked in an interview with Michel Ciment for *Postif* about the violence in *Badlands,* Malick replies with an observation of his childhood: "I was raised in a violent environment in Texas. What struck me was how violence erupted and ended before you really had time to understand what was happening".

Malick completed his studies in philosophy at Harvard under the acclaimed film-philosopher Stanley Cavell. Upon graduating from Harvard with a degree in philosophy, he entered Magdalen College in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar as continuation of his doctorate on Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. In 1969, Malick published what is still the authoritative translation of Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons.* Though his course of profession at the time lead towards an academic career in philosophy, prior to completing his final thesis, he became a freelance journalist for *Life* and *The New Yorker*.

Whilst financing himself through journalism, Malick was appointed to be a lecturer of philosophy at MIT. Finding the position unsuitable and following what is self-described as his 'naive'[47] interest in film, he enrolled himself into an inaugural class at American Film Institute (AFI). In retrospect, AFI's Advanced Film Studies in Los Angeles was at the time, an incubator for film-school formed directors. The institute established the likes of David Lynch, Paul Schrader and Malick's prime collaborator and art director, Jack Fisk. In the third year of his studies at AFI, Malick began drafting scripts of his directional debut, *Badlands*.

"I knew that a big studio would be interested in the film, but I wouldn't be able to control its production. So I decided to produce an independent film... much like a Broadway show".[48] Malick testified in his interview the commitment to the virtue of the story and the necessity of precision of production under personal creative instruction. In consequence, the film's budget was comprised of both independent investors and the courtesy of Ed Pressman, a close friend of the Malick himself. The production itself under the mere budget of 350,000 dollars caused strain on the time and moreover created additional tensions between the working team. Malick quarreled with his crew, replacing two cameramen before settling into a satisfactory

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[47] Michaels, Lloyd. *Terrence Malick*. n.p.: U of Illinois, 2009. 101.
[48] Lloyd. *Terrence Malick.* 4.

collaboration with his colleague, Steven Lamer.[49] During the six weeks of filming in Southeast Colorado, The Dustbowl and South Dakota, the production was confronted with both severe technical difficulties and budget cuts. The serene fire scene in the film, at live, went awry and caused the explosion of a camera and severely injured members of the crew. Furthermore, Malick recounts the budget running dry halfway through the shoot and the hurried improvisations in its course: "We were shooting on private properties without authorization" and filming with an unblimped camera- "to speed things up". The film ultimately cost around 950,00 dollars to complete and Warner Brothers bought the distribution rights for about 1.1 million dollars, making for its investors a slight return. In spite of the film's minor financial success, the final product of *Badlands* bore little resemblance to its tempestuous genesis, thus garnering both accolades and critical acclaim on its festival circuit.

Badlands, Terrence Malick's cinematic debut serves as an example of his work ethic; a precision and unrushed economy that proves his personal and creative capability to transcend the momentary predicaments of production. Furthermore, the film, if observed in context with his later films, insinuates to be a stylistic and thematic blueprint; a plot derived from lore and myth of the popular American imagination, voice-over narration, the rendered contrast between civilization and nature, symbolically loaded visuals and most notably, fire, rivers, wheat fields, among other things.[50] Amidst similarities and persistent individuality, Malick's films are proximate to an ambiguous biographical complex. A complex where evident knowledge of history, philosophy, religion, art, music, literature and affinity to the natural world inherently permeate through film. Writer, philosopher and filmmaker, Malick devotes himself to all crafts if separately or collectively with the equal fidelity and gravity.

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[49] Michael Almereyda. "Badlands: Misfits". *The Criterion Collection*. The Criterion Collection, Mar. 2013. Web. 19 Dec. 2014.

[50] Tucker and Kendall. Introduction. 6.

Nature and Violence

Nature and all its embodiments are quintessential to Terrence Malick's cinema. Whether it is the coastal forests of New England in *The New World* (2005) or the vast wheat fields in the Texan plains in *Days of Heaven* (1978), Malick, more than other directors, is devoted to the American landscape with a reverence and gravity that make his cinematic environments crucial to a deeper understanding of the films themselves. The varying thematic readings of the films inevitably bring forth opposing interpretations of his depictions of nature.

One prominent reading is specifically of *The Thin Red Line* (1998). The reading expresses a naturalistic conception of nature; nature as being "cruel", a warring force that frames human drama and yet is utterly indifferent to human purposes and intentions.[51] In contrast to this, there are readings of *The Thin Red Line* and Malick's other films as 'Edenic Myth'. These readings recognize in the films, characteristics of Biblical myth; nature being the manifestation of a "higher good". Robert Silberman identifies the natural world and the landscape as components that are essential to understand *The Thin Red Line*: "It is in the visuals of the landscape . . . that Malick is able to most clearly express his vision of the world as paradise and paradise lost".[52] Nature in *The Thin Line*, as in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven,* provide a backdrop "for a movement from innocence to experience haunted by a dream of paradise". Furthermore, a third reading brings a Transcendentalist interpretation to the films; echoing Emersonian views. Malick's nature is interpreted as a commodity of communal spirituality which can be achieved through isolated communion with the flora and fauna.

Terrence Malick's treatment of landscape and nature bides the viewers to acknowledge nature's potential for cultural meaning.[53] His films produce a kind of common meaning and reaction in the audience due to his use of recognizable geographical spaces and narrative contexts that anchor the spectator in a familiar setting.[54] *Badlands* relates to essential philosophical and ethical issues by examining key iconographic images of America, of the 'badlands', that charge the

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[51] Davies, David. "Terrence Malick". Livingston and Plantinga 573.

[52] Davies. "Terrence Malick". 574.

[53] Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner. "Cinema and Landscape". Introduction. *Cinema and Landscape*. ed. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2010. 24.

[54] Ben McCann. "'Enjoying the Scenery': Landscape and the Fetishisation of Nature in Badlands and Days of Heaven." *The Cinema of Terrence Malick Poetic Visions of America, Second Edition*. ed. Hannah Patterson. New York: Columbia, 2012. 78.

narrative with ideological, political and emotional significance. Malick invites viewers to meditate upon the landscape's significance as bound to the particular 'situatedness' of the human being who occupies it.[55] Using the three veins of interpretation, this chapter will try to articulate the interrelation between nature and violence in order to understand the aesthetic functions that Malick employs to portray morality or, in this case, the apparent lack of it.

'Naturally' violent

In one way or another, all of Malick's films deal with different periods in American history. On film, these pockets of time are contoured with American violence and conflicts that are generational, political, military or familial. The violence varies in its impact; from being world-changing to merely domestic and tabloid.[56] Trudging through the narratives are also characters of violent temperament: soldiers, warriors, arsonists and in *Badlands*, outlaws. The films contain and portray what Pvt. Witt in *Thin Red Line*, calls a "war at the heart of nature". Simon Critchley writes that this "war at the heart of nature" inherently has dual meaning, "suggesting both a war internal to nature and the human war that is being fought amid such immense natural beauty".[57] To take this thought further, Witt's comment also suggests that this 'war', the violence, is identified with an overarching 'Malickian' interest in the 'nature' of human nature.[58]

In *Badlands*, moments before setting off with Holly on their escapade, Kit douses her house with petrol, setting alight the piano, the food, the furniture and the corpse of Holly's murdered father. The flames that rise are accompanied to Carl Orff's choral music that plays in the background. Fire is both symbolic of violence and an act of violence in itself (see Figure 2.1-2.2).[59] Furthermore, a close-up of a locust nibbling on wheat spikelet or, more distinctively in *Days of Heaven*, a myriad of locusts that plague the wheat crop, both demonstrate nature's violent qualities (see Figure 2.3-2.4). Nature is externalized, a force of subliminal destruction (and reproduction) that creates violent ruinations and is indifferent to man's individual ambitions or motivations. Even badlands as a terrain, is violent in its ragged moonscapes, saw-tooth divides

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[55] Thomas Deane Tucker. "Worlding the West: An Ontopology of Badlands". Tucker and Kendall 82.

[56] John Bleasdale. "Terrence Malick's Histories of Violence". Tucker and Kendall 42.

[57] Simon Critchley. "Calm- On Terrence Malick's Thin Red Line". *The Thin Red Line*. ed. David Davies. London: Routledge, 2009. 25.

[58] David. "Terrence Malick". 574.

[59] Bleasdale. "Terrence Malick's Histories of Violence". 41.

and formations of rock and clay that form and erode in response to the irregular rain fall. Nature runs its course, its biology violent and its topography inhospitable. Thus, the terrains of *Badlands* are inevitably inhabited by renegades seeking refuge in places 'beyond the law' and invite violent human dramas to unfold within them.

Figure 2.1 Kit sets Holly's house on fire (*Badlands*)

Figure 2.2 The fire devouring the furniture (*Badlands*)

Figure 2.3 Locust nibbling on wheat spikelet (*Days of Heaven*)

Figure 2.4 Plague of locusts (*Days of Heaven*)

Malick, a protégée of Arthur Penn, whom he thanks in the credits to *Badlands*, was heavily influenced by Penn's films, especially *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). Although, Penn's film and *Badlands* share similarities both in narrative and genre, it is necessary to compare the two films because of their different portrayals of violence. *Bonnie and Clyde* is known to have ignited 'New Hollywood' and to have kindled its tone. The last scene and shoot-out, a visual trope, became then, the prototype and normative language of screen violence in American cinema. The scene begins with Bonnie (Fay Dunaway) and Clyde (Warren Beatty) driving down a dirt road, laughing as they come across C.W. Moss's father waving them down. The couple stops the car to talk to the man, not realizing that Frank Hamer and other sheriffs were hiding in the bushes. They open fire on the couple, unleashing their automatic guns on the unsuspecting lovers. In the intense choreography of gun violence, the couple's bodies jerk convulsively under the machine-gun blitz. Though the bullet-hits themselves are not clearly visualized, their bodies like crash test

dummies,[60] convulse under fire to create a visual rendition of a physically violent death. A cross-cut series of three shots show, first, in a middle shot, Clyde's body in midair, second, in sequence, shots of his bullet-riddled upper body and finally his head hitting the ground. Likewise, a slow-motion effect is created by separating the action with multiple shots: Bonnie's body in the car hangs out and falls to a series of three shots and five frames. The first and last frames are long shots of the automobile and rest are middle close-ups of her upper torso in different angles. Towards the end of the scene, frames of Clyde palpating on the ground intersect Bonnie's final fall (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 Bonnie's fall. View from left to right. (*Bonnie and Clyde*)

Stephen Prince, referring to *Scarface* (1932), asserts that the stylistic choices (slow-motion, violent editing) bring the deaths to maximum emotional effect and the same can be said about Penn's final shoot out: "The editing prolongs the moment of violence to shift its emphasis...from a depiction of violent death to an extended observation of violent passage, of *dying* as a process that takes time and that exhibits its own telltale visual signs".

Badlands is Malick's cinematic debut and the only film where there is self- issued publicity. In a rare interview with Michel Ciment, Malick draws upon his childhood and its influences on the film: "I was raised in a violent atmosphere in Texas. What struck me was how violence erupted and ended before you really had time to understand what was happening. Take, for instance, Lee

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[60] Penn in an interview with NPR (1989) mentions the system of camera settings which he developed to create both slow-motion and spastic effects in the scene: "The intention there was to get this kind of spastic motion of genuine violence, and at the same time, the attenuation of time that one experiences when you see something, like a terrible automobile accident...".

Harvey Oswald's murder by Ruby: "it took place in a flash…". In *Badlands*, Kit is responsible for a total of eight deaths (if the young couple dispatched in the storm shelter is taken into account). Whether knowingly or not, all the killings are rushed, sudden or seemingly by accident.

Kit's killing of the father is portrayed to be casual and even the result of panicked improvisation. In the scene, Holly's father (Warren Oates), visibly frightened by the warning gunshots to the floor, walks down the stairs towards the telephone and Kit, losing his cool, rushes down, and almost without thinking, shoots him- "he was provoking me, so I popped him". The camera only dedicates two quick shots to Kit shooting and immediately turns to the surprised father, helping himself with one hand on to the carpet. The camera does not *glamorize* the shooting or the death, the act is set in real-time (as opposed to *Bonnie and Clyde*) and the bloodshed is kept to a minimum (see Figure 2.6). Even the aftermath of the murder unfolds with a disturbing normalcy; Kit flexes his arms, places a cigarette between his lips and blatantly comments to Holly "I found the toaster" after he deposits the body in the cellar. Holly herself rushes to her father and strokes his cheek and naively insisting to call the doctor. Even when Holly does feel compelled to disclose frustration or anger about the death, she slaps Kit as if to fulfill a necessary stylistic gesture.[61] Holly molds herself into a tabloid identity that complements the detached cool machismo of Kit, her 'partner in crime'.

Though the predicaments of the murders vary in the narrative, the first killing committed, sets the tone for the killings that follow. Kit shoots Cato, his friend from the garbage route, from afar in a field when he notices him hastily distancing himself. After shooting Cato, Kit politely opens the door and Cato hobbles in and the three trivially chat. Likewise, Holly and Kit talk amiably with the young couple before they are sent into an underground shelter and shot; the young couple pose no real threat and thus with Kit's already established status of a killer in mind, the two supposed deaths serve no clear narrative function.[62] Furthermore, if in *Bonnie and Clyde* the violence climaxes to the deafening havoc of bullet shots, in *Badlands* the violence is muffled against Holly's guileless voice-over. Regardless whether or not the killings are justified, Holly in her voice-over narration presents an empathetic explanation. For example, Holly tells the viewers after Kit ambushes the bounty hunters on the turf of their 'Edenic' hideaway that:

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[61] Bleasdale. "Terrence Malick's Histories of Violence". 52.

[62] Hannah Patterson. "Two Characters in the Search for Direction: Motivation and the Construction of Identity in *Badlands*". Patterson 33.

"Kit felt bad about shooting those men in the back, but he said they'd come in like that, and they would've played it as down and dirty as they could. And besides, he'd overheard them whispering about how they were only interested in the reward money. With lawmen, it would've been different. They were out there to get a job done and they deserved a fair chance…"

In the same manner, after Cato is shot, Holly contemplates: "Kit never let on why he'd shot Cato. He said that just talking about it could bring us bad luck and that right now, we needed all the luck we could get".

Figure 2.6 The shooting of Holly's Father (*Badlands*)

Apart from the bounty hunters, a shooting that resembles a more typical Hollywood action scene, the killings of Kit are underlined with a summary quickness and a banality. Michael Chion claims about *The Thin Red Line* that Malick's violence is typified by restraint: "violence is at once very present and unreal, both because it is hardly or never mentioned and because the director avoids any overly explicit display of its effect on bodies, such as corpses, the impact of bullets, blood flowing and wounds".[63] What Chion claims for *The Thin Red Line* can be said too for *Badlands*; the violence in *Badlands* offers little aesthetic lingering.[64] Malick does not attempt to depict a ballet of bloodshed or paint the action with cinematic gloss. Unlike the visual tantrums of Oliver Stone or the facetious dark humor of Tarantino, Malick's violence does not turn to overkill nor does it resort to the conventional cinematic grammar of violence.

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[63] Michel Chion. *The Thin Red Line.* London: BFI, 2004. 16.
[64] Bleasdale. "Terrence Malick's Histories of Violence". 54.

The well-known narrative of the outlaw couple a la Bonnie and Clyde implies already a *sequence* of killings. Moreover, the asymmetry between the banality of the violence and its catastrophic consequences comes to emphasize the ubiquitous presence of immorality. It is mostly the seemingly insignificant shots in *Badlands* that portray this presence: the dead dogs by the side of the road in the film's opening or Kit in the feedlot, carelessly stepping on a cow, testing its mortality. The violence is casual and sequential at every point in time; it is an inherent part of the world, not noteworthy or a moment to be frozen in time and glorified. Malick unfolds to his viewers a violence that is breathtaking in its banality and ubiquity, violence that is every sense *natural*.

Scenery in Nature

Critics of Malick have said that his films ostentatiously endorse a sense of incompleteness and that their narratives dissipate among shots of nature and landscape before a solid rhythm can be established.[65] I would like to propose that the extensive dedication of film-time shots of nature does not detract from the films' 'wholeness'. On the contrary, what Ben McCann calls 'the fetishisation of nature' is of dual function: the characters' rumination of the benign immensity of nature compels the film-viewer to also reflexively contemplate the visual spectacle. McCann maps out the 'indifferent beauty of nature in the midst of human mayhem' in cinematographic terms. He points out that Malick uses filmic devices such as close-ups, wide screen and point of view (POV) shots to create the film's organic beauty.

Holly and Kit escape and drive in to the "wilderness, down by a river in a grove of cotton woods". As they drive into the distance, their car fades out and in its place there is a montage of seven shots, seven isolated renditions of nature. The first shot pans from left to right,[66] the semi-circular movement following a fallen tree accentuates its meandering movement down the river's stream. The next shots are: a sprig of thin green leaves, a mossy branch bark, an onyx beetle on a crown of thorns, pine tree branches and a cocoon cluster (see Figure 2.7) The vistas of nature dissolve in and out of each other, and the shots in extreme close-up alternate from blurred to deep focus. The close-ups of nature resemble the techniques of microphotography in that they

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[65] Roger Ebert. "Review: Thin Red Line". Rev. of *Thin Red Line*. n.d.: n. pag. *Roger Ebert*. Ebert Digital, 8 Jan. 1999. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

[66] Blain Brown. *Cinematography: Theory and Practice: Imagemaking for Cinematographers, Directors& Videographers*. Amsterdam: Focal, 2002. 65.

both call to meditate on the intricate ridges and crevasses that characterize of plants and animals. Reflections on close-ups and faces are considered mostly pillars of Bela Balazs's[67] film aesthetics. In his first book on film, *The Visible Man,* he writes:[68]

> "Close-ups are film's true terrain … the magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail … [it] enables us… to see the minute atoms of life… For what you truly love you also know well and you gaze upon its minutest details with fond attentiveness."

According to Balazs, the close-up 'raises us out of space', out of a time continuum into another register of experience. The object in its bound proximity to the viewer is no longer bound to time- "the image becomes a concept and can be transformed like thought itself".[69] Balazs intensifies the perception of dramatic proceedings; the object is temporarily removed from time's passage and creates a tableau vivant (a frozen moment) that exists beyond the flow of the narrative.[70] This technique is mainly applied directly to the face[71] with classic examples from *Persona* (1966) and *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928), which show close-ups of their characters' faces in order to establish an emotional intimacy. In spite of its popular use, the technique's significance can also be applied to Malick's preoccupation with nature's details.

The montage of nature and the close-up of the locust gnawing at the wheat are both prime examples in which Malick includes a series of shots that are not connected in terms of screen direction but share a common thematic element. Nature in *Badlands,* autonomous to its narrative, constitutes, 'clarifies and reveals' the action space which contains its characters. Moreover, it transfixes the viewers and causes them to pause and contemplate the high aesthetic power of the ordinary, of the *scenery* that gives access to understanding the power of nature.[72]

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[67] Bela Balazs is a 20th century, Hungarian-Jewish film-critic, writer and poet. In he is known, among other things, for his groundbreaking work in film aesthetics and production.

[68] Béla Balázs. *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*. ed. Erica Carter. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. New York: Berghahn, 2010. 38-39.

[69] Balázs. *Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*. 134.

[70] Michael Renov. *The Facial Closeup in Audio-Visual Testimony: The Power of Embodied Memory*. n.p.: n.p., 24 Jan. 2013. 5. PDF.

[71] Balázs makes direct reference of the technique in his analysis of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928). Dreyer obsessively returns to extreme close-ups and those of *Jeanne d'Arc* in particular, have since become iconic examples of the technique.

[72] McCann."'Enjoying the Scenery': Landscape and the Fetishisation of Nature in Badlands and Days of Heaven". 85.

Figure 2.7 'Fetishization' of nature. View from left to right. (*Badlands*)

Figure 2.8 Kit contemplating the landscape (*Badlands*)

The panoramic, incongruous wide shots in *Badlands* explore the tenuous human presence on a blank horizon- to which Holly proclaims: "at the very edge of the horizon we could make out the gas fires of the refinery at Missoula, while to the south we could see the lights of Cheyenne, a city bigger and grander than I'd ever seen". *Badlands* intersects many establishing shots of the environment with POV shots. For example, Cato's house is surrounded by desolate unfenced fields. Furthermore, perhaps the most iconic shot of the film is where Kit with his arms crow-barred around a rifle like a scarecrow or a crucifix, stares transfixed at the mountains of Montana with a sunset in the background (see Figure 2.8).

Landscape in the film conveys isolation, of "utter loneliness"; all humans in view are unsheltered from the elements. It is the scope which cannot be accounted for by the categories of closeness,

remoteness, familiarity or strangeness;[73] nature is a subject of unanswered questions, it cannot be grasped. The characters and their calamities in *Badlands* are literally and metaphorically insignificant and dwarfed in proportion to their natural surroundings. And in spite of Kit's desperate attempts to leave his 'mark' on the landscape (a subject that will be extensively discussed in the next chapter), nature remains indifferent, unaltered and ever beautiful.

The 'fetishization' of nature connects the film characters' and viewers as they, in tandem, marvel at and ruminate on the nature and landscape. The visuals for the viewers are also an aesthetic experience that looks through the screen to a field of existential reflection.[74] McCann points out that the "monumentality of nature creates a significance of its own, a narrative of its own…. a pastoral Americana that with its beauty and lyricism counteracts the violent story he [Malick] was telling". Nature is *Badlands*' source of aesthetic pleasure and so its prominence creates an undertow of its own. This undertow, places a rift in the film's (and viewer's) focus. The murders and their ethical repercussions are at the mercy of the visual anesthesia of the ethereal dreamscape.

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[73] Izabella Füzi. *The Face of the Landscape in Balázs*. n.p.: Scientia Kiadó, 2012. PDF.

[74] Christopher S Yates. "A Phenomenological Aesthetic of Cinematic 'Worlds'". *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Contemporary Aesthetics, 22 Oct. 2006. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

Mythology and Celebrity

In an interview with Beverly Walker for *Sight & Sound*, Terrence Malick recalls the influences that he drew from when scripting the characters:[75]

> "The critics talked about influences on the picture and in most cases referred to films I had never seen. My influences were books like *The Hardy Boys*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn*--all involving an innocent in a drama over his or her head. I didn't actually think about those books before I did the script, but it's obvious to me now. Nancy Drew, the children's story child detective--I did think about her."

Badlands inherently stages itself and reworks the *bildungsroman* traditions.[76] The film places an emphasis on the change and development of youth through adventure, dalliance and 'the road'. The wide open spaces, the winding roads that stretch into the horizon and wild car chases are all iconic and cater to what is called the 'road/outlaw' genre, a genre that ultimately participates in a discourse with American youth texts. From the Beat generation to J.D Salinger, the road serves as a pathway for escape and fulfillment.[77] This search for individualism beyond conventions in American culture source from the ingrained mythos of the 'Frontier' and moreover originates from the foundation of America itself.

This chapter will analyze the devices that Terrence Malick induces in order to stage his film within the American mythologies and perceptions of celebrity. The analysis is an attempt to distill the film's moral dispositions towards the actions of its characters. Can they be at once cultural icons, celebrities, beautiful and criminals?

Mythology

Frederick Jackson Turner, in his seminal essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, instigated the 'Frontier Thesis'. The thesis asserts that American Democracy was formed by the 'American Frontier':[78]

> "American democracy was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the *Susan Constant* to Virginia or in the *Mayflower* to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier."

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[75] Terrence Malick. "Malick on Badlands". Interview by Beverly Walker. *Sight & Sound* Spring 1975: 82-83. *Eskimo.com*. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.

[76] Neil Campbell. "The Highway Kind: Youth, Space and the Road". Patterson 41.

[77] Campbell. "The Highway Kind". 40.

[78] Frederick Jackson Turner. *The Frontier in American History*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962. 293.

Turner imagines the frontiersmen moving west, distancing themselves from the comforts and trappings of civilization. On their move west, they encounter the overwhelming dangers of the wilderness. In order to 'overcome' this nature, the travelling settlers were compelled to exchange their civil ways for the 'primitive' and 'savage' ways of the Indians.[79] These primitive ways were of course only temporary, a primary necessity until the fields were cleared, the towns built and society restored. The communities (which were inhabited by fishermen, miners, loggers, herders) that evolved as a result of the move west were based upon a certain form of equality. The interrelations between the communities called for some sort of democratic government. Turner argues that American Democracy developed not from ideologies that were the product (or response to) of a British heritage but rather that they sprouted from the unique environments of Northern America. The values of individualism, resourcefulness and self-sufficiency— essential in the cultivation of the West—are what underlie the American national identity and the democratic institutions.

The 'Frontier' then and now is constantly revived in different political and cultural forms. Turner was not the first or the last to assert the importance of the 'Frontier' in American history. The novelty and high acclaim of his thesis is mainly due to the fact that he fits the 'Frontier' sentiment that had long existed in American cultural consciousness to an academic and explanatory framework.[80]

John Orr, in his paper "Terrence Malick and Arthur Penn: The Western Re-Myth", suggests that Malick and Penn re-work the mythology of the 'West' like silent cinema did when its Westerns reinvented in film, the mythical figures that populated the public's imagination. In *Badlands*, Kit is the poster-child of the 're-experience' of the formative 'Frontier' dream of the West through the eyes of the alienated youth of 1959;[81] Kit acts out Turner's mythic definition of the past by showing scorn and impatience for the older society and an indifference to its lessons.

In contrast to the 1930s, Orr asserts that Malick and Penn are an "oblique response to the classical Western". Rather than substituting one form of myth for another, they *deconstruct* these myths in their making. *Badlands* is invariably identified as having mythic qualities due to its

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[79] Turner. *The Frontier in American History.* 4.

[80] Deborah Bird Rose and Richard Davis. *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback*. Canberra: ANU E, 2005. 25. Print.

[81] Campbell. "The Highway Kind". 40.

intertextuality with youth texts and the continuous disruption of the audiences' sense of knowledge. The viewer is not really able to comprehend the characters' motives[82] and therefore the film presents the 'unknowing qualities of myth'. Malick consciously keeps the viewers at arm's length, the film neither nostalgic nor trying to recreate the past with vivid immediacy. It is important to note that although Malick seemingly raises the film to a mythological platform, through its historical context and narration, this platform is not unyielding: the 'dream-like' quality is susceptible to the criticism of the viewers.

One way that Malick constructs and deconstructs the mythological features of the film is through the voice-over. Dialogue in *Badlands,* as in all of Malick's films, is kept to a minimum. Scenes of humans and nature are more often silent than filled with dialogue. Malick is known for his substitution of voice-over narration for dialogue. His later films have multiple commentators and in earlier films, *Days of Heaven* and *Badlands,* he chose the uncommon narrator of a female adolescent.

Holly is the 'mythographer' of *Badlands*, her narration does not draw from filmic traditions but rather literary ones.[83] The voice-over imitates the dreamy quality of children's texts. The film opens with the sound of xylophone tingles, chimes and Holly sitting on the bed petting her Labrador. Her narration, like an exposition of a story, begins with:

> "My mother died of pneumonia when I was just a kid. My father had kept their wedding cake in the freezer for ten whole years. After the funeral, he gave it to the yardman. He tried to act cheerful, but he could never be consoled by the little stranger he found in his house. Then, one day, hoping to begin a new life away from the scene of all his memories, he moved us from Texas to Ft. Dupree, South Dakota."

This scene with its music and narration, cuts to make way for another scene: the view of Kit's garbage truck entering the neighborhood. The rough, masculine diegetic sounds of the truck contrasts with the serene chimes of Holly's world. To emphasize this, the next scene is Holly in her dainty white shorts twirling a baton around (see Figure 2.9). To this shot she comments that, "Little did I realize that what began in the alleys and backways of this quiet town would end in the Badlands of Montana". Their two worlds, as in a fairy tale, are 'fated' to collide.

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[82] Patterson. "Two Characters in Search of a Direction: Motivation and the construction of Identity in Badlands". 28.

[83] First person narration is characteristic of the novels which Malick noted as his influences: Huck Finn in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Holden Caulfield in J.D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye.*

Figure 2.9 Fairy tale editing: *Badlands* **opening. View from left to right. (***Badlands***)**

Furthermore, the last scene of the film is the plane flying between the clouds into the horizon, taking Kit and Holly towards their fates. Holly narrates the scene in the plane cabin:

"Kit and I were taken back to South Dakota. They kept him in solitary, so he didn't have a chance to get acquainted with the other inmates, though he was sure they'd like him, especially the murderers. Myself, I got off with probation and a lot of nasty looks. Later, I married the son of the lawyer who defended me. Kit went to sleep in the courtroom while his confession was being read, and he was sentenced to die in the electric chair. On a warm spring night, six months later, after donating his body to science, he did."

To finish the 'story', the film ends like a *circle,* with the same tinkling music, and as a traditional storyteller, the narrator ends with an ironic 'happily ever after'. Holly shifts from law-breaker to law-upholder and retreats back to middleclass respectability without questioning her experiences or responsibilities.

Viewers are most often inclined to believe the homo-diegetic narrator because narration in first-person conveys a sense of authenticity. Malick, however, in *Badlands,* employs a young person's voice to raise questions about the possible limitations of the narrator's experiences and the reliability of their judgment.[84] The images shown and the viewable circumstances of the murders often contradict what is reported. This creates an ironic counterpoint and thus questions the reliability of Holly's narration. Furthermore, the film gives access to the reasoning behind the characters' actions, though only selectively. Malick explains in an interview that Holly as a Southern girl does not disclose to her audience her feeling about her father's death because to share such information would not be 'proper'. The ironic circular line and unreliable narration, are two of many devices where Malick ultimately deconstructs the 'fairy-tale' qualities of the film.

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[84] Anne Latto. "Innocents Abroad: The Young Woman's Voice in Badlands and Days of Heaven, with an Afterword on The New World". Patterson 88.

Celebrity

In January 1958, nineteen-year-old Charles Starkweather, a warehouse worker with a James Dean obsession and an unpredictable temper, accompanied by his fourteen-year-old girlfriend Carol Ann Fugate, sets off on a murderous eight-day rampage, leaving eleven people dead. The following month, the couple was apprehended and Fugate was sentenced for life and Starkweather to the electric chair. Their crime spree dominated headlines and the media quickly christened Starkweather as the 'Mad Dog Killer'. The couple was immortalized as one of the century's most maniacal serial killers due to their excessive killings and psychological state.

Hollywood has a tendency, in response to public interest, to produce cinematic adaptations of murderers and in particular of serial killer couples. Bonnie and Clyde, the celebrity criminals of the modern era, predictably inspired many books, television series and films, including Penn's own *Bonnie & Clyde*. Similarly, Leonard Kastle's film *The Honeymoon Killers* (1969) retold the story of the 'The Lonely Hearts Killers'. The Starkweather murders like their contemporaries were instantaneously mythologized in American popular culture. Their fatal road-trip has undoubtedly influenced both *True Romance* (1993) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and served as a plot-base for *Badlands*.

Many studies have undertaken the task of deciphering the cultural frameworks which through their laissez-faire boundaries and regulations allow for criminality to be celebrated. The general definition for 'celebrity' is an identification and relation of a group to an individual due to his physical, personal or ideological traits. Ruth Penfold-Mounce brings forth an additional element to this definition, stating that, more than identification, there is stimulation and 'resonance'. This 'resonance' occurs not only through the pleasure of the spectacle, but also through feelings of fear, disgust, horror and anger.[85] There are variant psychological and cultural explanations for the interrelations between criminality and celebrity; the following are those relevant to *Badlands*.

One psychological explanation is that the criminal-celebrity serves as a mental function to which the spectator revives and virtually reenacts the violent or subversive acts. Psychologist, Paul Kooistra suggests that through his transfixion and resonance to the criminal's crescent status, the spectator purges aggressive or rebellious impulses and experiences psychological relief. This

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[85] Ruth Penfold-Mounce. *Celebrity Culture and Crime: The Joy of Transgression*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 61.

explanation complements a cultural explanation presented by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss asserts that the public gravitates towards criminals that rejuvenate or reinterpret traditional figures using their mutual heritage. For example, Robin Hood is relentlessly revived by fictional or real personalities that are influenced by the anti-authoritarian, philanthropic archetype.[86]

The 1920s and 1930s in the USA are prime examples of 'resonance' towards criminality. The cultural conditions of in the Great Depression created celebrity potential for the likes of Al Capone, 'Pretty Boy' Floyd, 'Baby Face Nelson and especially Bonnie and Clyde, to become symbolic of a certain 'justice'. This 'justice' accorded with the resentment of the people towards the legal and political systems that seemed to be working against them. In the minds of the public, these criminals were the representatives of the struggle against moral codes and oppressive social institutions. Kooistra adds further that the bandits and gangsters provided the aforementioned physiological release that was crucial for the American public.

During the Great Depression, not only did the public shape the criminals according to the molds of romance and ideological longing,[87] the criminals themselves gained status by their self-consciousness revival of traditional figures and deliberate imitation of celebrity tendencies. For example, Bonnie and Clyde utilized the already embedded gangster myth in order to further their aggrandizement;[88] Bonnie's letters to Clyde in jail used language and references from popular culture. Moreover, they both submitted photographs to newspapers of themselves working the very set of 'gangster poses' that gained them the status of celebrity and cliché.

As celebrity plays a significant part in the audience public dispositions, it does also play a crucial part in the construction of Holly and Kit's identities. The couples' gestures are 'performative' in the sense that their essence or identities that they otherwise express are 'fabrications' and not authentic. In an interview with long-time collaborator and editor Billy Weber, he comments that Holly's voice-over was self-consciously scripted to "little bit sound like a romance magazine";

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[86] Reggie and Ronnie Kray, two criminals in the 1960s were hailed as the contemporary 'Robin Hood' due to them personifying many facets of the traditional figure.

[87] Penfold-Mounce. *Celebrity Culture and Crime.* 66.

[88] Diane Carson. "'It's Never the Way I Knew Them': Searching for Bonnie and Clyde". *Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde*. By Lester D. Friedman. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2000. 44.

Holly's attitude mirrors the clichés of the pulp magazines of her day. [89] Well aware of popular culture Holly internalizes influences through her language: "Something must've told him that we'd never live these days of happiness again, that they were gone forever..", "he wanted to die with me…I dreamt of being lost in his arms forever" and "we were gambling for time". Her uses of these clichés make her even more unreliable as a narrator, for the spectator is distanced through her immature, naïve romanticism.

Another example can be found when Holly, on the road, reads a magazine piece where celebrity rumors are determined to be true or false:

> "Rumor: Pat Boone is seriously considering giving up his career so he can return to school full-time and complete his education. Fact: Pat has told intimates that so long as things are going well for his career, it's the education that will have to take a back seat...Rumor: Frank Sinatra and Rita Hayworth are in love. Fact: True, but not with each other."

Holly discloses details about life and chooses her influences selectively. Her identity seems to be constituted from images and social roles of women in popular media; however "the magnetic field of traditional morality, the cornerstone of American Ideology, has been switched off". [90]

Holly comments that Kit "was handsomer than anybody I have ever seen. He looked just like James Dean" (see Figure 2.10). Kit as Dean, with his jean suit and cowboy boots, plays out the celebrity parallel and his self-conception of 'the rebel without a cause'. Upon capture, the policeman appropriately repeat Holly's impression of Kit and like James Dean, push him into the limelight, handing out his possessions as souvenirs and asking questions as if in a mock interview. During the car chase, Kit fittingly takes a moment to comb his hair back in the mirror and when halted, marks the spot with a tower of stones and shoots the car-tire before handing himself in.

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[89] Latto. "Innocents Abroad". 90.
[90] Latto. "Innocents Abroad". 90.

Figure 2.10 A 'rebel without a cause': Kit as James Dean (*Badlands*)

"He thinks of himself as a successor to James Dean-a Rebel without a Cause-when in reality he's more like an Eisenhower conservative. 'Consider the minority opinion,' he says into the rich man's tape recorder, 'but try to get along with the majority opinion once it's accepted.' He doesn't really believe any of this, but he envies the people who do, who *can*. He wants to be like them, like the rich man he locks in the closet, the only man he doesn't kill, the only man he *sympathizes* with, and the one least in need of sympathy. It's not infrequently the people at the bottom who most vigorously defend the very rules that put and keep them there".[91]

Terrence Malick, in an interview rightly points out that Kit is at once the 'individual' and the very conventional American dreamer. Holly and Kit emulate in desperation the individualism formed by visions of cowboy-youth and dime novels that endow them with legendary status, albeit momentary meaning.[92] When Kit nonchalantly comments, "Somebody dropped a bag on the sidewalk. Everybody did that, the whole town'd be a mess", or speaks dime-philosophy into the rich man's tape recorder, he does so not as a legitimization of his future murderous acts, but rather out of a certain morality, as a cowboy aspiring to be an up-standing citizen. The youth rebellion ultimately leads back to where social codes of normalization and discipline wait to reclaim the highway kind.[93]

The return of the 'rebel' and 'nonconformist' into the social fold is the point where Terrence Malick tempers the liminality of mythology and celebrity with caution. On the one hand, in the tradition of Bonnie and Clyde, the serial-killer couple revive figures of their past and consciously place themselves into mythic realms: Kit's imitation of James Dean and Holly's romance magazine narration. The couple plays on the viewer's cultural consciousness insofar that the

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[91] Malick, Terrence. "Malick on Badlands". Interview by Beverly Walker.
[92] Campbell. "The Highway Kind". 49.
[93] Campbell. "The Highway Kind". 47.

viewers' themselves are romanced by the characters. On the other hand, Kit and Holly's characters are ironically comical, their self-perception edge on the pathetic and the absurd.

The emotional detachment created from the characters is not clinical or God-like but rather a contemplative state of mind. The irony in the narration, the hackneyed philosophies and familiar archetypes are the faulty yet significant domains where the legitimacy of the couple's actions come into question. Malick, by not amplifying the myth and celebrity, gives way to the viewers to criticize the portrayal of casual evil and, moreover the media's responsibility in the perpetuation and reinforcement of these persistent cultural myths.

Rope: The Art of Murder

Alfred Hitchcock

Post-war Hollywood had procured an appetite for suspense and gallows humor, making Alfred Hitchcock's entry into the American film industry an anticipated and successful one. Although ultimately beginning in Britain, the height of Hitchcock's career financially and artistically began in the late 1940s and lasted until the late 1950s. Hitchcock's career in Hollywood began with a contract with well-known film producer and executive, David O. Selznik. Together, Selznik and Hitchcock produced a line of films, beginning with *Rebecca (1940)* and continuing with *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946).

Auteurist critics of French film magazine *Cahiers du cinema* were the first to recognize Hitchcock's exemplary status as a director and whose films reflect his personal vision.[94]Hitchcock's persistent control over virtually all aspects of his films' production, ultimately led to the creation of his own trademark. His insistence of complete creative control already early on in his Hollywood career created tensions between Hitchcock and Selznik. After directing *The Paradine Case* in 1947, Hitchcock's final film with Selznik, he established with friend, Sidney Bernstein, an independent production company called 'Transatlantic Pictures'. Although this company became inactive after only two films, it granted Hitchcock the incentive to direct *and* produce his own films. Moreover, the company became an experimental ground where he fashioned his own distinctive directional style.

Rope (1948) was the first film with this independent company and moreover the first film that Hitchcock filmed in color. Francois Truffaut, who too contributed to the *Cahiers du cinéma*, released a book-length interview with Alfred Hitchcock on his life and film. Hitchcock in his interview almost apologetically admits to Truffaut that he "undertook *Rope* as a stunt".[95]In the interview, Hitchcock details how he attempted to produce a film that mimics the nature of theatre; where the "stage drama out in the actual time of the story".[96] In order to achieve this,

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[94] Richard Allen. Introduction. *Hitchcock: Past and Future*. ed. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzalès. London: Routledge, 2004. 2.

[95] Alfred Hitchcock and François Truffaut. *Hitchcock, Truffaut*. Paris: Ramsay, 1984. 179.

[96] Hitchcock and Truffaut. *Hitchcock, Truffaut.* 179.

each shot in *Rope* runs for around ten minutes and the cuts between reels are meticulously camouflaged. Hitchcock explained that in order to maintain continuous action, he had figures pass in front of the camera. The brief black-out gave time to switch camera reels without interrupting the action. The new reel would begin with the frame at the end of the preceding reel.

Apart from the technicalities, the film itself depicts two young homosexuals, Brandon and Phillip (John Dall and Farley Granger) that strangle their college friend, David (Dick Hogan) with rope and put his body in a chest. The chest is arranged to be the dining table and center piece of the cocktail party where David's family and friends are expected to attend. The intentions behind the murder are curiously enough, not far from what Hitchcock claims for the film- a "stunt", an experiment. Brandon asserts that "nobody commits a murder just for the experiment of committing it. Nobody except us". In respect to Hitchcock's new creative circumstances, the experimental nature evident in the *Rope*'s production can be seen as a formal reflection of the film's narrative.

The reactions to *Rope*'s release were lukewarm; critics focused on the film's technical aspects whilst refraining from commenting on its content. The overall disregard for the content may be explained by the references to fascism, a topic still sensitive at that time and the clear resemblance of the plot to the 'Leopold and Loeb' case (1924). Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were two Illinois college students who carried out a 'perfect murder' of a third student as a means to establish their status as Nietzsche's 'Superman'. Their trial was dubbed 'trial of the century' and undoubtedly remained a disturbing topic in the memories of Hitchcock's audience. In hindsight, *Rope* served as an introduction to a new chapter in Hitchcock's career. Its technical innovations and polemic content were a preface for the 'art' he later makes out of murder.

Theories in 'The Art of Murder'

With *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963) as trophy representatives of Hitchcock's repertoire, *Rope* seems to the odd bird in his filmography. Whereas in his other films, the *act* of murder anchors the narrative, in *Rope*, murder strikes in the first scene and is neither stylized nor messy. Unlike *Psycho*,[97] the murder in *Rope* is not the visual heart of the film, but rather it is the lengthy ten minute takes that comprise the film and attempt to mimic a viewing in a theatre. Furthermore, in comparison to *Vertigo*[98] or *Frenzy*,[99] the build-up and consequences of the murder in *Rope* almost are marginal components of the narrative. The murder scene serves primarily as an incentive for suspense. It is the dialogue and the content of *Rope* that take center stage; the film is predominantly self-explanatory, *'Arspoetica'*. This is the first film where Hitchcock does not exercise the act of murder but the *theory* of it.

The idea that a subject as macabre as murder naturally lends itself to theatrical, aesthetic treatment and receives its modern and definitive expression in Thomas De Quincey's *On Murder considered as One of the Fine Arts* (1827). The connection between De Quincey and Hitchcock is by no means arbitrary; the relationship between the two is disclosed by both *Rope'*s narrative and the director himself. Hitchcock's *Rope*, is based upon Patrick Hamilton's play of the same name. When the play was first published by Hamilton in 1929, he commented that it was intended as a "De Quinceyish essay in the macabre".[100] Furthermore, Hitchcock, at one of his last public speeches, made a plea that "murder should be treated delicately". In the speech, he makes reference and quotes De Quincey's essay to justify to his opinion concerning the cathartic qualities that aesthetic treatment of murder has to bring.

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[97] In Psycho, the infamous shower scene, where Marion Crane is murdered, is innovative both graphically and as a plot device. The scene was meticulously edited, incorporating at least seventy individual shots, particular lighting and music. This murder scene also served as an aesthetic blueprint in *The Birds*: Hitchcock employed similar editing in the scene where birds ferociously attack Melanie Daniels.

[98] In *Vertigo*, the plot circles around the murder of Gavin Elster's wife, Madeleine; the murder scene is even reenacted by the characters.

[99] In *Frenzy*, the plot follows a serial killer - there are a *series* of murder scenes.

[100] David Sterritt. "Morbid Psychologies: The Fine Art of Rope". *Hitchcock at the Source: The Auteur as Adaptor*. ed. R. Barton Palmer and David Boyd. Albany: SUNY, 2011. 160. Print.

This chapter will present and examine Immanuel Kant's and Thomas De Quincey's aesthetics. The two contrasting philosophical frameworks will help to characterize Hitchcock's own 'art of murder' and ultimately understand the film's relation to aesthetics and ethics.

Immanuel Kant

Only until the 1780s, late in Immanuel Kant's philosophical career, did he begin to consider and direct his attention to 'aesthetics' as a legitimate subject of philosophy. Kant was one of few of his time to critically examine the feeling of pleasure as based upon cognitive judgment. Consequently the *Critique of Judgement,* is the first seminal work to fully integrate aesthetic theory into a philosophical system. The third *Critique* demonstrates that the physical and particularly, moral universes are compatible if not, unified to aesthetic judgment. The groundwork that Kant sets for aesthetics is crucial to understand *On Murder*, for De Quincey sustains satiric critique and attempts to uncover the contradictions in Kant's philosophical tradition. De Quincey challenges Kant's theory that assumes a coherent and unproblematic relationship between aesthetics and ethics.

The connection between aesthetic judgment and moral feeling in the *Critique of Judgment* are predominantly expressed in:

1. Kant's 'Second Moment', his demand for universal validity of aesthetic judgment. Kant analyses the judgment of beauty under four 'moments'. Of these four 'moments', the 'First Moment' (Quality) establishes that judgment of the beautiful is *disinterested* and is not based on private factors. Meaning, one judges something to be beautiful based on the pleasures he feels that are "merely contemplative",[101] without reference to his desires or appetites. For example, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*[102] is not beautiful because the spectator lusts for the nude. The 'Second Moment' (Quantity), where Kant demands for universal validity of aesthetic judgment, establishes that the pleasure in the beautiful is not wholly subjective, but has some basis that justifies our thinking that others should also find

[101] Melissa McBay Merritt. "The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime". *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*. Ed. Timothy M. Costelloe. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2012. 48. Print.

[102] Tiziano Vecellio. *Venus of Urbino*. Digital image. *Uffizi: Guide to Uffizi Gallery Museum*. Uffizi.org, n.d. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

Titian's painting beautiful.[103] The beautiful is *disinterested*, it does not depend on private conditions, but "must be regarded as grounded on what he[the beautiful] can presuppose in every other person". Consequently, "the judgment of taste, accompanied with the consciousness of separation from all interest, must claim validity for *everyone*".[104] In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant details how moral action is determined by reason and because reason is one and the same for all beings, morality is too universal. An action can only be moral if it embodies the maxim that wills to be a universal law. In the third *Critique* Kant writes: [105]

> "The claim to universal validity made by a judgment of the sublime rests, not on the universal validity of the conditions of cognition, but rather on the universal validity of moral feeling. Kant's demand for universal validity in the judgment of beauty amounts to his moral demand that he makes in his ethics. The validity of aesthetic judgment depends on an appeal to morality."

2. The notion of the 'sublime'. In the *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant introduces presents a division of the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime with the latter expressing the relation between aesthetics and ethics. Kant refers to the dynamically sublime with respect to nature's vastness and power: ocean storms, starry heavens, mountain peaks, lightning and thunder. According to Kant, one experiences displeasure when we realize the inadequacy of humans' physical powers in comparison to nature's might, however, "we can regard an object as *fearful* without being afraid *of* it".[106] What is "dynamically sublime" is the moment when the 'sublime' "has no dominion over us".[107] It is a condition where "the irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of nature and a superiority over nature…whereby the humanity in our person remains un-demeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion".[108] Kant argues that encounters with

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[103] Donald W. Crawford. "Kant". Gaut and Lopes 57.

[104] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. ed. John Henry Bernard. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005. 34. Print.

[105] Hannah Ginsborg. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology". *Stanford University*. Stanford University, 2 July 2005. Web. 21 Dec. 2014.

[106] Kant. *Critique of Judgement.* 74.

[107] Kant. *Critique of Judgement.* 75.

[108] Kant. *Critique of Judgement.* 75.

nature's power and magnitude could leave individuals with an awareness of the higher-rational being. The sublime is the continuation and purer form of the ordinary, ethical experience.

Thomas De Quincey

The Moralism that Kant presents, meaning the compatibility between aesthetics and ethics, reveals itself to be problematic when humans' customary experience of murder in Western philosophy and culture is *primarily* aesthetic. From public executions to violent cinematic spectacles, only the victim experiences the moral, physical 'reality' of the violence whereas the rapt onlookers who view the violence from a distance regard this 'reality' as an aesthetic experience.[109] Thomas De Quincey in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* asserts that the most brutal killings can be appreciated as works of art and evoke a feeling of sublimity if treated with disinterest and an aesthetic perspective.[110] De Quincey theorizes the 'aesthetic experience of violence' that is already prevalent and gives an intellectual framework that counter and undermines Kant's disposition.

De Quincey, demands full cooperation of both the killer and his audience in order for the murder to be considered as work of art. The killer first must be considered as an artist in his own right. The audience, if the by-stander or the narrators, are not the active artists but the *aesthetic spectators*. The narrators, if in literature or in film, that describe the happenings of the murder must emphasize the difference between themselves, as the would-be artists, from the criminal artists they describe.[111] Hitchcock in accord with De Quincey, also emphasizes the passivity of the narrator and the spectator. As opposed to *Psycho* where the audience identify with Norman Bates, the killer, or *Rear Window* that presents effectively the detective's point of view, *Rope* is narrated from the point of view of the witness. By identifying the audience with the witness, Hitchcock mediates a distance from both victim and assailant, where the spectator can experience the murder aesthetically. Moreover, in terms of the film's aesthetic, the ten-minute long shots attempt to mimic a spectator's experience of the stage. The particular cinematography

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[109] Joel Black. *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991. 3.

[110] Under this title De Quincey published three essays. The first published in 1827, the second in 1839, and a long "Postscript" in 1854.

[111] Black. *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture*. 38.

that Hitchcock has crafted for *Rope* comes to affirm that the aesthetic experience is *staged* by someone else who is the real artist, namely, the murderer.

Rupert Cadell, the two killers' former professor, also represents the difference between the spectator and 'artist-criminal'. Cadell is conflicted by his own 'murder as art' philosophy when his students, Brandon and Phillip, decide to translate the philosophy into dismaying action. Within Cadell's aesthetic hypothesis, he himself is the 'would-be artist' whereas his students who put this philosophy to practice are the 'true artists'. What prevents Cadell from being and presumably make Brandon and Phillip the 'true artists', has to do with the 'disinterest' that De Quincey demands of the murderer in order for his crime to be art.

In a separate essay, *On The Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* (1823), De Quince describes what Macbeth experiences when he murders King Duncan in his own Castle:[112]

> "The murderers and the murder must be insulated- cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs - locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible and the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, laid asleep, tranced, racked into dead armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion."

De Quincey demands a 'disinterest' very different from that of Kant. Kant refers to 'disinterest' as relief from the subjective experience whereas De Quincey asserts that the murderer should place himself into a subjective and almost dream-like state of mind. In order to for the murderer to become a 'true artist' he must completely suspend himself from "ordinary tide and succession of human affairs". If Kant expressed the aesthetic experience as a continuity of the rational ethical world, De Quincey contrasts Kant's rationality and suggests a decisive break from the ethical world where the 'artist-criminal' is in an irrational, hallucinatory state. What De Quincey presents is an Autonomist disposition where aesthetics and ethics are acutely autonomous from each other. By De Quincey's standards, the murderer must show complete disinterest in the human existence, meaning his murder must be thoroughly unmotivated and divorced from the ethics or any other functions of worldly affairs.

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[112] Thomas De Quincey. "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth". *A Book of English Essays*. Ed. W. E. Williams. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951. 170.

In this respect Rupert Cadell in *Rope*, ceases to be a 'true artist' because the he is unable to suspend himself above moral prohibitions and act upon his thesis. Moreover, he is so thoroughly tied to the ethics of human existence that he could not even consider his philosophy's practical implications. Brandon and Phillip succeed in committing to their professor's thesis and do murder their friend for the sake of making it a work of art. The question arises if Brandon and Phillip succeed in completely committing to Autonomist doctrine that De Quincey prescribes?

The murder in *Rope* falls short from what De Quincey would consider a work of art. First, the dinner party that Brandon and Phillip host, occurs only 'post-mortem', after the murder itself. The party seems to serve no purpose for the murder other than to exhibit to the guests (and to the film's audience) the carefully fabricated artistry of the act. Second, Phillip begins to panic when he realizes that Brandon has half-intentionally contrived the means by which their deed will be discovered.[113] Brandon is urgent to impress his audience and is reliant upon them in order to validate the murder's artistic integrity. These are both projections of his inability to suspend above 'worldly affairs'. Therefore, Brandon forfeits the 'disinterest' that is the essential for De Quincey to consider murder as a form of art.

Murder in *Rope*, fails to manifest the Radical Autonomist statement of 'Art for art's sake' (murder for murder's sake) that De Quincey proposes and nor does it fall in to the Moralism of Kant. By intending, though not committing to their 'murder as a work of art', Brandon and Phillip only partly adopt De Quincey's thesis. Therefore, reasoning would imply that they impart a form of Moderate Autonomism. The Moderate Autonomist disposition, however, is also problematic because the 'art', the murder, only suspends itself above the moral functions and not other social functions such as status and power and therefore fails to contain its complete autonomy. Moreover, to state that a Moderate Autonomist claim arises from *Rope* only takes into regard the external influences - Thomas De Quincey - had on the film. The next chapter will attempt to disclose more accurately the aesthetic disposition with regard to philosophies that are internal to the film's dialogue.

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[113] Black. *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture*. 89.

Rope and Nietzsche's 'Superman'

Dialogue between Brandon, Rupert Cadell and Mr. Kentley (the father of the murdered student). Taken from the cocktail party in *Rope*:

> **Brandon:** The notion that murder is an art which superior being should practice -
> **Rupert:** In season!
> **Mr. Kentley:** - Now I know you're not serious.
> **R:** I'm a very serious fellow.
> **Mr. K:** Then may I ask who is to decide if a human being is inferior and therefore a suitable victim for murder?
> **B:** The privileged few who commit it.
> **Mr. K:** And just who might they be?
> **B:** ...Oh myself, Phillip.... possibly Rupert
> **R:** I'm sorry, Kenneth, you're out.
> **Mr. K:** Gentlemen, I'm serious.
> **B:** And so are we, Mr. Kentley. The few are those men of such intellectual and cultural superiority that they're above traditional moral concepts. Good and evil, right and wrong were invented for the ordinary average man, the inferior man, because he needs them.
> **Mr. K:** So you agree with Nietzsche and his theory of the 'Superman'.
> **B**: Yes, I do.
> **Mr. K:** So did Hitler...
> **B:** Hitler was a paranoid savage. His 'Supermen', all fascist 'Supermen', were brainless murderers. I'd hang them first for being stupid. I'd hang all incompetents and fools. There are far too many in the world.
> **Mr. K:** Then hang me. I must be stupid, because I don't know if you're serious or not.

The previous chapter discussed the external philosophical influences on *Rope*. This chapter analyzes how *Rope* self-proclaims to be a film, philosophical in content. The film deals with a retired professor that publishes philosophy books and moreover, in conversation, the professor's student, Brandon, proclaims himself to be an advocate follower of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Shai Biderman and Eliana Jacobowitz in their article *Rope: Nietzsche and The Art of Murder* answer to whether Brandon and Phillip legitimately applied Nietzsche's ideals. Biderman and Jacobowitz present how Brandon and Phillip are similar to the 'Superman', however, also why both characters ultimately do not truly apply Nietzsche's philosophy. This chapter will go along the lines of the article and answer how the two killers characterize themselves as 'Supermen'. However, the chapter will not continue to answer if the murder done in the name of Nietzsche is truly Nietzschean? The fact that Brandon and Phillip identify with Nietzsche's philosophy will suffice to understand the interesting and paradoxical relationships between aesthetics and ethics that arise.

What is a 'Superman'?

Nietzsche's idea of 'Superman' (in German 'Ubermensch' and sometimes translated as 'Overman') first appears in the prologue of his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and *Übermensch* – a rope over an abyss". The ambiguities surrounding what or who is exactly a 'Superman' provoked numerous interpretations by scholars and philosophers, from Carl Jung to as Mr. Kentley mentions - Hitler. Biderman and Jacobowitz have defined 'Superman' as: [114]

1. The experience of the 'will to power'
2. To experience this 'will to power' in a high and refined form, modeled in the life of an excellent creative artist who makes his own life a work of art.

Nietzsche's 'will to power' is closely associated with his 'Superman'. Interpretations that the 'will to power' and the 'Superman' exercise control and domination imply too that Hitler is an embodiment of these two notions. Such interpretations as Hitler's Nazism have spurred a new thread of interpretations that attempt to make the idea more palatable by downplaying or suppressing its disturbing features.[115] One of these interpretations places its emphasis on Nietzsche's value of creation or creativity. For example, Alexander Nehamas claims that Nietzsche's new ethics centers itself round self-creation. Moreover, Nehamas states that the 'will to power' is a reinterpretation of oneself and that Nietzsche views reinterpretation as one of the most powerful theoretical and practical tools.[116] Biderman and Jacobowitz seem to go along the lines of Nehamas's interpretation by associating the 'Superman' with self-creation; with "an excellent creative artist who makes his own life a work of art". When discussing *Rope*, it is appropriate to use the interpretation that 'will to power' is self-creation and art because the two killers employ specifically the 'art of murder' as their embodiment of the 'Superman'.

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[114] Shai Biderman and Eliana Jacobowitz. "Rope: Nietzsche and the Art of Murder". *Hitchcock and Philosophy: Dial M for Metaphysics*. ed. William A. Drumin and David Baggett. Chicago: Open Court, 2007. 37.

[115] Bernard Reginster. "The Will to Power and the Ethics of Creativity". *Nietzsche and Morality*. ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007. 33.

[116] Alexander Nehamas. *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1985. 97. Print.

A further note to emphasize that the 'will to power' is art, is Nietzsche's personal and high regard for art:[117]

> *Our ultimate gratitude to art.*—If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science . . . would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance. . . . As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us.

Nietzsche stresses the healing capacity of art. The beautiful illusions that art can create serve as a catharsis from the "utterly unbearable" truth in life, it is the antidote for the nihilistic existence - art *empowers* you.

God is Dead

The Gay Science (1882) ties the 'Superman' to rejection of transcendent foundations, the death of God. In *The Gay Science*, the madman announces the death of God to an audience of atheists who laugh and do not find the madman's exclamation profound nor new. The audience as the madman, already believes in the death of God. However, unlike his audience, the madman believes that the death of God has momentous consequences. The madman specifically addresses an atheist audience and not Christian believers because it is not the death of God itself that liberates man rather the loss of entitlement to the accustomed frame of reference and points of orientation.[118] Even in a world that is post-Christianity, a world that is de-deified, atheists are still hung over from the familiar habits of moral thought -the 'shadow of God'. In order to vanquish all products from the death of God, man needs to create completely new meaning and values: a new ethics that is not externally imposed or universally binding but an ethics that sources from human beings, as individuals.

In consequence of the audience's laughter, the madman ultimately concludes that his "time is not yet".[119] What he is demanding from the audience is a perspective that without preparation and time, is ultimately inconceivable. If not the current audience, then who will be able to abandon all things known and create the 'new ethics'? To this question, Nietzsche introduces the

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[117] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. ed. Bernard Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2001. 104.

[118] Aaron Ridley. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Art*. London: Routledge, 2007. 91.

[119] Nietzsche. *The Gay Science.* 120.

'Superman', a select few individuals who replace God and who themselves are gods. As mentioned before, "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and *Übermensch* – a rope over an abyss". Man must 'overcome', self-create and reinterpret himself in order to reach the 'Übermensch'. This act of creation does not only come in the form of limits that need to be exceeded or the boundaries that need to be transgressed, creation as an end, but the deliberate search for challenges and limits. The individual becomes 'Superman' in the act of 'overcoming' himself, in the constant search of challenges and thus, self-creation.

These select individuals must first be involved and work with art because through art man first discovers the god-like power within himself, the power of creative will. Once they discover this inherent creative will, they need to channel this to become an artist. Meaning, to self-create oneself by the deliberate and consistent challenge of limits (traditions, conventions). This process of 'overcoming', of individual excellence, is the process that creates one's own set of ethics- to become a god.

How is Brandon a Superman?

Now that the contours of Nietzsche's 'Superman' have been shortly explained, the main criterions for the 'Superman' are presented below in order to understand why Brandon and Phillip apply themselves to the Nietzsche's philosophy. The criteria are:

1. To experience the 'will to power'
2. To experience this 'will to power' in a high and refined form - to be an artist.
3. To suspend oneself from all remnants of the 'death of God'.
4. To create, to impose upon yourself your own meaning and values.

First, Brandon definitely embodies the 'will to power' when he claims that "being weak is a mistake...because it is being ordinary". The murder is not the crime, "the only crime is that of making a mistake", to be weak. The murder is their expression of power, their power over the ordinary man who still submits himself to morality and is constrained by the human condition. Second, as educated, cultured men, Brandon and Phillip have delved in art, literature and philosophy, in particular, Nietzsche's philosophy. Through the arts, they have discovered the potential god-like power that is waiting to manifest. In order for this power to manifest, it is not

enough to admire art, they must become artists themselves; to act upon the 'art of murder' as painting a picture:

    a. <u>The paints and subject</u>: the people. They invite David's (the murdered friend) parents, his fiancée Janet, and Rupert their old school teacher. Brandon even tries to orchestrate the reunion of Janet with Kenneth, her ex-lover as another way of exerting his control.

    b. <u>Composition:</u> they situate the dinner party in the living room around the dining table.

    c. <u>The details and artistic embellishments:</u> the guests dine off the book chest where David's corpse is hidden and Rupert's books are tied with a rope, the *very* rope that was used for the murder.

Third, Brandon claims that Phillip and himself are "those men of such intellectual and cultural superiority that they're above traditional moral concepts". He suspends himself above the morality known to man, "above good and evil". This claim brings the two killers towards the fourth criterion. To murder is to exceed moral boundaries and to make an art out of it, is to take part of the self-creation. Brandon and Phillip are going through the process of self-creation, they are creating their own set of ethics. Biderman and Jacobowitz give emphasis to this fourth criterion and suggest that that Brandon's strategy was also a sense of self-deification. The dinner party and murder was some sort of ceremonial party, a 'Nietzschean' festival of atonement or sacred game.[120]

The four criterions mentioned above explain why Brandon and Phillip, to their understanding and interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy, view themselves as 'Superman'. The fact that the two killers adopt Nietzsche's 'Superman', however, only complicates their aesthetic dispositions. The challenges that the 'Superman' presents will be detailed below.

Aesthetic Complications

The previous chapter has presented how *Rope* partially adopts the Radically Autonomist doctrine of Thomas De Quincey. Although the Autonomist argument seems obvious to apply to Brandon and Phillip's philosophy, however, a question arises whether or not, their claim is in fact Immoralist? Why not exercise the 'art of pick-pocketing' as opposed to the 'art of murder'? Do the ethical defects in fact contribute aesthetically?

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[120] Biderman and Jacobowitz. "Rope: Nietzsche and the Art of Murder". 40.

The 'Superman' suspends himself above morality. He does so by defying traditional systems and by constantly searching for the boundaries to exceed. The self-creation, the art, is in the *transgression*. The higher the transgression, the more empowering the self-creation. Murder is the highest of transgressions, the gravest of moral standards to defy. Brandon and Phillip choose their 'medium' to be murder because the 'art of murder' to their interpretation of Nietzsche, is the highest of transgressions and therefore, an empowering form of self-creation. Due to the fact that Brandon and Phillip adopt Nietzsche's philosophy, their alleged Autonomist claim falls into an Immoralist claim. The ethical defect and the degree of the transgression contribute to the aesthetic value of the 'art'.

Nevertheless, even with an immoralist claim established, this does not prevent their 'art of murder' from entering into a paradox. The murder of their friend is first a transgression of ethical standards, however, to transform this murder into an art is also a transgression of aesthetic standards. The fact the dinner guests are repulsed at the thought of making murder a form of 'art' indicates that the perspective that is predominant in society is the Moralist claim. Mr. Kentley, is particularly horrified by Brandon's remarks on the 'art of murder' because he believes that an action or a person solely immoral cannot be subjected to aesthetic judgment (a Moralist claim). If not Mr. Kentley or for that matter all 'ordinary people', than who can appreciate David's murder as 'art'?

Brandon invites Rupert to the dinner party because he is "the one man who might appreciate this from our angle, the artistic one". Rupert, who is knowledgeable in Nietzsche's philosophy is a potential admirer of David's murder. The only people who can view the murder from Brandon and Phillip's 'angle' are the people who adopt their 'new ethics'. The Immoralist claim enters into a paradox when it is established on Nietzsche's philosophy. Because the 'Supermen' make their own individual excellence as a set of ethics, one has to adopt this set of ethics in order to appreciate their creation. The Immoralist claim falls into a Moralist claim. One has to adopt the two killer's ethics, albeit new ethics, in order to consider the murder an aesthetic success.

To conclude, the relations between aesthetics and ethics that arise from Rope are a function of external and internal influences. In terms of external influences, no doubt that Thomas De Quincey's Autonomist aesthetics had influence over the film. However, analysis reveals that the characters only partially uphold De Quincey's Autonomism. With regard to internal influences,

the dialogue of the film mentions and discusses Nietzsche's 'Superman'. The fact that the characters adopt Nietzsche's philosophy ultimately complicates the aesthetic disposition of the film. The partial Autonomism, through the 'Superman' transfigures into Immoralism and finally into a form of Moralism. The unsteady aesthetic dispositions that arise can be seen, to an extent, as a reflection of Hitchcock's experimentations with themes of art, beauty and murder.

Funny Games: Immorality and the Audience

Michael Haneke

Film historians describe, if not lament, the growing omnipresence of the 'blockbuster' in the late 1970s; they view the rise of the franchises as moviemaking "selling out".[121] They explain the loss of artistic integrity, especially in the American film industry, by the shift in priorities whereby the financial success and entertainment value eclipsed the emotional, political and intellectual capacities of film. The 1980s is seen as the renaissance for the Hollywood action film and therefore a rise too in the spectacle of violence. Michael Haneke attributes film's 'fall from grace' and particularly its treatment of violence to the appearance of television. He explains how film in reaction to "overwhelming omnipresence of the electronic media", attempted to trump television by "intensifying its own means".

Senses of Cinema author, Mattias Frey, divides Haneke's career into two categories: films made between the years 1988-1997 that were financially and topically oriented around Austria, and films from 2000 onwards that debated broader European problems.[122] The 'Austrian period' of Haneke's career include the director's first three films, *The Seventh Continent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994)- these three films are otherwise dubbed as the 'Emotional Glaciation Trilogy'. The films are all thematically concerned with narcissism and the abjection and the coldness of personal contact in the age of video.[123] The trilogy directly addresses the state of film in the 1980s and in particular comes as comment to and criticism of violence and the media.[124]

Funny Games was released in 1997 and came as an epilogue to the 'Emotional Glaciation Trilogy'. The film plot depicts the two young men that hold hostage a family and subject them to various forms of torture and sadistic games. *Funny Games*, as an epilogue, is concerned with

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[121] David Bordwell. "It's the 80s, Stupid". Web log post. *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema*. Davidbordwell.net, 20 Nov. 2008. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.

[122] Mattias Frey. "Michael Haneke". *Senses of Cinema*. Senses of Cinema, Dec. 2010. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.

[123] Catherine Wheatley. *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*. New York: Berghahn, 2009. 24.

[124] *Benny's Video*, for example, shocked crowds with its restrained, portrait of a teenager who kills a young girl "to see how it is". The violence in the film is 'onscreen' in the literal sense, it is filmed by the characters with different mediums (hand-held and surveillance cameras). The film is intended to be a comment on the exploitation of violence in the media.

spectatorship and violence; however, in contrast to the trilogy that preceded it, Haneke utilizes the filmic conventions that he criticizes. *Funny Games* is a departure from the avant-garde fashion of his previous films and purposely uses devices and story material that are shared with mainstream movies. The film lures in the conventional audience, yet subjects them to an experience that is deliberately unsuspected and *unconventional*.

Since Frey's article was written, in 2007 Haneke made an American remake of *Funny Games*. It is said that Haneke originally intended it to be made with an American cast, however for budget reasons opted to set the film in Austria.[125] The remake apart from differences in location, actors and language is a shot-for-shot remake of the original. The location was moved to Long Island, the cast changed to well-known Hollywood actors (Tim Roth, Naomi Watts) and the all dialogue translated to English. Haneke wished to attract a mainstream audience and therefore all advertising and press for the remake figured the film was that of a normal conventional thriller. Although not completely clear for what reason Haneke made the remake, it is that apparent that the U.S version not only criticizes the action or thriller genre but also challenges directly Hollywood's blithe treatment of violence.

For the purpose of this thesis all further reference to Funny Games, whether visual or through text, in this chapter will be to the American remake because the U.S version more accurately carries Haneke's opinions to be detailed further on. Nevertheless, whether considering the original or the remake, the fact that *Funny Games* wages war on mainstream movies whilst playing 'the rules of their *game*', created among critics as much praise as outrage. This duality that Haneke plays upon makes him "one of contemporary cinema's most reviled and revered figures".[126]

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[125] Robert Koehler. "Funny Games". *Cineaste Magazine*. Cineaste Publishers, 2008. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.

[126] John Wray. "Minister of Fear." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 23 Sept. 2007. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.

A Moral Agenda

At a press conference at Cannes in May, 2009, Michael Haneke baldly stated that "all my films are about violence." The particular violence that Haneke refers to is a violence that consequences in the social alienation of self, of others and the loss of a common humanity.[127] This theme that unites Haneke's films is not especially novel; he himself makes reference to Michelangelo Antonioni and Robert Bresson as very influential in the ways his films interrogate violence. Haneke, however, has garnered critical attention because within this overarching theme, his films foreground violence's specific role in contemporary media and in the audience's 'consumption' of the spectacle.

Haneke, in a published essay "Violence and the Media", details his thoughts on the representation of violence. Headdresses violence as a necessity to narrative film albeit, also claims that drastic adjustments that need to be implemented in its depiction. Haneke's essay will serve as a theoretical companion for the analysis of *Funny Games*; the film's content, intentions and ultimately, its disposition in the ethics and aesthetics debate.

Media and Violence

The 'cognitive argument' for Immoralism in the first chapter pointed out that cognitive responses to artwork, especially narrative fiction, differ remarkably from responses to situations in reality. This is particularly relevant for scenes that are potent in expression. Empirically, the way one responds to violence in real life is a far cry away from how an audience responds to literary and filmic violence. The 'cognitive argument' of the Immoralist claims that responses to immoral fiction allows one to explore through imagination the beliefs of others and therefore is positive for the viewer (see pp.22-24). "Violence and the Media" differs from the 'cognitive argument'. Haneke as opposed to the Immoralist, questions to whether these fictional scenes of violence, particularly in film, are truly cognitive beneficial.

Whether or not violence on film is cognitively beneficial is not as much a consideration of censorship, rather a question that concerns how the audience *responds* to these acts of violence. Haneke consistently invested in the investigation of what he considers 'consumable' violence.

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[127] Peter Brunette. *Michael Haneke*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 2010. 1.

Over years he has overtly critiqued 'Hollywood' movies. He challenges critics and film viewers to consider their own responsibility for what they watch and to ask themselves just what they are really doing when they seek to be 'merely' entertained.[128] Haneke perceives film not only as a medium to which the audience responds differently to violent situations, but also as a medium that is utilized to instigate an abnormal pleasure to fictive atrocities.

What allows the entertaining qualities of films? Haneke explains these filmic pleasures as consequences of two aspects:

1) <u>All-overpowering presence</u>. Film images, in contrast to literature or the fine arts have the capacity to simulate a reality that is tangible to all the senses. This reality is overwhelming and predestines it for a narcotized, anti-reflexive reception.[129] The film posits the spectator into a guiltless complicity with the violence screened. When watching a thriller or action movie, moral obstacles (truck blowing apart, mass murder) dissipate at the mercy of the emotionally visceral experience - the pleasure.[130]

2) <u>Disengagement</u>. First, violence on screen allows pleasure by the disengagement from the viewer's immediate experience: to place the narrative in a context that does not render itself to be personal (Westerns, science-fiction, etc.).Second, the violence is justified when placed in a context where they are necessary though unpleasant last resort (war, judicial punishment). Finally, commonly, violence may be pleasurable when it is embedded in a climate of wit and satire.[131]

What Haneke calls the 'aestheticizing mode' of violence on screen, allows for the audience to release themselves from fears and desires. The film-viewer oscillates from an overwhelming

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[128] Brunette. *Michael Haneke*. 5.

[129] Michael Haneke. "Violence and the Media". Comp. Roy Grundmann. *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. ed. Roy Grundmann. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 576.

[130] It should be noted that Haneke here is presenting an aspect that is founded upon the 'paradox of fiction.' This paradox arises from the premise that our emotional responses to fiction are irrational. In order for one to emotionally respond to a fictional situation, he needs to believe that the situations in question exist or have existed. Some fictions, and especially film, however, are capable of moving the viewer despite them being fictive. When Haneke points out that films simulate a *reality*, he agrees with the premise that emotional responses require belief in the situation's existence. The audience, when horrified by a film, believe at the very moment that these horrors are real. Haneke criticizes the audience because they have hypocritical reactions to fictive situations. On the one hand they believe momentarily that the screen violence is real yet on the other hand, they inappropriately take pleasure in the spectacle.

[131] Haneke. "Violence and the Media". 577.

simulated reality that he momentarily believes to be real, to a disengagement where his pleasure can be afforded. This oscillation between real existence and the emotional security of the 'image' has enabled the domestication of violence; for the violence to become a commodity that can be consumed in morally-unregulated doses.

Representation of violence does not cease to be problematic merely at the pleasures of the spectacle; Haneke hints that the 'consumption' of violence has far greater and dire consequences. He writes that "the controlled invocation of evil permitted the hope for its controllability in reality".[132] Violence on screen introduces a naivety where not only does one respond with pleasure, but this response becomes habit to the extent that it is applied to situations that are real. Haneke is concerned that the anomalies of the responses to film violence will cause the viewer to treat the violent realities of his own life with the same casualness and apathy.

"Violence and the Media" as the title suggests, does not only deal with issues surrounding film violence but also other types of 'media', namely, television. Haneke in his essay holds television responsible for the form-content relationships in classical aesthetics "to have become obsolete".[133] The appearance of television created a market where violence had not only an overwhelming omnipresence but also a presence that was immutable; screen-violence was no longer only an outing to the cinema but also a constant presence in the family living room. Under the circumstances where violence permeated the media, each medium, including film, fought to intensify itself in order to make its spectacle and its violence more 'consumable'. The television and film industry oriented itself around the form of its medium to increase the entertainment value with disregard for the impact and the morality of the content.

When Haneke mentions that the form-content relationships "have become obsolete", he points out that film and television have been directed into Autonomist fundaments, in particular into a hedonistic formalism. Form and content in the entertainment industry are utilized to maximize pleasure. Any qualms around violence are completely autonomous of the media used and are removed if proved to interfere with the audience's pleasure. Haneke, is overtly opposed to the formalism of the industry and proposes a quintessentially Moralist demand that the form-content

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[132] Haneke. "Violence and the Media". 578.
[133] Haneke. "Violence and the Media". 578.

relationships return to their post. Moreover, the director demands that the industry to "re-conceptualize the whole concept of violence and its origins".[134]

It can be said that *Funny Games* is Haneke's essay in film form. *Funny Games,* differs from the 'Emotional Glaciation Trilogy'[135] that preceded it because it deals with violence and spectatorship outside the context of Austrian society. The film, as the very critique of the essay, orients its investigation around popular film and cinematic genre. Haneke, in an interview with Christopher Sharret is asked whether *Funny Games,* as a film that comments on media and violence, goes along the lines of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. To this Haneke answers:[136]

> "My goal there was a kind of counter-program to *Natural Born Killers*... What [Oliver Stone] produced is something like a cult film where the montage style complements the violence represented and presents it largely in a positive light. It might be argued that *Natural Born Killers* makes the violent image alluring while allowing no space for the viewer...*Benny's Video* and *Funny Games* are different kinds of obscenity, in the sense that I intended a slap in the face and a provocation."

Funny Games is intended to provoke, to talk about violence in a *reflexive* way.[137] Meaning, to leave the audience member "thinking space" to reflect on the violence they are watching without obliging them into titillation and pleasure. Haneke punishes the audience, he makes them feel guilty for taking pleasure in the violent spectacle; he intends to show violence, the suffering for what it truly is.

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[134] Christopher Sharrett. "The World That Is Known: An Interview with Michael Haneke". Grundmann 582.

[135]*The Seventh Continent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*.

[136] Sharrett. "The World That Is Known: An Interview with Michael Haneke". 584.

[137] In an interview with Serge Toubiana, Haneke openly admits his intention for *Funny Games*: "The film must be unsettling. It's the only film I made to provoke. People have often criticized me for making films just to provoke. That was never the case. But in this film, yes. It made me happy to give an awakening kind of slap: Look at what you normally watch!".

Moral Disgust

Haneke's films are known to adhere to many of the precepts of 'counter-cinema'[138] and among them the production of 'cinematic unpleasure'. The term 'cinematic unpleasure' signifies the frustration of the pleasure drive and the mobilization of negative emotions on the spectators' part, such as discomfort, embarrassment, anger and guilt.[139] Catherine Wheatley argues that the 'cinematic unpleasure' that Haneke's films produce, is a device that he employs in order to explore the ethical relations between film and viewer. The director's focus on this sentiment is as much part of the film's aesthetic as too the foundation of the spectator's moral reflexivity.

Although, critical writing on Haneke's cinema, including that of Wheatley, have investigated the sources of 'cinematic unpleasure', the phenomena of disgust is yet to receive significant study as an emotion which serves as an essential component of a film's narrative and of the audience's response. This chapter will examine the emotion of disgust and its particular application in *Funny Games* as part of the film's wider objective.

The phenomenon of disgust can be understood to be a combination of judgment and a violent effect on the human perceptual system. Winfried Menninghaus names three elementary characteristics of the phenomenon of disgust:[140]

> "(1) violent repulsion vis-à-vis (2) a physical presence or some other phenomenon in our proximity (3) a phenomenon that at the same time, in various degrees, can also exert a subconscious attraction or even an open fascination".

In relation to the first two characteristics, disgust partly depends on aesthetic judgment; however, they essentially go beyond such judgment. When one encounters an object or situation vis-à-vis that is disgusting, he apprehends the qualities of this encounter not simply as given, but as something that *should* not be, at least not in the proximity of the one judging.[141] The judgment negates the existence of the object or situation and therefore goes beyond aesthetic appreciation and intrinsically makes the judgment a matter of morals.

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[138] 'Counter-cinema' refers to the rough grouping of films, film makers, and institutions which set themselves the formalist and ideological domination of mainstream (Hollywood) cinema. A prominent characteristic of 'counter-cinema' is that the films are independently funded and therefore unrestrained by financial and ideological agendas.

[139] Wheatley. *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image.* 78.

[140] Winfried Menninghaus. "Between Vomiting and Laughing. Base Lines of a Philosophy of Disgust". Introduction. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*. Albany: State U of New York, 2003. 6.

[141] Menninghaus. "Between Vomiting and Laughing. Base Lines of a Philosophy of Disgust". 5.

The third characteristic reflects how the content of disgust can be complex and at times paradoxical. Disgust repels us, but does so whilst capturing our attention: emotion is a field of tension between attraction and repulsion. Eighteenth century aesthetics defined disgust as the absolute other of aesthetic 'pleasure', of the beautiful. The beautiful, however, is consistently in danger of edging towards the disgusting (a sweet that is too sweet, becomes vile). In this respect, the beautiful and the disgusting are the two ends of the same spectrum; the absolute other, so the aesthetic inherently returns to the domain or the spectrum of the beautiful. Furthermore, Freud refers to disgust as a reaction that forms in bodily acts and most importantly in sexual endeavors. Freud explicitly links disgust to repressed libidinal drives, meaning, during 'perverse' acts, sexual desires attempt to trump the bodily inhibitions that generate the emotion of disgust. The confrontation of the body with its own repulsion releases repressed sexual desires and, to an extent, pleasure.[142]

Previously, it was mentioned that Haneke's blatant objectives for *Funny Games* was: (i) to make the audience aware that they take pleasure in suffering, and (ii) to take responsibility for cinematic violence and its consumption. These objectives place the spectator's reason and emotion into tension; they demand rationalization of the spectacle simultaneous to viewer's emotional response. In order to achieve the intended purposes, Haneke produces 'unpleasure' because more so than pleasure, negative emotions have a focal point and prompt the viewer to search for the object to which this emotional reaction is attached.[143] Discomfort, embarrassment, anger, shame, etc., all compel the viewer to look rationally at the emotion's source, the suffering.

Disgust in contrast to the other emotions of 'unpleasure' is at once essential and problematic to *Funny Games*' objectives. On the one hand, disgust heightens the relationship between form and content. When one is disgusted, the aesthetic judgment of the situation occurs synchronously, if dictated by the moral judgment, or in other words, disgust is the epitome of Moralism. Aesthetics and ethics in disgust are bound to each other; the emotion rehabilitates the relationship between form and content that "have become obsolete". On the other hand, disgust creates the very fascination and pleasure that Haneke is trying to criticize. The paradoxical content of disgust

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[142] Tomas Geyskens. *Our Original Scenes: Freud's Theory of Sexuality*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven, 2005.

[143] Wheatley. *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image.* 104.

challenges Haneke to carefully deconstruct the pleasure of the emotion without jeopardizing completely the re-establishment of the relations between form and content.

The Deconstruction of Disgust

There are two characteristics of disgust that need to be discussed in order to understand how Haneke manipulates disgust to be devoid of pleasure. The first, as mentioned before, is the experience of unwilled proximity that defines the basic character of disgust. The experience of disgust is primarily formed from the senses and therefore the emotion is instigated by an object or situation within a radius that is in reach of our senses. German-Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn asserts that whether or not certain situations instigate disgust, requires an intersection of the sensory feature 'proximity versus distance' with that of 'obscurity versus lucidity'.[144] Meaning disgust is excited by substantial materiality, something 'real' and tangible to the senses. Mendelssohn's claim moves towards the second characteristic of disgust: that disgust is symptomatic within the epistemological configurations of art, particularly with regard to questions of truth and reality.[145] Menninghaus describes this second characteristic as 'existential disgust', as a "violent crisis of ordinary self and world perception which suddenly experience its very fundament as either absent or actively taken away".[146]

In terms of film, violence can be disgusting when it viscerally maximizes its proximity and overwhelms the senses. Moreover, such violent spectacles are disgusting when the viewer experiences them to be 'real'; when the illusion of privileged control over the fictional world is shattered. Haneke, with the aid of the 'proximal' and 'existential' qualities of disgust is able to deconstruct the pleasure within the emotion.

Proximity and violence

Quentin Tarantino is all too known for the farce and gore that propel the pleasure of his films. Whether it is the 'ear cutting scene' in *Reservoir Dogs* or Beatrix Kiddo plucking out an eye from its socket in *Kill Bill: Vol.2*, the violent scenes in Tarantino's cinema adequately fit the criteria for disgust. The violence in Tarantino's films overrides equally the repulsion and pleasure drives of the audience. These cinematic tropes of violence have become so immensely imbedded into

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[144] Menninghaus. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation.* 39.
[145] Christa Bluminger. "Figures of Disgust". Grundmann 148.
[146] Menninghaus. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation.* 356.

popular culture that any other film employing violence and gore will be undoubtedly be compared to Tarantino. Haneke in *Funny Games* seemingly depicts violence and gore according to 'Tarantinian' conventions; however, it would be erroneous to claim that the film is homage to the director. On the contrary, although Haneke openly establishes the generic structures of disgust, he does so with the intention that his disgust will be the very antidote of pleasure.

George, the father in *Funny Games*, attempts to negotiate rationally with Peter and Paul to leave the house. The two intruders however react by breaking George's leg with one of his golf clubs. Haneke, in this scene, is careful not to show them hitting George. At the moment of violence, there is an immediate cut-on-action and George goes from a walking, upright position to lying on his back with one contorted leg. The transition of these two shots is immediate, only George's cry of pain latches between them (see Figure 4.1). Haneke chooses to keep the violence off screen; the audience does not see but *hears* the violence. Furthermore, with Georgie's murder, not only is the violence of screen, but the camera ignores the violent act altogether. In one continuous shot, Paul leaves the room and the camera follows him into the kitchen and while he is rummaging through the refrigerator for a snack (his 'popcorn' for the killing), the viewer hears the gun go off and a scream that follows. The camera however does not as one would expect, avert to the living room but remains in the kitchen with Paul. After at least half a minute in the kitchen whilst only hearing ruffling sounds and whimpers from the living room, the camera finally returns to linger over the blood spattered across the television screen (see Figure 4.2). The one-shot intensifies the audience's helplessness since they are unable to escape the slow movement, to cut away to another shot and to be relieved from the scene. In this scene, as with George's leg, the audience does not view the killing but hears and sees its consequences.

Had Georgie's murder scene been translated to a Hollywood action film or, for our purposes, a Tarantino film, the camera would have undoubtedly returned to the living room, giving the audience witness of the killing. If the Tarantino-style 'splatter film' was to be accentuated, Georgie's murder would be accompanied with slow-motion footage, loud sound effects and bags of exploding, splattering blood. Furthermore, the scene would be optimized to arouse the audience's disgust as the killing presses itself onto the visual and auditory systems of the viewer.

Figure 4.1 Off-screen violence: Breaking George's leg. View from left to right. (*Funny Games U.S*)

Figure 4.2 Off-screen violence: Georgie's murder. View from left to right. (*Funny Games U.S*)

Haneke's violence in *Funny Games* establishes a disgust that is far more sober in effect. The violence, as opposed to generic conventions, only tampers with the auditory sense. The fact that the audience only hears the violence compels them to fill in the visual blanks with imagination. Haneke, in an interview comments: "I use your [the viewer's] fantasy. I think it's one of the most important things for a filmmaker... the audience has to make their pictures, and whatever show means diminishing the fantasy of the viewer." The confrontation with the object of disgust is only auditory and partly imagined - less *tangible*- and therefore the extent to which the emotion

affects the audience is minimized. The minimization of the effects of disgust strips away the visceral 'emotional high' and thus the pleasure. Moreover, even when Haneke does choose to explicitly show the object of disgust that confronts the viewer visually (the bloody television), the shot is static. Only at first does the unwilled proximity with the image cause disgust, however, because the camera holds static over the object, the spectator departs from the emotion and is compelled to rationally contemplate what he is watching. This contemplation that is created includes the awareness of cruelty of such violence and therefore defeats any pleasure from the image that may have been initially aroused.

Reality Games

Menninghaus describes the 'existential disgust' as a "violent crisis of ordinary self and world perception which suddenly experiences its very fundament as either absent or actively taken away".[147] In terms of film, this reinforces that violence can be disgusting when it viscerally maximizes its proximity and overwhelms the senses. Furthermore, such violent spectacles are disgusting when the viewer experiences them to be 'real'; when the illusion of privileged control over the fictional world is shattered.

As the title suggests, *Funny Games* comprises a very different form of 'games'. Roy Grundmann details three levels of games that the boys play with the family and with the viewer: (i) games in their formal meaning (ii) the murder as a game (iii) the film as a game.[148] These 'games' in the film are not at any one moment isolated: the scenes integrate most levels, if not all them, into a tight knit of gambol and discomfort. All levels, particularly concerning the third level, come to clarify how Haneke renders in *Funny Games* what Menninghaus calls 'existential disgust'.

The first relates the formal definition of 'games': an activity engaged as a pastime or amusement such as puzzles, board games and sports. In *Funny Games*, the family plays guessing games in the car; George the father, owns a set of golf clubs and playing on the television during Georgie's murder is the Formula One automobile race. Golf in particular, bring these 'games' to the second level. This bourgeois yet innocent form of recreation in the hands of the two boys, becomes the very device for the beginning of their physical violence - Peter breaks George's leg with his very own club. Peter and Paul relate to their murders as a game that they are playing; at first their

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[147] Menninghaus. *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation.* 356.
[148] Thomas Elaesser. "Performative Self-Contradictions: Michael Haneke's Mind Games". Grundmann 70.

device of violence (golf clubs) is taken from the world of 'games' and later on the game is arbitrarily expanded to include how George and Anna will be killed.[149] Paul announces that George and Anna are going to play a new game: "The Loving Wife" or "Whether by knife or whether by gun, losing your life can sometimes be fun". The new rules of the game allow Anna to switch places with George even though it was decided beforehand that he is going to die first. Likewise, Peter and Paul base their acts of torture on children's games such as 'hot and cold', 'cat in the sack' (Georgie's head, the 'cat' temporarily suffocates under a plastic bag) and 'eenie-meenie-minie-mo' (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 Murder as a 'game': 'cat in the sack' (*Funny Games U.S*)

Figure 4.4 The film as a 'game': "Is that enough? But you want a real ending, with plausible plot development, don't you?" (*Funny Games U.S*)

It is in the same scene that the 'new game' is announced and the game of torture skillfully transcends onto the third level - the film as a 'game.' This transcendence is at first very subtle; as Paul unties Anna from her rope gag, he comments that "this is going to make things a little more interesting, it's boring when mutes suffer. We want to entertain our audience, right?" The spectator is not completely sure if the Paul is referring to himself and Peter as the 'audience' or to the 'real audience' themselves.' Further on in the scene, Paul asks "Anna, have you had enough, or do you want to play some more?"When George suggests that she should not answer, Paul responds, "Huh, that's cowardly. We're not up to feature-film length yet." Here, Paul launches onto a middle level where he recognizes that he is a fictional character in a movie. Finally at the climax of self-reflexivity in the scene, he looks directly at the camera (at the audience) and says "Is that enough? But you want a real ending, with plausible plot development, don't you?" (see Figure 4.4). In this one scene, Haneke has deliberately installed all three levels of 'game' whilst emphasizing that the two boy's "ultimate rationale is found on the third level of the game, the

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[149] Brunette. *Michael Haneke*. 65.

film's explicit, perversely playful acknowledgment that these 'funny games' are enacted only because there's an audience for them – us, the viewers."[150]

Figure 4.5: The film as a 'game': Anne's attempt to shoot Peter. View from left to right. (*Funny Games U.S*)

It is important to note that in this scene there is a subtle shift from conventional sensory disgust to an acute 'existential disgust' and Haneke is nevertheless thorough enough that in both phases the pleasure is considerably reduced. Before the 'rewind', when Anna shoots Peter, the audience is able to experience pleasure from two sources:

1. The aesthetic of the shooting. Peter's murder is the only scene in the film where violence is shown on screen and interestingly enough, Haneke takes the opportunity to mimic the very violent scenes of Hollywood thrillers that he himself criticizes. The stylized violence or as aforementioned 'Tarantinian' aesthetic, prescribes a disgust that by definition includes pleasure.

2. The anticipated catharsis. Throughout the film, the two boys remind each other of the 'rules' to their game, whilst consistently changing them to give their victims (and the audience) a false sense of hope. The scene where Anna shoots Peter is placed at the very climax of the narrative, to gives a sense of hope and that she would be able to triumph

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[150] Elaesser. "Michael Haneke's Mind Games". 70.

over her captors. The shooting prescribes the audience's pleasure because the anticipated

catharsis nearly manifests itself - '*finally* the innocent victim is able to free herself from

her heinous predicament.'

Whilst watching Peter's killing, the two sources of pleasure are not differentiated; the scene itself, if not the power of the medium, creates a *synchronization of the senses*.

Figure 4.6: The film as a 'game': The rewind. View from left to right. (*Funny Games U.S*)

The third level of the 'game', the 'rewind' of Peter's murder, immediately diminishes any hopes that had been previously implied. Moreover, because of the synchronization of the senses, the pleasure sourcing from both the catharsis *and* the disgust are now translated to discomfort. What arises after the 'rewind' is 'existential disgust.' The spectator's realization that his stable control over the film is all but an illusion, all but fiction is the very "violent crisis of ordinary self and world perception" that Menninghaus describes. And although the characteristics of disgust are heightened, the alleged pleasure that inscribed in the emotion is stripped away. *Funny Games* creates its un-pleasure through what Wheatley calls 'aggressive reflexivity'; where the spectator's sudden awareness of the film *as a* film aggressively collides and thus ruptures the previously functioning pleasure drives. All that is left, is the discomfort and for the spectator to reflect upon the form and content, himself being manipulated by the content, a pawn in its *game*.

Discussion, Summary and Conclusion

This final chapter aims at answering the three objectives that have been set out for this extended essay, all relating to the basic aesthetic dispositions of Moralism, Autonomism and Immoralism.

4. To answer if and how the film medium is unique in the 'aesthetics and ethics' discourse? Namely, does the medium call for a particular discussion and if so in what ways?

5. To analyze the aesthetic dispositions that characterize the three films. Is the relationship between aesthetic and ethics uniform or does it vary from film to film?

6. To examine the relationship between aesthetics and ethics with regard to the audience. Do these aesthetic dispositions, when they arise, challenge the Moderate Moralist standpoint? Do they also challenge other aesthetic dispositions?

A Medium Specific Claim

In order to address the first objective, the first chapter presents how the film medium is unique both in its intense engagement and in its wide engagement in comparison to other mediums. Although each artistic medium as a means of self-legitimization or characterization proposes claims that are specific to itself, the 'aesthetics and ethics' debate rarely, if at all, makes claims that are medium-specific.[151] Hence there is a lacuna in the debate as it may well be that particular aesthetic dispositions are more relevant to certain mediums than to others.

The first chapter proposes three explanations as to why the film medium is uniquely challenging in this discourse:

(i) In film, the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, whether conflicting or harmonious, is not acknowledged by intellect but through *emotion.* The power of the film medium is due to the intensity of audience engagement and to the immediate emotional ties between the two domains.

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[151] Martha Nussbaum to an extent makes a medium-specific claim regarding literature. Nussbaum asserts the value and usefulness of a particular selection of literature to moral philosophy and to the development of important moral skills.
Peek, Ella. "Ethical Criticism of Art". *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

(ii) In film the spectator is confronted with multiple media effects and therefore the relationship and confrontation between aesthetics and ethics, takes place on *multiple* platforms.

(iii) Film, as a mass-media art-form, can both regulate morality and make a certain moral statement persuasively attractive through the pleasures of sensory experience.[152]

The hypothesis presented in this thesis suggests that the film medium is inherently subject to Moralism. The points of 'friction' and the fact that the film form can regulate morality, explicitly demonstrates that aesthetics and ethics are by no means autonomous but rather entangled in a complex *relationship*. After researching the three case studies, it seems that the Moderate Moralist claim, with some reservations, is proven strongest when applied to film.

This medium-specific claim is based upon two explanations:

1. the film medium has characteristics that are compatible with the Moderate Moralist 'Common Reason Argument' as proposed by Noel Carroll. Carroll asserts that a moral defect in an artwork will prevent full engagement with the work and thus count as an aesthetic defect.[153] The compatibility between the film medium and the 'Common Reason Argument' as well as the reservations, are presented below:

   a. The 'Common Reason Argument' can be specifically applied to film because, at its core, film is a medium that centralizes 'experience' and 'engagement'. If for moral reasons, a film does not succeed in engaging its audience, one has sufficient grounds to judge it to be aesthetically defective.

   b. The strength of compatibility between argument and medium is demonstrated when confronted by Moderate Autonomism. The Moderate Autonomist claims that aesthetics and ethics are autonomous of each other, though admitting that moral features may possess and instigate other qualities, such as complexity and coherence which contribute to the aesthetic worth of artworks (see Figure 5.1).[154]

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[152] Carroll. *Theorizing the Moving Image*. 80.
[153] Carroll. "Moderate Moralism". 223-38.
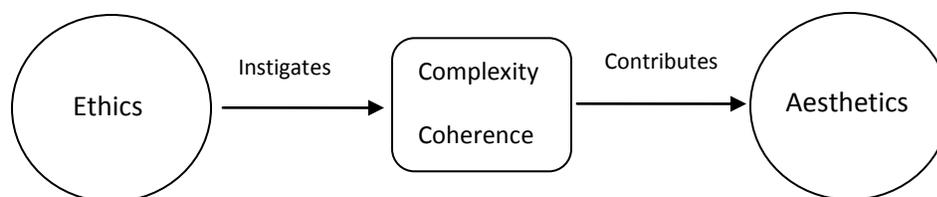[154] Gaut. *Art, Emotion and Ethics.* 77.

Figure 5.1 Moderate Autonomism

The discussion on disgust through *Funny Games* exemplifies how the emotional intensity of the film experience, as proposed in the hypothesis, heightens the relations between aesthetics and ethics. For example, when watching the film, there are scenes that prescribe disgust. The emotion of disgust synchronizes aesthetic judgment and ethical judgment and therefore, whilst watching *Funny Games*, at the moment when the spectator is disgusted, the Moderate Autonomist claim cannot be applied. The midway agent (qualities such as coherence and complexity) that maintains the autonomy of the two domains, at the moment of disgust, fall through (see Figure 5.2).
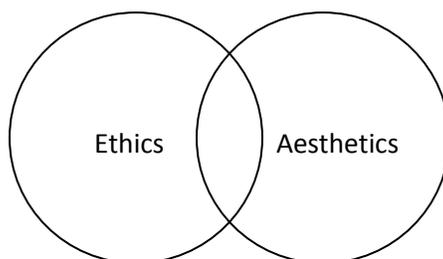

Figure 5.2 Moderate Moralism

The emotional intensity that is unique to the film medium is compatible with the 'Common Reason Argument' presented by Carroll, because both are characterized by the synchronization of judgment; the ethical vice is also an aesthetic defect due to a *common reason*.

c. Although, the 'Common Reason Argument' is firmly exemplified in the film medium, film also provides the same grounds for this argument to be problematic. The immediacy between aesthetics and ethics that the intense engagement creates does not necessarily precipitate an aesthetic defect. For example, some emotions, such as disgust, are especially problematic. On the one hand, the emotion validates Moralism as the ethical defect also determines the aesthetic defect. On the other hand, the prescribed feelings of disgust in

film may be the very reason why the film is aesthetically merited. Disgust has an element of pleasure and therefore, despite the object being morally perverse, the engagement is aesthetically rewarding. An audience watching a thriller film with gore takes pleasure in the disgust; and if the film was not to prescribe disgust, the film would be considered aesthetically defective. The intense engagement of film is compatible with the 'Common Reason Argument', however, in some instances such as disgust, where the emotion seems to validate Moralism, it posits at the same time, a form of Immoralism.

2. The criticism of Ethicism on Moderate Moralism is weakened when applied to the film medium. Moderate Moralism applies itself to 'morally sensitive audiences' in order to avoid both relativism and the reduction of moral and aesthetic value to terms of popular opinion. The presentation of this ambiguous definition of the audience, presents a dilemma for the Moderate Moralist. Either it introduces an element of Autonomism into the Moralist claim or contrarily, it collapses into Ethicism altogether (see chapter 1, 19-20). Ethicism, as opposed to Moderate Moralism, is independent from an actual or ideal audience. It is construed by the responses that the audience *ought to give*, namely which responses the narrative or the film calls for, independent of whether it in fact arises. With regard to the film-medium, the 'morally sensitive audience', is not only less problematic but on contrary, even more so relevant. The film as an audience-oriented art form is aware of the moral and aesthetic sensitivities of its viewers. A director invested in a film, especially genre films, caters the film to a particular demographic, an audience that will be receptive to the film's content.

To summarize the answer to the first objective, the film medium does call for a specific discussion. The strength of Carroll's 'Common Reason Argument' when applied to film, proves film's orientation towards Moralist aesthetic dispositions. Meaning, regardless of the disposition of an individual spectator, film demands discussion of both aesthetics and ethics as well as the complex *relationship* between them.

Aesthetics and Ethics *in* Film

Badlands

Terence Malick's *Badlands* is characterized by sublime scenes of nature and the deeply enrooted mythologies. Regarding nature, it would be an understatement to say that the flora and fauna are the film's essential source of aesthetic pleasure. Often the characters, alongside the audience itself, look out towards the horizon and meditatively contemplate the film's nature and landscape. Furthermore, Malick through close-ups *fetishizes* nature to the extent that nature possesses within the film, a narrative of its own. This narrative places a rift in the film's (and viewer's) focus. The killings juxtaposed by the nature are dwarfed and are engulfed by nature; they become a banal component of the surroundings - the killings become *natural*.

In *Badlands* violence is not 'aestheticized'. The killings are insignificant in relation to the all-encompassing and bewildering landscape. Nature and violence in the film do not behold simultaneously aesthetic significance and therefore the disposition that characterizes *Badlands* can by no means be Autonomist. The way Malick treats violence is quintessentially Moralist in the sense that the morally defective (the killings) are minimized in order for the film to be aesthetically meritorious.

Furthermore, Malick treats mythology in a manner that the Moralist disposition is continued and consistent throughout the film. Through its historical context and narration, Malick raises the film onto a mythological (and ideological) platform of the 'American Frontier'. This platform, however, is not unyielding: the 'dream-like' quality of the film is susceptible to the criticism of its viewers. Through the characters, landscape and cinematography, the film synchronously construct and deconstruct the 'Frontier Thesis'. The deconstruction of the characters especially emphasizes that they cannot be at once both killers and the mythological acclaimed, 'Pioneers'.

Rope

The relationship between aesthetics and ethics in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* is analyzed according to external influences regarding the 'art of murder' and references internal to the film that justify this form of 'art'. The 'art of murder' in *Rope* was scripted with the intention to follow the tradition of Thomas De Quincey. However, the protagonists, Brandon and Phillip, ultimately are

unable to suspend themselves above 'worldly affairs' and therefore fail to commit to the Radical Moralist tradition that De Quincey constitutes. Furthermore, Brandon and Phillip adopt Nietszche's 'Superman' thesis as justification for their murderous act. By interpreting Nietzche's philosophy, their allegedly Autonomist claim is transfigured into a form of Immoralism as the transgression is of the source of the aesthetic merit. These transfigurations, however, are not halted at Immoralism, because one has to take into account that the 'Superman' or the film's case, Brandon and Phillip, create a new type of ethics. The Immoralism elapses into Moralism when the new ethics is set as a criterion to aesthetically assess the murder.

Autonomism ⟶ Immoralism ⟶ Moralism

Figure 5.3 Transfigurations of aesthetics in *Rope*

Funny Games

Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* differs from the two previous films in that the director himself specifies the relations between aesthetics and ethics that he wills to augment in his films. Haneke in his essay 'Violence and the Media' expresses an essentially Moralist interest to rehabilitate the relations between form and content that to his opinion, in the modern day, "have become obsolete".[155] In order to understand how Haneke raises the Moralist disposition in *Funny Games*, the chapter analyzes disgust and how the filmmaker utilizes the emotion for his aesthetic-philosophical objectives.

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[155] Brunette. *Michael Haneke.* 578.

Aesthetics, Ethics and the Audience

Of the three films, Malick's *Badlands*, most directly challenges the Moderate Moralist. This is so, because the challenge is expressed clearly in the visuals of the film. The film is problematic because the viewer is instantly struck by its unavoidable beauty whilst implicitly condemning the content. This tension poses as question to the Moralist. According to my interpretation, the question that the film poses is may be solved by the pluralism that Moderate Moralism allows. All things considered, within a fine balance, the aesthetics of *Badlands,* which are essentially sourced from nature, 'override' the film's ethical flaws of the characters' violence.

The Moderate Moralist's solution to the challenge, however, only allegedly solves the issue. The solution's shortcomings are affirmed when compared to Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. In the case of Riefenstahl's film, the pluralism that Moderate Moralism allows can be applied. The Moderate Moralist considers the racist ideology foregrounding the film to be an aesthetic defect. However, in the fine balance, the pioneering cinematography and other aesthetic virtues can be considered to 'override' the racist ideology.

In *Badlands*, as opposed to *Triumph of the Will*, the ethical flaws that the films aesthetic virtues 'override' are not evident. Not every film that depicts violence is automatically considered to be ethically flawed. The first chapter presents different criteria as to how a work of art can be ethically criticized, yet for *Badlands* none of these criteria seem to be relevant. It may be, however, in the case of *Badlands,* that the ethical flaw is the very juxtaposition of beauty and evil. The Moderate Moralist identifies beauty as 'good' and therefore it would be *ethically* incongruous to identify violence as beautiful. He considers *Badlands* to be ethically and aesthetically flawed because the film allegedly entangles immorality with aesthetics.[156] In my opinion, once the tension that Badlands presents is considered to be a moral flaw, the pluralistic solution that the Moderate Moralist presents is undermined. The juxtapositions between aesthetics and immorality in *Badlands* run throughout the film and therefore the Moderate

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[156] Often, when debating film and the capacity of the medium to subvert, the subject 'aestheticization of violence' arises. This subject is problematic due to a basic assumption that is inherent to the Moderate Moralist position. It is important to note that the Radical Moralist would not accept immorality in any form of art. Any fictional representation of immorality, be they brutal violence or planned murders, are by definition *already* a form of art. The question whether the immorality is 'aestheticized' in the pejorative sense is only proposed by the Radical Moralist. The Moderate Moralist accepts that there are depictions of immorality in art, yet he regards immorality to be 'aestheticized', when it is glorified, applauded, commended, that is identified as good.

Moralist needs to consider the film in its entirety, as aesthetically and ethically flawed. There are no other additional aesthetic qualities which may 'override' the quality that is the film's essence. *Badlands* exemplarily showcases film's capacity to *transfigure* challenges from the realm of aesthetics into the realm of ethics. Badlands transfers the film image and intense engagement of immorality from a matter of aesthetics to a matter that is ethically problematic.

The Moderate Moralist can claim that the movement between aesthetics and ethics are morally virtuous. He can adopt the 'virtue theory' and consider the ethical problems that *Badlands* presents as challenges that refine moral sensitivity and thus as aesthetic virtues. The Moderate Moralist, however, needs to carefully judge for himself whether the ethical flaws before him truly propel his moral development or flaws that remain ethically and aesthetically unacceptable. Moralism loses its philosophical integrity if every ethical flaw is ultimately considered by the 'virtue theory' as an aesthetic virtue.

These transfigurations between aesthetics and ethics can also be applied to Hitchcock's *Rope*. The Moderate Moralist viewer is not challenged by the filmic depiction of murder but he is unnerved when it is fabricated as 'art'. *Rope* confronts the Moderate Moralist with the Autonomist claim of the characters when they attempt to make their murder 'beautiful'. The Moderate Moralist viewer, however, is suspended from the challenge when justice ultimately 'prevails'; Brandon is incapable of suppressing his urge to unveil his handiwork and leads himself to getting caught. The fact that the killers fail to commit to their Autonomist thesis give the Moderate Moralist sufficient grounds to consider the murder as a failed attempt at 'art' and therefore, only strengthening their own Moralism.

A question arises, whether the 'relief' that the Moderate Moralist is given at the end of the film, can be considered by the viewer as an aesthetic defect? According to 'virtue theory' mentioned in the first chapter, an artwork can be ethically criticized if it undermines moral development. The theory asserts that a work of art that challenges its viewers to reassess their views, to develop sensitivity towards different dispositions, is ethically meritorious. By this logic, the Moderate Moralist should consider the challenge as an aesthetic virtue and the relief from the challenge as an aesthetic vice. Whether the Moderate Moralist regards the 'relief' that he receives as an aesthetic defect or not, depends on the ethical disposition he chooses to uphold (whether or not he adopts the 'virtue theory'). Aesthetic consistency is as much bound to one's own aesthetic

disposition as to one's morals; the aesthetic inconsistency indicates the inconsistency of one's *ethics*.

Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, as aforementioned, is the only film out of the three, where the director indicates his intention to prescribe in his film a form of Moralism. Nevertheless, the film succeeds to surprisingly challenge a Moderate Moralist audience and more obviously challenge viewers that uphold Immoralist and Autonomist dispositions.

Ten years after the original release of *Funny Games*, Haneke directed and released an English version of the film. The film was advertised predominantly to American audiences as a conventional thriller despite the fact that the film itself protests the conventions advertised. This form of advertisement, however, was purposefully done because Haneke intended to 'punish' the very audiences that are entertained by the thriller. The film challenges the Moderate Moralist audience if one takes into account the film's actual audience and the ethical problems of Haneke's intentions.

As aforementioned, the director is aware and caters for the aesthetic and moral sensitivities of his audience. In my opinion, Haneke in his U.S release of *Funny Games* miscalculated and overestimated the sensitivities of his Moderate Moralist audience. Although Haneke intends to prescribe a form of Moralism, it is not certain that the Moderate Moralist will recognize the discomfort that he experiences as fortification of his disposition. The different games, skillful cinematography and clean aesthetic ultimately charge the film with a playfulness and 'sadism' that in the eyes of the Moderate Moralist is inappropriate treatment of the psychological and physical torture at hand.[157] The Moderate Moralist is challenged because it is immensely difficult to establish whether or not *Funny Games* participates in the excesses it criticizes.[158]

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[157] The second release of *Funny Games* was heavily criticized and consequently dividing critics into two camps: one commending Haneke for the intellectual exercise and the other asserting that Haneke's film undermines his intention. David Stratton, an English-Australian film critic, belonging to the latter group, comments that "[I'm] not sure that, in manipulating the audience to make his points, Haneke isn't guilty of the exploitation of filmmakers and films he's attacking here...".
David Stratton. "Funny Games". Rev. of *Funny Games*. n.d.: n. pag. *ABC - Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. ABC. Web. 21 Dec. 2014.
[158] Brunette. *Michael Haneke*. 5.

With regard to the film's objective, not once has Haneke clarified his intentions to utilize the aesthetic medium to "give an awakening kind of slap",[159] to 'punish', his audience. He considers this form of punishment as what the audience "needs", for their own moral development.[160] The Moderate Moralist may agree with the objectives of the film in theory. However, he is nevertheless challenged when the end product, the film, figures aggressiveness towards the audience. Haneke may not 'aestheticize' the violence *of* the film *per se*, but rather 'aestheticizes' (manipulates the medium) the violence towards the audience.

Funny Games challenges the Immoralist viewer due to the manner in which the film utilizes the emotion of disgust. It is demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis that the Immoralist argument ultimately falls into an individual subcategory under Moderate Autonomism. Disgust, however, is an exception to this claim. Not only do ethics and aesthetics collide (see Figure 5.3) but the pleasure that is inherent to disgust, incorporates an element of Immoralism into the emotion. The pleasure that is prescribed by disgust origins from a situation or objects that is morally problematic. Therefore the emotion establishes the Immoralist relationship of moral vice that equates to aesthetic merit. Haneke in *Funny Games* neutralizes the pleasure of disgust and therefore, as opposed to his expectations, the Immoralist viewer experiences distilled discomfort when prescribed disgust.

In the case of *Rope*, if the Autonomist challenge that the characters present is considered by the Moderate Moralist as an aesthetic merit, it would seem inconsistent with the Moralist's thesis. In order to justify this incongruence, the Moderate Moralist considers the challenge to be moral and therefore claiming the Autonomism back into the fold of Moralism. *Funny Games* differs from *Rope* in the sense that the film reveals acute aesthetic inconsistencies of the Moderate Autonomist viewer. Moreover, due to the unique qualities of the film medium, the Moderate Autonomist cannot maneuver out of his logical fallacy as easily as the Moderate Moralist did so for *Rope*.

Funny Games prescribes disgust whilst intending to strip from the emotion any element pleasure. When Haneke prescribes to his audience disgust devoid of pleasure, he is prescribing an

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[159] *Michael Haneke Interview*. Perf. Michael Haneke and Serge Toubiana. Kino Video, 2006. DVD.
[160] Haneke tells Toubiana in an interview: "...I always said it's a film that you watch if you need this film. If you don't need this film, you leave. If someone stays until the end, he needed to be tortured during that time to understand. If you want to, you can understand very quickly...".

emotional experience that is best accounted for by the Radical Moralist. A Moderate Autonomist viewer who would asses aesthetically *Funny Games* autonomous of its ethics would be completely disregarding the moral agenda that the director has set for the film. Moreover, because no one is free of disgust,[161] the Moderate Autonomist would experience a Radical Moralist emotion despite claiming an Autonomist position. The Moderate Autonomist in *Funny Games* cannot uphold aesthetic consistency because the film *emotionally* subjects the viewer to Moralism. The Radical Autonomist may out of complete rationalization, withstands the Moralism of the film to which he is subjected.[162] However, because the Moderate Autonomist viewer allows a distant relationship between aesthetic and ethics (see Figure 5.1), the strength of the Moralism in Haneke's prescribed disgust succeeds in deconstructing the autonomy.

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[161] Menninghaus. "Between Vomiting and Laughing. Base Lines of a Philosophy of Disgust". 2.

[162] The Radical Autonomist not only claims ethics to be autonomous from aesthetics, but also from sentiment. A Radical Autonomist viewer can admit that he experiences disgust, however, because this is only an emotion, it does not impair his Autonomist argument that is established in the realms of rationality.

Aesthetic Incongruence: A Conclusion

Ted Cohen in his article *On the Consistency of One's Personal Aesthetics*, asserts that personal confrontation with aesthetic incongruence aids in the foundation of one's set of judgments, his aesthetic *personality*. Cohen's argument can be demonstrated on Stanley Kubrick and Quentin Tarantino, as two directors that have been on numerous accounts compared to each other:

(1) *A* likes Stanley Kubrick

(2) *A* likes Stanley Kubrick because Kubrick is *x*.

(3) *A* does not like Quentin Tarantino

(4) *A* believes Quentin Tarantino is *x*.

In this line of argument, aesthetic incongruity is revealed. In order to maneuver out of the logical fallacy, *A* can decide to abandon x altogether or attempt to refine x; to look for a way to make *x* more specific and detailed.[163] This type of argumentation is more than relevant, for example, to the inconsistency of aesthetics that the Moderate Autonomist experiences whilst watching *Funny Games*. The viewer believes in the autonomy of aesthetics and ethics, however, emotionally he experiences disgust that explicitly binds the two philosophical domains together. The inconsistency, to which the Moderate Autonomist is subjected, obligates him to reevaluate the Autonomism of the moral atrocities that he views. The desire for aesthetic integrity and congruence compels one to interrogate his aesthetic judgment, to discern some order in his aesthetic responses and honestly investigate what he praises, denounces and desires. Cohen aptly articulates that "the surest path to self-awareness is the investigation of your linkages to others".[164]

With regard to the three films, *Badlands* has demonstrated how the intense and especially the visual engagement of film, transfigure aesthetic inquiries into the realm of ethics. Likewise, *Rope*'s aesthetic challenges have revealed how a viewer's aesthetic consistency is an indicator of his ethical consistency. Finally, *Funny Games* presents various examples as to how different aesthetic dispositions are challenged. These aesthetic challenges ultimately expose the aesthetic and thus ethic incongruence of the person that upholds each of these dispositions.

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[163] Ted Cohen. "On Consistency in One's Personal Aesthetic". Levinson 110.
[164] Cohen. "On Consistency in One's Personal Aesthetic". 106.

Film as a medium of intense engagement obliges the spectator to acknowledge with an emotional gravity the inconsistencies of his judgment. Moreover, film does not minimize this pursuit of self-knowledge to a literate demographic, but rather the wide engagement of the medium, places a uniform aesthetic and ethic responsibility on a diverse collective of people. The film image does not have the capacity nor does it profess to amend the immoralities that it depicts, yet within its immense power the spectators revaluate and reflect upon their regard for the pain of others.

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תוכן עניינים

תקציר

סוגיות הנוגעות לקשר שבין אסתטיקה ואתיקה מלוות את האמנות לאורך ההיסטוריה. הרוע המוצג כיפה
יוצר דיסוננס, ומציב בפני המתבונן קונפליקט, בגין ההנחה הטמונה עמוק בתרבותינו כי יופי מזוהה עם טוב,
ובהתאם, המכוער מזוהה עם הרע. הקולנוע מבליט מטבעו את הסוגיות הללו בשל יכולתו של המדיום
להמחיש לקהל רחב רעיון בתור חוויה אינטנסיבית. מטרתה העיקרית של עבודה זו, היא להסביר איך הקולנוע
מאתגר את התפישות האסתטיות והאתיות של הצופה ולענות על השאלה, מדוע המדיום הקולנועי יכול וראוי
לעשות זאת.

בעבודה אנתח שלושה סרטים : 'שבילי הזעם' של הבימאי טרנס מאליק, 'חבל' של הבימאי אלפרד היצ׳קוק ו-
'משחקי שעשוע' של הבימאי מיכאל הנקה. שלושת הסרטים מכילים, באמצעות תכנים או מבעים ויזואליים,
ייצוגים שונים של רוע. יחד עם הייצוג המובהק של הרוע בסרטים הללו והקשיים המוסריים הנלווים לו,
ובניגוד להנחת היסוד התרבותית הגורסת ניגודיות בין רוע ואסתטיקה, בשלושת הסרטים ניכר הדגש על הפן
האסתטי . החלק הראשון של העבודה סוקר מספר גישות כלפי היחסים בין אסתטיקה ומוסר. החלק השני
עוסק בסוגיות אסתטיות ואתיות שעולות מתוך הסרטים. הפרק האחרון דן בשאלה כיצד הסוגיות שעולות
מתוך הסרטים מאתגרות את השיפוט האסתטי והמוסרי של הצופים.

מסקנת העבודה היא כי הקולנוע, בשל הסגולות הייחודיות למדיום, מוביל את הצופה לחוות חוויה רגשית
שבהכרח יוצרת זיקה בין היפה לבין המוסרי. לפיכך, הקולנוע מכריח את הצופה להעריך מחדש, הן מבחינה
אסתטית והן מבחינה מוסרית, את הרוע שעל המסך.

עבודת גמר בקולנוע

יחסי הגומלין בין אסתטיקה לרוע בקולנוע

מנחים: ירדן כרמין, ד״ר גד פרודובסקי

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חורף תשע״ה/2014

מחזור כ״ד