

UNBECOMING

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ENCOUNTERS WITH

ETHICAL

EVENT

FILMS

DAVID H. FLEMING



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Unsettling Encounters with Ethical Event Films

David H. Fleming



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For Phaedra

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Misfortune, sickness, madness, even the approach of death have two aspects: in one sense, they separate me from my power, in another sense, they endow me with a strange power, as though I possessed a dangerous means of exploration, which is also a terrifying realm to explore.

Gilles Deleuze

Introduction

On Ethics and Evental Encounters

How does one become conscious of oneself, of God, and of things?

(Deleuze 1988: 28)

For both the philosopher-cum-artist Friedrich Nietzsche and the artist-cum-philosopher Antonin Artaud, thinking through, or *with*, stimulating works of art offered one of the few ameliorations from the smothering drudgery of so-called ‘normal’ (or normalized) life. The other came from the emancipatory embrace of madness, delirium and disorder. Imprimis, *Unbecoming Cinema* sets out to synthesize both, for today we arguably need disruptive encounters evermore, to help defamiliarize, disorganize and destabilize the systems that everywhere deform and distort life. Although admittedly exploring a range of mad and maddening films and ‘non-cinema’ (see Brown 2016; Nagib 2016) from diverse sectors, times and places – aimed at a broad spectrum of demographics including film festival audiences, art gallery visitors, YouTube viewers, ‘head audiences’ and niche ‘gore whore’ fangirls – the works explored throughout *Unbecoming Cinema* appear arranged together courtesy of a shared desire to construct new conceptual dimensions for thought, and think or impart *difference*.

More specifically, the book sets out to explore, survey, map and reconnoitre a diverse range of ethico-political films that work to communicate¹ what it is ‘we are up against’, and raise ethical questions about ‘*how* best to proceed’. Or to put it more plainly, the book dives into expressive screen projects that desire or aspire to make a real *difference* in the world, by plugging themselves into, and operating upon, the nerves, brains, bodies and milieus they encounter. *Unbecoming Cinema* is primarily about moving encounters, then, and is itself a product of these moving encounters with thinking films: of being touched by artistic bodies that communicate difference, or agitated to feel-think alterity. As such, we maintain that the ‘delirious’ (Seem 2004) ethical philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, both with and without his erstwhile collaborator Félix Guattari, appears best suited for approaching such forms of film; not only for its capacity to conceptualize becomings, events and the thinking of difference, but also because against any narrow conception of ivory tower intellectualism, Deleuze and Guattari insist that philosophy be inseparable from a lived way of life, and address itself to the real-world problems that confront us (otherwise it would be of absolutely no use).

What remains true of philosophy also extends to our understanding of ethical art throughout this project, for this too is comprehended in terms of addressing itself to real-world problems, or operating as a productive agent or force for change. This is to say, the unorthodox films of this project are not principally explored as stable texts to be laid out and

hermeneutically deciphered or interpreted. Rather, and contra to such negative approaches to media, we view these ‘unsettling’ and ‘unbecoming’ films as active agents, dynamic forces, machinic bodies or immanent modalities that display a positive ability to modify viewer’s senses and thoughts, and generate actual movements of world. The ethical or eventual encounter stemming thereof becomes a primary focus of this book, particularly with regard to how such encounters potentially increase an individual or collective body’s range of ‘affections’, their ‘power of action’, or else aid them in coming into ‘full possession of that power’ (see Deleuze 1992: 269).

Our opening epigraph, which appears in Deleuze’s writing on Benedict Spinoza’s *Ethics*, relates comparable notions to the formation of *adequate ideas*. That is, empowering forms of knowing that increase one’s ability to live, act and be affected. Of particular relevance to this project is how this three-fold question can also broadly account for the forms of ‘philosophical’ enquiry raised by the various audio-visual projects explored throughout this book; or the forms of questions the films prompt their viewers to think about, or become conscious of, during and after the screening event. For good or bad, however, and as the title of the book suggests, the types of encounter explored throughout *Unbecoming Cinema: Unsettling Encounters with Ethical Event Films* are rarely customary or run-of-the-mill, and can be understood using their form and content to provoke and agitate their viewers. As such, we must here temper an early warning to our prospective readers. Note, the films explored hereafter undeniably encroach upon contentious, troubling, shocking, provocative, disgusting, transgressive and taboo topics and themes that are likely to offend or upset certain sensibilities. In addressing our subtitle first, readers would do well to recall that in everyday parlance, to feel ‘unsettled’ or suffer from ‘unsettling’ means to be disturbed by something: to be made to feel uneasy, anxious or worried. Being unsettled simultaneously implies a sense of being inconstant, though, of being altered or disrupted: like the unsettling of the riverbed or the ocean floor by dynamic movements of water. Many chapters in this book accordingly explore filmic encounters that are unsettling in both these senses of the term: being at once moving emotional encounters, which concomitantly disturb sedimentalized modes of perceiving, feeling or thinking. For across all four chapters we necessarily dive into the unsettling: disturbing documentaries that record and display actual suicides; disrobing art installations, art therapy films, and *art brut* videos that positively portray autism, ‘brain disorders’ and ‘machinic animism’; distorting drug cinemas that promote spiritual and physical revolt; and revolting pervert(ing) torture-porn designed to turn our stomachs and instil feelings of disgust. Albeit in an ethical way.

By foregrounding the ethical potentials bound up in such encounters, *Unbecoming Cinema* necessarily finds itself allied with a tranche of recent works that appear to reject dipping once more into the cinematic ‘canon of joy’ (Culp 2016: 1), and instead confront works that patently do not leave their viewers happy, cathartically soothed, or even necessarily entertained. Indeed, in titles such as Mikita Brottman’s *Offensive Films* (2005), and more recently Nocolaj Lübecker’s *The Feel-Bad Film* (2015), we can locate scholars gauging the political importance of films that appear deliberately antagonistic, assaultive,

boring, confusing, despairing, frustrating, humiliating, irritating, irksome, misfortunate, sickening, traumatic or worrying. Lübecker critically foregrounds the importance of films by directors – such as Lars von Trier and Harmony Korine – who deliberately deploy negative affects to unground viewers, as a means of stimulating valuable ethico-political thought patterns (2015: 171). Film here surfaces a privileged medium for making us aware of the role non-positive feelings play in modern life, particularly by operating in a *cruel* fashion upon our bodies and minds. Accordingly, as Lübecker puts it, these feel-bad films help highlight ‘the Artaudian dimension of going via the body of the spectator to her metaphysics’, in an unpleasant operation that we know ‘the patient will survive’ (Lübecker 2015: 169).

Such ethical impulses and gestures might also be recognized as part of a wider reappraisal and critique of what, after Slavoj Žižek, we might call the political factor of enjoyment (2008). And in this sense *Unbecoming Cinema*, like these aforementioned titles, might also be thought in relation to a broader spread of works that include Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Sarah Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism* (2009) and the blazing political manifestoes by The Institute for Precarious Consciousness (2014) and The Invisible Committee (2005), which confront dead-on the circulation of so many negative affects, sad passions and bad feelings that increasingly impact life within so-many modern societies.

Because the majority of the films explored in this book are also peripheral personal-political projects emerging from the shadowy margins of the commercial industry or the military-entertainment complex,² we also often encounter emancipating experimentation with film form, format, content and expression, which further disturb or unsettle what it is we might traditionally think of *as* cinema, either as a mode or practice. Such fluid approaches are again best accommodated by Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent *schizoanalytic* paradigms, wherein any nominal notion of ‘cinema’ is recast to account for its contingent borderings, while recognizing it as a dynamic living assemblage caught cross-pollinating with other fecund bodies, forces and ‘desiring machines’, which ignite ongoing processes of de- and reterritorialization, qua becoming different. In the same vein, recent standout ‘intermedia’, ‘transmedia’ and media-archaeology projects such as Sean Cubitt’s *The Cinema Effect* (2004), Thomas Elsaesser’s ‘The New Film History as Media Archaeology’ (2004), Pavle Levi’s *Cinema By Other Means* (2012), Jefferey Geiger and Karin Littau’s edited collection on *Cinematicity* (2013) as well as Steven Shaviro’s work on ‘Post-cinematic affect’ (2010) display fruitful parallels with the unsettled forms of film we engage with throughout this project. For in all these what we often encounter is the familiar image of mainstream cinema in its absence, or difference. That is, in unfamiliar or hybrid forms that appear to ‘do’ film differently, and as such contingently interfere with any stable notions we might have of a particular genre, its viewing practices, or even what we should experience with cinema. Accordingly, many of the films explored henceforth can be understood as making palpable Elsaesser’s conceptualization of the cinema as a ‘philosophical *perpetuum mobile*’ (Elsaesser 2008: 239); a notion that forces us to restlessly

interrogate the hyper-plastic medium cinema always-already is, and pay heed to how it becomes modified, deformed and detoured in its distorting and perverting encounters with its 'outside' (changing industries, technologies, politics, economics, social practices, and the nature of the real).

We can locate a geopolitical iteration of this self-same deterritorializing impulse in Victor Fan's *Cinema Approaching Reality* (2015). Characteristically, Fan there invites readers to reinterrogate and re-perceive 'traditional' occidental film theory's thinking of the aporia between art and the real; first by considering it from the perspective of its oriental 'outside', and then by passing these ontological and epistemological considerations through a defamiliarizing eastern prism. With this reorienting gesture, the cinematic writing of philosophers of film such as André Bazin and Deleuze are literally and metaphorically shanghaied,³ becoming estranged and made alien as they are re-read and re-imagined through the lenses of Chinese critical theory and Buddhist thought. At the very end of his mind-bending book-length enquiry, Fan finally unbuttons Bazin's famous ontological question of 'What is cinema?' by inviting readers to ponder instead the more enigmatic Zen-like problem of: 'What is not cinema?' (Fan 2015: 222). The making strange of the cinema bound up in this gesture ethically and politically resonates with our investigation into what we are conceptually calling 'unbecoming' cinema here, and which at this stage I must confess to not being the sole offender in fashioning. Indeed, an earlier iteration of 'unbecoming cinema' was forwarded by William Brown and I in our reading of Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (2009), which was published in 2015 in *Film-Philosophy* as 'Voiding cinema: Subjectivity beside itself, or unbecoming cinema in *Enter the Void*'. There, we highlighted the extent to which digital imaging technologies ostensibly allowed the cinema as we knew it to stand outside and beside itself – in a manner metonymically mirrored by the dying and reborn character Oscar (Nathaniel Brown) within the narrative – so that the film and viewer could better ponder or prehend the non-fixity of being alongside notions of death and re-birth relevant to cinema's digital becomings (Brown and Fleming 2015).

Brown's subsequent writing on *Supercinema* and 'non-cinema' has since served to bifurcate or vacillate these earlier discussions, branching them off in two distinct yet complimentary directions. In *Supercinema* (2015), for example, Brown explores Hollywood blockbuster manifestations of digital cinematic expression, while foregrounding the novel becomings and new ontologies opened up by the wider digital event. Echoing Jonathan Beller (2006), Brown remains aware that these particular manifestations of cinema are ideologically co-extensive and synonymous with capitalism. Thus, if in this project Brown shows that there can be philosophical profundity in even 'vapid' Hollywood blockbusters, in his later work he encourages us to see that there is likewise philosophical value 'in even the "worst" films in the world' (Brown forthcoming). Indeed, in 'Non-cinema: Digital, ethics, multitude', which he expands in his forthcoming monograph of the same title, Brown takes us down an altogether different ethical path, away from the centres of commercial

film-making, towards the digitally enabled democratic peripheries and margins – and the weedy peripheries within those margins – of the lo-fi non-commercial underbelly of global digital screen culture. In his search for alternative (Dusselean) ‘barbarian’ philosophies and non-cinema expressions, which become reminiscent of François Laruelle’s ‘non-philosophy’ and ‘non-photography’ models (2011, 2012),⁴ Brown investigates the work of amateur/alternative USA directors such as Giuseppe Andrews, that find clear parallels with the sick and perverse independent films we explore in chapter four here. Certainly, the ‘Vomit Gore’ work of Lucifer Valentine, like the marginal bad taste work of Andrews and certain so-called ‘mumblecore’ directors, is celebrated for its clear sense of ‘thinking outside the box office’ and for its truly thought-provoking and *unbecoming* nature (more on which later). Of course, these off course and outlandish forays into the offensive and trashy margins also recall an already long line of critical and philosophical engagements with alternative screen cultures, tastes, practices and politico-aesthetics, which include, but are not limited to, realizations and/or conceptualizations of a ‘counter-cinema’ (Wollen), ‘imperfect-cinema’ (Garcia Espinosa), ‘third cinema’ (Solans and Getino), ‘amateur cinema’ (Zimmerman) or ‘bad cinema’ (Sconce) (see Brown 2016: 116).

Perhaps demonstrating the timely nature of such enquiries, in the very same edition of *Film-Philosophy* that Brown’s introduction is published in, we can also discover Lúcia Nagib’s own slightly different take on what ‘non-cinema’ means today. Nagib’s notion of non-cinema is more precisely informed by her critical engagement with Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of ‘acinema’, André Bazin’s description of the ‘impure cinema’, and Alain Badiou’s theorization of the parasitic art’s bastard ‘inaesthetics’.

As this latter critical coordinate also becomes significant for our larger investigation, we might minimally unpack it a little before proceeding. Worth recalling here is that throughout his writing Badiou maintains that philosophy and cinema are both impure arts and practices, which reveal a dissimilar and asymmetrical relationship with regard to how they ‘think’ (or provoke thinking). On the one hand, an art form like cinema offers itself up as one of the fundamental ‘conditions’ for philosophy, which is itself a ‘truthless’ medium that needs the cinema to vampirically feed upon and ‘re-think’ (cinema as an object for philosophy). On the other hand, the cinema is an art form that functions perfectly well without philosophy. It is this realization that ultimately leads Badiou to coin his neologistic term ‘inaesthetics’, which is designed to draw a distinction between the way in which art thinks and the manner in which philosophy re-thinks art (qua aesthetics). Or, as Badiou renders it in the preface to his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005):

By ‘inaesthetics’ I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.

(Badiou 2005: i)

Badiou also understands the cinema to be an impure art at its core, outlining it as a parasitical art form that synthesizes and democratizes all the other arts, without for all that actually presenting them. Picking up on such ideas witnesses scholars such as Brown and Nagib expanding on the important role that ‘non-cinematic’ forces (from artistic, political and technological fields) have upon the changing nature of film (and by extension the real). Together, such forays into the realms of the non-philosophical and the non-cinematic become indicative of a larger swell of titles that increasingly demand that those who study film and/or philosophy ‘zoom out’, as such, and pay heed to the broader landscape, or historical events, while recognizing the complex entanglements and intermingling of other technologies, practices, institutions, movements, artworks, thoughts and non-human forces, actors and factors that directly or indirectly interfere with and impact how and what philosophy and film can think today. In the wake of such ideas, *Unbecoming Cinema* remains politically alert to the in-forming historical, artistic and non-cinematic formations that impact the unsettling of cinema as a heteroclite and dynamic (inter)medium or apparatus, with several chapters touching upon how film – as an audio-visual mode and social practice – becomes and unbecomes, or reterritorializes and deterritorializes, as it forges transforming articulations with its outside.

Here, the unsettling and emancipatory drives reified by the form and expression of many of the films necessarily dovetail into our notion of ‘unbecoming cinema’, which is reshaped here to be more than just another polysemous portmanteau tactically deployed to defamiliarize or disturb our habitual thinking of the cinema as a technosocial medium and practice. To spell it out, beyond highlighting how film becomes and unbecomes as it makes assemblages with other bodies and forces (as the second half of the book makes abundantly clear), the specific notion of an *unbecoming* cinema mobilized here also performs a spiralling return to reconnect us to notions of disturbing and unsettling films – particularly with regard to our encounters with taboo transgressing drug films and Vomit Gore BDSM⁵ horror porn that often stand accused of being ‘unbecoming’ in the more vernacular sense of the term: being deemed too disturbing, disgusting, unseemly, immoral, pretentious, unflattering or unpalatable for conservative tastes. As we will soon discover, though, these choices are often adopted as part of a broader tactic to help promote the ethical perception of alternative conceptual dimensions, and provoke the thinking of difference.

Thinking Ethically with Films (and Deleuze)

Of late, many have commented that the study of film, and in particular ‘film-philosophy’ – which constitutes a host of practices that David Martin-Jones broadly defines as being concerned with ‘how films philosophise’ or ‘do philosophy’ (2016a: 6) – has undergone something of an ‘ethical turn’ (see e.g. Nagib 2011: 10, Choi and Frey 2014: 1, Sinnerbrink 2016: 5). Certainly, if one were to construct an extensive catalogue of recent titles that contain a conjugated nominal clustering of ‘film/cinema’ and/as ‘ethics’, it would easily plug several

pages, even if printed in size ten font. A by no means exhaustive smattering of book-length specimens in this grain would have to contain stand-out monographs such as Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton's *Film and Ethics* (2010), Lúcia Nagib's *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (2011), Joseph Kupfer's *Feminist Ethics in Film* (2012), David Leiwei Li's *Economy Emotion and Ethics in Chinese Cinema* (2016), Robert Sinnerbrink's *Cinematic Ethics* (2016) and the far-reaching edited collections such as Ward E. Jones and Samantha Vice's *Ethics at The Cinema* (2011), Jacqui Miller's *Film and Ethics* (2013) and Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey's *Cine-Ethics* (2014). Collectively, if not individually, this expanding cluster of titles draw on a diverse range of movies plucked from the 'polycentric' 'world of cinemas' (see Nagib 2011: 1; Martin-Jones 2016b: 69), while putting them into productive dialogue with a legion of eminent thinkers and philosophers such as Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Lévinas, Laura Mulvey, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Stanley Cavell, André Bazin, Enrique Dussel and Alain Badiou, to name just a few.

To speak generally, we might note that this growing field characteristically betrays a collective movement away from any quest for grand unifying theories, and instead, to hijack Choi and Frey's observations, discloses a preference for 'singularity over universality, affectivity over rationality, and ethics of the particular over ethics of moral imperatives' (2014: 2). Nonetheless, if we were to try to pick a guiding line through this ever-expanding labyrinth, we might note how much of this scholarship places emphasis on the way in which films specifically affect their viewers, while allowing them to emote and evaluate, relate to and empathize with others, or else gain new perspectives and understandings upon pressing real-world issues. Also common to many of these enquiries is their taking cognizance of a complex entanglement and immingling of politics, aesthetics and ethics bound up in our reception and understanding of film: as text, praxis, politico-economic product or as a social practice. To channel Sinnerbrink's recent summation of the turf, in order to fully appreciate cinema as a 'medium of ethical experience' (2016: x), these studies variously pay heed to three separate, yet interconnected, levels or dimensions that we can adumbrate here as the ethics within cinematic representations, the ethics of cinematic representation and the ethics and politics of cinema as a symptomatic expression of broader cultural-historical or ideological perspectives. Towards the end of his book, Sinnerbrink also points forward to an important fourth dimension that he sees as being specifically linked to 'how' it is films do what they do when they express or evoke ethical experiences in their viewers.

In recognizing the importance of all these dimensions, *Unbecoming Cinema* takes time in each and every chapter to explore the intersections of context, politics, aesthetics and form with regard to audio-visual expression and evocations of film-thinking, and how these different dimensions help create or configure 'a particular philosophical view' (Kupfer 2012: 1), or else allow a film and its viewer to 'do' ethics (Downing and Saxton 2010: 3; Sinnerbrink 2016: xi). *Unbecoming Cinema* also shares with many of these existing enquiries an understanding of film as an important and prioritized site/sight of 'ethico-political' thinking or thought. In working to unpack this concept somewhat, though, we might first take pause to reflect on the meanings of each of these terms, as well as the role of the hyphen

in inter-connecting ethics and politics under the canopy of film aesthetics (or ‘inaesthetics’). As a starting point, we might return to Downing and Saxton’s assertion that while ethics and politics always remain ‘irreducible to one another’, consideration of cinema makes us intensely aware of how the two terms are ‘mutually implicated and enabling’ (2010: 11). Accordingly, for Downing and Saxton, cinema makes tangible the Levinasian notion that ‘ethics is an optics through which we habitually view and conceptualize [the world]’ (2010: 2). Echoes of D.N. Rodowick’s assertion here too, that all aesthetic questions of medium specificity eventually ‘turn into ethical questions’ (Rodowick 2007: 73). Of course, in the broader context of the academy’s so-called ‘affective turn’, many scholars conscious of the film-optics as ethics position take pains to account for the embodied nature of film viewing. Vivian Sobchack’s *Carnal Thoughts* (2004), to take but one example, remains a landmark in this field, augustly foregrounding the extent to which film aesthetics materially impact the viewer’s sensorium, by eliciting feeling and emotional responses as the human body and ‘the film’s body’ become experientially enfolded during the act of screening. In her explication of such experiences and emotional reactions, Sobchack demonstrates how, aesthetics as ethics ultimately emerges ‘first and corporeally as sense-ability and response-ability’ (2004: 310).

The aforementioned explosion of works on ethics and film no doubt also overlap with another fanning spread of titles fashioned under the ‘Deleuzian’ Film Studies banner. At the time of writing, the website Deleuzecinema.com reliably informs its users that there are between twenty to thirty monographs penned in this particular film-philosophy *style*, not to mention the ever-growing catalogue of edited collections, special journal issues, articles, book chapters and talks that collectively institute this sprawling rhizomatic field. Of course, it could be argued that the turn to Deleuze is in and of itself simply symptomatic of film-philosophy’s wider ethical (and affective) turn: if not the reverse. For sure, the conflation of Deleuze’s thought models (both with and without Guattari) with ethics boasts a well-furnished history. We might recall that in the preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s first co-authored collaboration, Michel Foucault notes: ‘I would say that *Anti-Oedipus* (may the authors forgive me) is a book of ethics’ (2004a: xv). Ronald Bogue goes further still, suggesting that in a sense, ‘all of Deleuze’s work is concerned with ethics, in that ethical principles inform his basic conception of thought and what it means to think’ (Bogue 2012: 7). Or as D.N. Rodowick renders it, with regard to Deleuze’s thought models more broadly, ‘the fundamental ethical choice is to believe in this world and its powers of transformation’ (Rodowick 2009: 99). It is precisely for such reasons that many, such as J.H. Müller and William Brown, discuss Deleuzian thought in terms of being a ‘difference machine’ (see Brown 2015: 4), or else (in my own preferred variant) a ‘difference engine’.

It is no secret here that Deleuze (and Guattari) took inspiration from Nietzsche, picking up his arrows and furthering his conviction that truly ethical ‘thought is creation, not will to truth’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2011: 54). At its heart, then, a Deleuzian ethics is associated with an immanent political search for a ‘new health’, which often only arrives alongside a new

‘art’ or ‘style’ of thinking/living. Deleuze famously earmarked the cinema as a particularly privileged site/sight for achieving this, not only because cinema’s psychomechanics ‘makes thought immanent to the image’ (168), but as Bogue elucidates, because ‘learning to think otherwise is a manner of learning to see in a new way’ (Bogue 2012: 4). Accordingly, for many Deleuzian scholars, the two *Cinema* books are best understood – like Deleuze’s other forays into painting, literature, architecture and music – as ethical exercises that are principally concerned with the alternative ‘ways of being that art provokes in us’ (Rodowick 2009: 99; see also Bogue 2009, 2012). In a chapter in *Cinema 2* entitled ‘Thought and cinema’ Deleuze posits that because cinema literally puts movement into the image, it should be understood as a transversal *spiritual automaton* that is capable of engineering a shock to thought by ‘*communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly*’ (Deleuze 2005b: 151).

Let us recall here that Deleuze’s original models of cinematic thinking were based upon his Spinozian (immanent) and Bergsonian (temporal) take on the medium, which demanded we first believe in this world, and then make ourselves open to becoming with it (Rodowick 2009: 100). Deleuze’s models of cinematic thinking were also mapped over two distinct historical moments (predominantly effecting Europe and the United States) that nurtured a shift from a classical pre-war modality (*Cinema 1*’s movement-image) to a modernist post-war one (*Cinema 2*’s time-image). In Rodowick’s reading of Deleuze’s two *Cinema* books, these distinct regimes are described offering viewers different ethical paths across the plane of immanence (2009: 109). In the first instance, the movement-image, as it was expressed through the work of directors such as Sergei Eisenstein and D.W. Griffith, made a belief in the possible transformation of the world tangible. In difference to these, the post-war time-image shaped by modernist directors such as Orson Welles and Jean-Luc Godard appeared to disclose an alternative

intuition of an interior, deeper world, ‘before man,’ as it were, produced from a shock to thought or by thought’s confrontation with what is unthinkable. This is a confrontation with a time that is not that of Being, identity, or teleology, but rather, an anticipatory time – of contingency, the purely conditional, the nondetermined or not yet.

(Rodowick 2009: 109)

To make a parenthetical comment on such issues here, it is interesting to note that several chapters in Annie van den Oever’s recent edited collection on Viktor Shklovsky’s notion of *ostranenie* (variously translated as ‘making strange’, ‘deautomatizing’ or ‘defamiliarizing’) make overt links to Deleuze’s film-thinking models. In a section revisiting cognitive and evolutionary-cognitive perspectives, for example, Lázló Tarnay notes significant overlaps between Deleuze’s concept of ‘deterritorialization’ and Shklovsky’s notion of ‘defamiliarization.’ There, Deleuze’s Bergsonian view that ‘the radically new, a radically new experience, can only come through the senses and not through some rearrangement of the already known’ finds significant resonances with Shklovsky’s formalist view of art’s defamiliarizing cognitive

potentialities (2010: 155). Crucial to both models, Tarnay maintains, ‘is that deautomatizing perception is tantamount to constituting a challenge to the intellect which “normally” can only classify’ (2010: 147). In another chapter Miklós Kiss harnesses Godard’s *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) to help further Shklovsky’s idea that the main ‘purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known’ (2010: 165). Kiss thus queries how Godard’s film disrupts our habitual cognitive modes of perceiving and knowing in both a ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ manner. By so doing, his exploration forges significant parallels with Deleuze’s earlier discussions of Godard’s cinema as ‘a pedagogy of the image’ (2005a: 14) and his outline more generally of a deterritorializing ‘Godardian pedagogy’ (2005b: 258).

Deleuze essentially understands Godard’s films inviting audiences to confront the ‘intolerable or the unbearable,’ the unknown or the unthought, in an artistic manner that forces us to ‘forget our own logic and retinal habits’ (2004b: 18). Bogue accordingly employs Deleuze’s pedagogical views to highlight the ethical dimensions and nature of the filmic encounter, wherein avant-garde ethico-politics are deployed to teach viewers ‘to stop seeing and hearing the clichés that clutter the world and to see and hear the new that is already there’ (2012: 4). Bogue elsewhere clarifies that such disjunctive artistic encounters spawn ‘genuine thought’ courtesy of ‘the disruption of ordinary habits and notions’ (2004: 333). Consequently, an encounter with Godard’s pedagogical cinema forces us to ‘undergo the disorienting jolt of something new, different, truly other, and then to explicate those signs, to unfold the differences they enfold’ (Bogue 2004: 341).

From this vantage we are now able to recast Deleuze’s models of creativity in an ethico-aesthetic light, and in turn re-perceive how many existing titles that explore, expand, adapt or detour Deleuze’s take on cinematic-thinking are also in principle exercises in film and/as ethics. Especially those that highlight the different attitudes bound up with the psychomechanical thinking of different image forms. In *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity* (2006) and *Deleuze and World Cinemas* (2011), for example, David Martin-Jones investigates the causes and effect of different ethical and pedagogical forms of film thinking in cinemas emanating from times and places above and beyond those of Deleuze’s *Cinema* books. In the former work, he foregrounds how discontinuous or disjunctive historical moments – such as the build up to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong or the post-economic boom period in Japan – frequently bear witness to increased experimentation and hybridization of movement- and time-image forms of cinematic thought. Apropos of significant historical disturbances and sociopolitical unsettlings, different film-makers and national cinemas are observed to creatively toy with alternative ethico-political modes of film thinking as previously stable notions of national identity (and history) come into crisis. In Patricia Pisters’s *The Neuro-Image* (2012), to take another noteworthy masterwork from the field, readers and viewers are confronted with newly emerging image forms that expose an entirely different ethical path across the plane of immanence. Following Deleuze and Bergson, if the movement-image is primarily concerned with action that takes place in the present, and the time-image exposes a second synthesis of time wherein the past surges

forth into the present, in modern films such as *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004) Pisters observes a new image modality emerging. These ‘neuro-images’, as she calls them, emerge entangled with our modern screen cultures and modulating digital artworks (and networks), and appear to think and express an alternative ‘third synthesis’ of time (2012: 23). What is most unusual about these novel time-image forms, Pisters argues, is that they appear to reach backwards to touch us from the untimely time of the future (2012: 138ff). Thus, and to momentarily channel Bogue as our guide again, we might state that in these creative readings of newly emerging time-image forms (and in an ethical act of *mise en abyme* with the very screen-images she describes), Pisters ludically confronts her readers with the shock of having to think something new, by first exposing them to that which ‘is not orthodox but paradoxical, and hence its sense seems nonsense, not good sense’ (Bogue 2004: 333).

More recently, Nadine Boljkovac’s *Untimely Affects* (2015) continues to provoke readers to ethically confront the unthought that precedes thought via Deleuze’s philosophical writing. While Boljkovac’s ideas and concepts clearly resonate with Pisters (2012: 147–148) and Brown’s (2015: 115–118) earlier writing on Resnais, this mind-bending body-conscious project serves to further swell the ever-expanding ‘bastard line’ (see Massumi in Deleuze 2005a: ix) of Deleuze-inspired ethico-political film-philosophy, with a flair and style reminiscent of previously striking ‘personal’ projects such as Steven Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body* (1993), Laura Marks’ *The Skin of the Film* (2000), Anna Powell’s *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* (2007) and Patricia MacCormack’s *Cinesexuality* (2008), to name check but a few that we will return to throughout *Unbecoming Cinema* (on account of their shared Deleuzian sense and sensibility that there is always a ‘fundamental affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance’: Boljkovac 2015: 15).

Arriving here, and before moving on, it becomes helpful to briefly disentangle our working notion of cinematic creativity from the ethico-politics of the works we will be exploring hereafter. Indeed, it is important to recall that creativity (and deterritorialization) in and of itself does not a Deleuzian cine-ethics make. And although we will strive to make this point clearer within the space of each chapter, it is beneficial to return here to Joseph Barker’s take on Deleuze’s film ethics, where contrary to ‘the standard view’, he teases out the prioritization of ‘ethics over creativity’ in Deleuze’s cinematic writing. Barker demonstrates that to be truly ethical in a Deleuzian sense demands film-makers create images that make felt the complex inter-relationship between thought, the body and the ‘intolerable’ (2014: 122). Integrating statements from Deleuze’s *Dialogues* (2006) with Claire Parnet, Barker further clarifies that we should not here mistake a Deleuzian ethics as simply ‘speaking for the unhappy, speaking in the name of victim, of the tortured and oppressed’, but rather ‘of *giving* voice to unlivable spaces, of which the brain is most intimate with thought’ (2014: 131). This is to say that, for Deleuze, ‘the creation of new images is necessary only in order to force thought into a vision of the intolerability of the world, an intolerability that is continually arising anew and thus continually demands new vision’ (Barker 2014: 122).

Throughout *Unbecoming Cinema* as we explore cinemas about suicide, madness, spiritual revolt and revolting perversions we will engage with artworks and art forms that expressly foreground or make palpable a deep malaise, or that which is truly intolerable, and by so doing unleash or untether ethico-political images that ‘force thought to think its constant imposition of deadly boundaries upon bodies, rather than being produced merely for the sake of creation’ (see Barker 2014: 123). In such manner, this book also differs from many of the existing (Deleuzian and non-Deleuzian) works on cinema and/as ethics, by uniquely exploring works that put into question the current state of thought, while setting into motion new thoughts, which make thinking itself grope towards that which has not yet been thought, or else introduce untimely truths about what is intolerable in the world. In so doing, we necessarily explore voices and artworks from the margins and peripheries which reach out to their viewers’ nervous systems in order that they might touch them, impress them, come into consciousness *with* them, in the hope of making them feel and think differently, or otherwise, and increasing their powers to act and interact. Or again, and to momentarily purloin the powerful words of the Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, *Unbecoming Cinema* embraces and harnesses the electricity and power of minor ethico-political voices from the wilderness that appear to express or be ‘grounded in an avowed affirmation of life in the face of the collective murder and suicide that humanity is headed toward if it does not change the direction of its irrational behaviour’ (Dussel 2013: xv).

Thinking Ethically with Deleuze (and Film)

As is now hopefully becoming clear, for Deleuze, the mind’s capacity for thought is directly related to the body’s ability to act and interact with (or affect and be affected by) its surrounding environment. Following Spinoza, he outlines three primitive affects that entail profound consequences for all human thought and action: desire, joy and sadness. At its simplest, this trident ‘practical philosophy’ amounts to a love of freedom, the joyous denouncement of death worship, sad passions and ‘all that separates us from life, all these transcendent values that are turned against life, these values that are tied to the conditions and illusions of consciousness’ (Deleuze 1988: 26). Reflecting Spinoza, Deleuze maintains that what most often divides us from living life to the fullest are the passions and actions that arrive courtesy of a negative encounter with ‘the outside’, qua the ‘lines’ that serve to territorialize and border us. In outlining these, Deleuze and Guattari necessarily take up a non-normative notion of identity and politics that is not easily mapped onto ‘the most enduring fictions of Western political thought’ or discourse (Patton 2000: 2). Instead, they adopt non-subjectivist terms to describe processes of transformation within a transcendent field of force relations, which amounts to discussing societies in terms of an abstract yet literal assemblage of different ‘desiring-machines’: such as language-machines, social-machines, economic-machines, judicial-machines, education-machines, entertainment-machines, etc., etc., etc.

Within these complex and dynamic confederate systems, individuals appear cut up and divided into three broad bundles of ‘lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics and zones’, with each of these being multiple and modular in nature, and moving ‘to different beats’ and rhythmic vibrations (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 223). The first line formulates the ‘molar line’, or the hard segmental line that vertically frames individuals into distinct social and political groups, cutting them up and categorizing them under various stratifications and appellations (such as French, white, male, cisgender, philosopher and smoker). This line is associated with the (re)production or maintenance of stratified molar identities and moral systems. The second line becomes the ‘molecular line’, wherein small or miniscule changes take place that do not necessarily challenge the overall structure, or an individual’s stratified subjectivity. The final line does challenge the overall structure, however, being recognized as the ‘nomad line’, or line of flight, which amounts to a radical (and at times dangerous) horizontal pathway that takes off from the molecular line, fully breaking with the molar structure, and drawing bodies into new and unknown territories.

Familiarity with these models can help us to understand how many of the films and videos explored throughout this project work to engineer an encounter with difference, or open up perception or thinking to alterity. For here, human and artistic bodies, qualities, powers, and forces encounter one another as desiring-machines that move into transformative composition with each other, mingling and modifying each other, so that film, as a machinic force, becomes capable of scrambling the thoughts and beliefs of those it encounters: as it introduces or inculcates new or alternative modes of thinking and acting. Arriving here, it appears seemly to also enjoiner yet another warning to our potential readers regarding an associated playful perversion and distortion of language (and meanings) they will necessarily encounter in the following pages on account of such forces. Indeed, in the attempt to engage with dynamic audio-visual artworks that deploy their form and content to express alterity, or communicate unfamiliar feelings directly to the viewers’ body, nerves and guts, we place a heavy burden on the resources of critical language. In the first place, some might already have anticipated that the expressive function of representational and symbolic language (as critical language-machine) is destined to be pushed and stretched to its limits by articulating itself with experimental artworks, especially those designed to ignite or impart the thinking of difference. For them, it will come as little surprise that several chapters occasionally find language taking (philosophical) sustenance and flight from its encounter with these unbecoming and unsettling films, so that words too begin to stutter, stammer, stim and operate artistically, or differently. Such consequences will likely be familiar to readers of contemporary film-philosophy, which regularly harnesses and detours philosophical concepts and discourses to better express how it is that moving filmic images provoke intensive and untimely sensations, the unthought or the becomings of thought, while opening up new dimensions and spaces of possibility, or else challenging viewers to feel or act non-habitually. As already intimated, Deleuze’s materialist work on cinema becomes particularly instructive here, especially with regard to his detailed investigation into the ways cinema puts movement into the image and the mind.

Of particular importance to us here is the extent to which Deleuze opts to treat filmmakers as he would philosophical authors, and how he describes cinema as a scientific/artistic medium that resonates with philosophical ideas and notions (see Rodowick 1997: xiv). What is more, on account of cinema's dynamic movements, and the movements of thought that this stimulates or begets, Deleuze also maintains that one naturally moves from cinema to philosophy, and back again from philosophy to cinema (Deleuze 2000: 366). Subscribing to similar beliefs, *Unbecoming Cinema* openly explores a broad selection of film and video that manifestly needles us to move backwards and forwards between philosophy and film, film and philosophy, and to think differently or 'eventally' about important life and death matters.

In *What is Philosophy?* (2011) Deleuze and Guattari draw out yet more pertinent parallels that link together the philosopher and the artist (cinematic or otherwise). In the first instance, both are identified as experimental creatives, whose inventive and intensive works promote new possibilities, or inculcate fresh modes of thinking and acting. The philosopher's task is to fashion new concepts, they demonstrate, while the artist's is to generate novel bundles of sensation (affects and percepts). Of particular value to this project is the extent to which both art and philosophy are recognized as being primarily concerned with *movements*, or looking past what things are to how they *become*. Accordingly, Deleuze and Guattari describe philosophical and artistic thinking as particular forms of experimentation; with thought *as* experiment being linked to the (ap)prehension of something that is the process of becoming, which entails recognizing how whatever 'is in the process of coming about is no more what ends than what begins' (Deleuze and Guattari 2011: 111). The artist and philosopher's job is ultimately to wrestle thought into the middle of things, of life, and make it known about, or felt. Thinking is here literally *doing* something, then, whether it be in the form of coaxing, creating, tinkering, arranging, modifying or shaping. Or stated differently, thinking becomes the attempt to actualize 'that which is in the process of coming about – the new, remarkable, and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is' (111). For the experimental artist, therefore, to think and know one's world is to intervene in it and change it, to sense and partake in events. To at once unconceal or make tangible the invisible forces that deform and deny life, and at the same moment create new paths, new possibilities and new worlds.

Although philosophers and artists are destined to work within adjacent creative territories and upon different 'planes of consistency', Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate how their works can intersect and interfere with each other, either by speaking directly to one other, by expressing comparable notions or by harmonizing into a joint refrain. As we will shortly discover, this is especially true when art and philosophy become entangled in the dynamic movements of the same *pure event*. Indeed, from chapter to chapter we will foreground the affects and effects of controversial, provocative and outlandish projects that strive to communicate or stimulate new patterns of thought, feeling and/or perception in those they encounter and apprehend. That is, we explore machinic films that operate or perform as immanent 'difference engines', attempting to increase the powers of the bodies

they articulate with both during and after the event of screening. From such a vantage, the only way to evaluate an encounter comes to be in terms of whether one's capacity to act or be affected is increased or decreased: the former being recognized as a good encounter that increases the 'will to power' of those involved, and the latter as a bad or disadvantageous encounter, which negatively impacts or decreases one's ability to live and act.⁶

Here, we necessarily follow Deleuze's ethical *method of explanation by immanent modes of existence*, which amongst other things, and against negative models of social contracts, Laws and transcendent Judgments, frames life in terms of ongoing experimentation and creation (Deleuze 1992: 269). But not, as Deleuze and Guattari forewarn us, in a manner that would risk blowing 'apart the strata without taking precautions,' or bring about a catastrophic collapse by throwing them 'into demented suicidal collapse,' or opening up dangerous forms of 'black hole' becoming (or terminal unbecoming) (2004b: 178). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari advocate a careful art of life, wherein one should lodge themselves within the strata whilst keeping open 'a small plot of new land' to move into (178). Throughout *Unbecoming Cinema* we will return time and again to emancipatory examples of film-makers that deploy blocks of sensation and fashion bundles of affect to elevate their artistic expressions into an intensive force and material body that allows viewers to think, feel and perceive differently, while signposting new paths and zones of action and becoming.

By opting to structure his own *Cinema* project (*Cinema 1: the movement-image* [1983] and *Cinema 2: the time-image* [1985]) around the catastrophic event of the Second World War, Deleuze specifically explored how films thought – and invited viewers to think – a different image of time and temporality before and after the war. There, film images are outlined as a pre-subjective materiality that serve to distribute thought and feeling across and beyond the confines of the traditional bounded human brain and body, so that thought and perception come into being courtesy of a more-than-human encounter with the outside, and an aggregated trans-kingdom articulation of film and viewer. In *Cinema 1*, for example, Deleuze describes cinematic 'movement-images' in terms of material aspects of the viewer's subjectivity, which although found operating in the world, directly trace circuits inside their biological brains. The transductive mental movements ignited by the encounter with dynamic film images reach their zenith in *Cinema 2*, where Deleuze explores the art cinemas of exhaustion, delirium and madness (as well as modern political films) that begin to expose an alternative way of thinking about time and temporality that emerged after the war, and at times demanded the creation of new circuits, or patterns of thought (Deleuze 2000: 366).

Instead of setting out in search of alternative cinematic models of time, we attempt to extract here certain patterns, or ethical affinities, that can be detected resonating within and across many very different forms of film (drawn from different periods and sectors), and which appear to diagnose the immobility or stagnation of life and thought, while calling forth 'a new earth' or a new people (see Deleuze and Guattari 2011: 109). Such films are often simultaneously destructive and creative in nature, then, at once found desiring to 'do violence' to the viewer by intervening and engineering a cut, or a crack, in what they

thought they already knew – often by first dislodging or ungrounding certain clichés and molar truths – whilst promoting and promulgating new affective patterns and associations that open up fresh potentials. As such, the broad range of projects explored throughout are not selected because they open up vistas onto some shared or essential notion of Truth, but rather because they appear to make the thinking and circulation of different ‘truths’ possible, or palpable (even if not palatable) to the senses. Furthermore, we contend that by introducing viewers to new sets of possibilities, or alternative truths, the films explored in *Unbecoming Cinema* can be understood in terms of increasing the viewers’ powers to act or be affected, whilst igniting ethical ‘events of thought’ (see for example MacKenzie and Porter 2011: 66).

On Event Cinemas and Eventual Encounters

For many, Deleuze goes up against Alain Badiou as the main philosopher of the *event* today: with these two philosophical heavyweights conceptualizing the nature of events somewhat differently, by focusing upon dissimilar immanent and transcendent aspects therein (see for example Janning 2013; Badiou and de Baecque 2013; Ling 2011). Broadly speaking, against Badiou’s Neo-Platonic models of (essential) *truths*, Deleuze (the anti-Platonic) foregrounds the immanent aspects of events, while speaking of universal becomings. Amongst other things, and as Finn Janning renders it, this invariably involves erecting a line of flight away from the Ancient Greek dictum of ‘know thyself’, to demand we instead know our location, or locatedness (see Janning 2013: 31). By also taking heed of the intraphilosophical intersections that connect contemporary physics and film-philosophy à la Deleuze or Brown, we might add here too an awareness of our ‘speed’ or ‘momentum’ (see Brown 2015: 57–59).

Although both these models remain relevant to our thinking of events in the following chapters, *Unbecoming Cinema* ultimately employs Alfred North Whitehead, Deleuze and Guattari, and Alain Badiou as its four cardinal points (and conceptual personae) that help orient our thinking of events. In striving to minimally adumbrate the parameters and perimeters of these hybrid models here, we can begin with the process philosophy of Whitehead, wherein *events* are determined as something that is lived through, and emerge from progressive encounters within a world in process, or passage, and where causal relations between events begin to emerge and accrue as life dynamically unfolds. Moving beyond human-centred models, Whitehead fundamentally views events as ‘units of realization’, or as the ‘emergence into actuality of something’ as a consequence of agents (human or inhuman) and an activity, which in combination, result in a new unity. Here, the vital and universal processes of becoming are ostensibly redrawn as a series of *prehensions* (to prehend is to grasp or experience something) of ongoing and unfolding events. Accordingly, if one event prehends another that precedes it, each constituent event is transformed by their mutually prehensive relationship. As such, Whitehead outlines events in terms of that which extends around us, and as being both ‘the medium within which our physical experience develops’

and ‘the development of that experience’ (Whitehead 1955: 63). Or put more plainly, events are understood by Whitehead in terms of ‘the grasping into unity of a pattern of aspects’ (Whitehead in Lowe 2013: 174–175).

Taking inspiration from Whitehead in *The Fold* (2006b), Deleuze similarly argues that events should be understood as a form of extension, wherein our unity with an event is tantamount to our becoming *with* it. Accordingly, before they become ‘actualized in us’, events ‘signals and awaits us’, appearing to ‘want for us and invite us in’ (Deleuze 2004a: 63, 170). Although events are here both immanent and processual, and occur in the ever-changing plane of consistency, Deleuze maintains that they are also the result of the frisson generated between the actual and the virtual (see for example Parr 2010: 78–79). Thus, elsewhere, Deleuze describes an event as not so much being ‘what occurs (an accident)’, but rather that which is to be found ‘inside what occurs, the purely expressed’ (2004a: 170). What Deleuze calls the pure event must in turn be understood in terms of unique instants of production, then, or as the appearance and expression of *difference* within a continual flow of becoming. It naturally follows that the only thing ‘shared’ by all actors and objects swept up in an event for Deleuze relates to their having become different together, or perpetuated difference in an ongoing process of becoming (our becoming *with* the event). In this manner, a viewer may move into composition with an evental film that pre-exists their encounter with it. The film here being a distributed force field or intensive artistic-machine that awaits and signals them from the vantage of the future (the film lying in wait for the viewer to discover or encounter it), while at the same time, the film itself must also be understood in terms of prehending or becoming in-formed by the wider movements of an event external to and prior to it, and to which it already expresses a unity. Here, both the viewer and the film attest to the unified and unifying existence of a broader movement that expresses itself through them, or else stretches out over them, grasping them and enrobing them within the movements of its wider event horizons.

If the Deleuzian event is primarily understood in relation to ‘sense’, for Badiou events are more precisely related to ‘truth’ (see for example Badiou’s ‘The Event in Deleuze’ [2006]). Albeit courtesy of his refashioning of Platonic essences and a malleable toying with the chronological flow of time, Badiou claims that *new* truths, or truth procedures, can essentially be discovered or created. Badiou’s model of the event thus confronts the creation of new ‘truths’, and the emergence of a trace of that which formerly *inexisted*. As such, the event itself is best understood as a kind of ‘vanishing mediator’, which although becomes responsible for the emergence of a new present or world, is ultimately dissolved in its wake. From this aspect, events unavoidably decompose what came before and create new truths and worlds that replace them from within what Badiou refers to as an ‘evental site’ (2005: 202). Events can here be conceived of flowing backwards to contingently modify and transform the past they formed a break with. In contrast to Deleuze’s immanent model of universal becomings then, Badiou more precisely proposes that the event should be understood in terms of a pure break with the becoming of an object or the world.

Key here is that for both Deleuze and Badiou, the significance of an event is ultimately distanced from our own subjective experience of it, either by continuity (becomings) on the one hand, or the cut or break on the other (unbecoming). Events consequently have little intrinsic significance in and of themselves.⁷ For in both Badiou and Deleuze, the missing ‘thing’ or piece of the evental puzzle is the immanent experience by the subject, or the personal encounter of the subjective form becoming swept up or grasped by the movements of the event. In the following pages we can attempt to plug this gap by paying attention to how different ethical and machinic artworks engineer what Ian Mackenzie and Robert Porter refer to as ‘*an event of thought*’ (2011: 65ff) in the viewer. That is, we will foreground how a dramatic production of difference can become ignited in the subject by their encounter with an intensive thinking artwork that moves into material composition with their senses. In combination with Whitehead’s notion of unifying prehension, MacKenzie and Porter’s dramatic tweaking of such encounters help us to re-ground the evental happening in the concrete experience of screening, and pinpoint the film as having ‘some kind of autonomy to cut open being and bring something new into existence as an experiential dramatic event’ (2011: 129–131).

Over the following four chapters we will explore several different manifestations of such evental encounters with ethico-political films, and examine how different forms of audio-visual art or art-brut unleash deterritorializing movements that make wider becomings palpable to the senses, or else allow viewers to think new truths, and begin resonating with the movements of a wider distributed event. These dramatic experiential transformations can also here be tied to what Deleuze elsewhere refers to as a ‘fundamental *encounter*’ (Deleuze 2004c: 176), which, Simon O’Sullivan reminds us, are typically ‘future-oriented’, and ‘diagrammatic’ in nature (2006: 1), in that they connect the concrete artworks and viewer to an ‘outside’ (here the virtual, a new truth, or the movements of a pure event). In such light, we can understand films emerging as rhythmic material assemblages that during and after the event of screening affectively prompt viewers to grapple with what Deleuze terms the *unthought* that precedes thought.

The Territories

Although each of the following chapters explore radically different forms of film and evental encounter, and can be conceived of as self-contained territories that can be entered and crossed in any order whatsoever, the book is concomitantly divided into two complementary halves: the first engaging with ‘missing peoples’ that are typically filtered out of everyday political discourses and consciousness, and the second with ‘lost peoples’ who appear to be left utterly unsure of how to act or live. Part one opens by diving straight into life and death issues surrounding sad passions, mental illness, ‘mad pride’ and sensory and brain ‘disorders’, by confronting ethical and animist art projects that provoke viewers to come face to face with the veiled *worlds* of suicide and autism. If the book’s first half is about unveiling and disclosing, then the second half is more precisely about works

that appear to distort and pervert the 'real' in an attempt to defamiliarize the familiar, or grant audiences novel opportunities to see, feel and think otherwise.

In working to establish what an ethical cinema is, or does, chapter one first works to engineer an encounter between Deleuze's suicidal defenestration and his own practical philosophy, which, for many, emerges as an univocal force capable of 'rescuing' or rethinking his own self-killing. We thereafter articulate these philosophical discussions with an ethical investigation of Eric Steel's haunting 2006 documentary debut *The Bridge*: a film that records and replays twenty-three out of twenty-four images of real suicide recorded in San Francisco during 2004. En route, we road test whether Steel's thinking and thought-provoking film can overcome some of the opprobrious criticisms levelled at it, while investigating whether its tactical deployment of shocking percepts and animist affects can artistically redeem what many see as an immoral exercise in tragedy tourism and suicidal snuff. As we unpack a whole raft of ethical and moral issues bound up with the recording and screening of actual death, we concomitantly flesh out what is meant by a machinic model of film, whilst exploring how a particular iteration encourages its viewers to feel differently about certain taboo issues, think philosophically about life, ignite into political actions and become swept up in the movements of a wider political event.

Chapter two thereafter moves beyond considerations of 'mental illness' to focus upon 'brain disorders'. As such, this chapter is marked by a series of defamiliarizing movements. In the first instance we make a marked 'philosophical' movement away from Deleuze towards Guattari (or rather from Deleuze and Guattari towards [Fernand] Deligny and Guattari), as we uncover a range of clinical and critical autistic films that appear to nudge perception beyond the 'neuronormal' or 'neurotypical' world of the intellect, the ego, the figure and the *Other* towards the prehension of an alternative alien universe of autistic intuition, the eco, fields and animism. In this chapter we concentrate on the transformative impact of film moving into an assemblage with autistic and animist modes of thought, perception, action and expression, and explore how three 'autie type' machinic artworks prompt or provoke viewers to apprehend alternative ethical modes of being in and *with* the world.

As intimated, the next chapters undertake a further ethico-political movement as they drift away from considerations of missing peoples to focus instead upon what we might call 'lost' peoples. Specifically we will be considering films targeted at 1970s counterculture and post 9/11 generations living under the shadow of unpopular foreign wars and fears of domestic violence, albeit as they appear rendered in the twisted 'minor' films of the outlandish and ostentatious outsiders Alejandro Jodorowsky and Lucifer Valentine, the anarchic inventors of Midnight Movie 'pill films' and 'Vomit Gore' torture-porn(ology) respectively. As cruel, corrupting and contagious projects, these doubly articulated unbecoming 'cinemas of the body' are discovered trying to make palpable the invisible political forces and powers that actively distort and deform life around them. By exploring these sick and distorted cult films as unique sociotechnical products of their time, chapters three and four necessarily dive head first into agitating corporeal ethico-political cinemas of the body which address themselves as much to the viewers' nerves and viscera as they do their minds or intellect.

One final warning might be mindful at this stage before proceeding, regarding the mixed ecologies of methods readers will encounter as they cross the following chapters, and no doubt appear as a consequence of allowing the different films to dictate the terms upon which we approach and understand them on a case-by-case basis. For indeed, within each and every chapter, readers will find themselves on occasion taking an unforeseen turn or path, or entering into an unusual interdisciplinary terrain that they might not have predicted. Being unable to satisfactorily lay the foundations for any of these features here, we hope the reader will consent to our doing much of the conceptual groundwork and construction on site, so that like nomadic peoples, we might turn new and uncharted plots of land into useful temporary dwelling places that allow us to pause long enough to take sustenance and what we need, before prompting us to take flight once more into those other open territories.

Notes

- 1 Here, we agree that at ‘the most prosaic level [...] communication could be said to involve the *perception of an altered state*’ (Fuente, Budarick and Walsh 2012: 41, emphasis in original).
- 2 See, for example, Elsaesser (2011).
- 3 In *Lost In Translation* (2010), Homay King reminds us that the verb ‘to shanghai’ colloquially means ‘to drug or otherwise render insensible’, as well as ‘to transfer or forcibly abduct’ (51).
- 4 For Brown, non-cinema is to the cinema what non-philosophy is to philosophy in the work of Laruelle. In his mind-bending work *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (2012), Laruelle outlines non-philosophy as being born on the plane of ‘radical immanence’, as succeeding philosophy, and being concerned with all that is Real and philosophy is not. Or, as John Mullarkey explicates it, in his work Laruelle ‘abstains from philosophy as such while simultaneously taking it as its own raw material’ (2006: 133). Which is to say, philosophy ‘becomes the material of non-philosophy rather than its object’ (Mullarkey and Smith 2012: 2). In a similar spirit, Brown’s notion of non-cinema is essentially a non-negative one, in that it offers a positive democratic way of viewing what might otherwise be negatively judged as failures or small and insignificant trifles by mainstream or academy standards.
- 5 BDSM is a commonly used overlapping acronym deployed to describe a range of six erotic practices or preferences associated with Bondage and Discipline (BD), Dominance and Submission (DS) and Sado-Masochisim (SM).
- 6 Bogue characteristically clarifies such ideas when he notes that by following Spinoza, Deleuze understands this will to power not in terms of ‘an increase in power *over* a world, but an increase in powers of affecting *and being affected*’, which ultimately amounts to ‘a responsiveness to a selected world and an openness to *interaction*’ (Bogue 2012: 12).
- 7 Ian MacKenzie and Robert Porter (2011) have recently highlighted how by trying to escape the traps of empiricism and dogmatism, both Deleuze and Badiou were similarly forced to look outside the event itself for the real drama constituting it.

Part I

Exposing and Revealing

Chapter One

Death 24X A Haecceity: Or Deleuze, Life and the Ethico-Aesthetics of Documenting Suicide in (and off) *The Bridge*

*As harps for the winds of heaven,
My web-like cables are spun;
I offer my span for the traffic of man,
At the gate of the setting sun.*

Joseph Strauss (Chief Engineer for the Golden Gate Bridge)

The Golden Gate Bridge is to suicides what Niagara Falls is to honeymooners.

Tad Friend (2003)

I'm going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump.

Anon (Suicide note from Golden Gate Bridge Jumper)

We open *Unbecoming Cinema* by taking in earnest Albert Camus's assertion that there 'is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide' (1955: 11). For alarmingly, today we inhabit a world where around 800,000 people are known to take their own lives every year, which the WHO informs us amounts to around one self-killing every forty seconds (2014). Although Emile Durkheim cast considerable doubt over the value and validity of suicidal statistics on account of the phenomenon's many and varied morphological 'species', by propositioning that we consider suicide collectively as *sui generis* a 'social fact', he concomitantly highlighted dangers in overlooking the 'mutual connection' between suicidal event-acts and the 'social constitution' (Durkheim [1951] 1997: 37, 636). In the wake of such thinking, we must also take seriously Durkheim's notion that collective suicidal tendencies emerge within any given culture, especially those where certain social 'breakdowns' or 'maladjustments' permit 'suicidogenetic' currents to flow towards and infect individuals. For indeed, it is under the shadow of today's so-called suicide 'epidemic' that we here set out to explore a raft of moral and ethical issues bound up with the public documentation and projection of suicide, particularly with regard to Eric Steel's haunting ninety-four-minute debut *The Bridge* (2006); an unsettling, upsetting and yet edifying personal-political project that literally brings viewers face to face with twenty-three (out of twenty-four) suicides that occurred around San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge during 2004.¹

The Bridge

The opening black frame bleaches out so that a surging pearly greyness engulfs the screen. All the while a resonating sound-wave amplifies towards a higher frequency. The intensifying pitch peaks as a dark object pierces through the soupy fog. This allows viewers to retroactively discern what it is they have been seeing; a time-lapse image of a gigantic body of sea harr rolling through the architectural struts of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge: the imperious structure that will hereafter serve as the film's gravitational centre.

Gear changing to a more accustomed 'human' speed of perception, the ensuing montage strings together a series of scale-shifting close-ups depicting seagulls gliding beyond the bridge's steel cables, a ferry sounding its horn as it navigates beneath the bridge's span, pleasure craft skimming over the water, kite-surfers skipping waves and hanging in the wind, seabirds paddling against the tide. A conspicuous zoom thereafter introduces us to the bridge's human traffic, as Alex Heffes' elegiac string and piano score *The Shadow of the Bridge* is sneaked in. The lilting melancholic tune immediately mediating how viewers perceive and 'think' the subsequent 'all too human' montage containing images of a lean male figure dressed in black striding along the bridge (a character we will later come to know as Gene Sprague), some joggers taking in morning exercise, a businessman peering over the red railing, a family of three enjoying an uninterrupted view of the Bay, a motionless hooded woman contemplating the water's surface below, a tourist making snaps and a rout of schoolboys marching headlong into the gusting wind. Presently, an older gentleman dressed in a green T-shirt and red baseball cap is isolated by the camera's trembling telephoto lens. He abruptly straddles the bridge's four-foot barrier, crossing over it with an assured movement. He pauses, for a pulse, and then in a heart-in-mouth moment, throws himself away from the bridge.

The unexpected, and yet inevitable, hits us as the figure crosses from the horizontal platform to swiftly drop down a vertical plane. The shaken camera is jolted by his precipitous celerity. Limbs extend outwards, pathetically kicking against thin air. His body hastens down, escaping the camera's haphazard framing as it approaches terminal velocity. Frame and body blur into pure motion. Two hundred and fifty feet down, seventy-five miles per hour, 9.83 meters per second per second: four fleeting seconds.

A splash sound (effect?). The camera's catch-up gaze misses the impact. Its operator scours the scene for traces. There is no visible scar. A kite surfer moves into shot, towards where this stranger's life must have passed. The Coast Guard arrives moments later. Heffes' sorrowful piano tinkles on, as the film's title fades up: *The Bridge*.

Thinking Suicide with Film

Deleuze, whose own suicide and writing upon death and life becomes fundamental to our later analysis of Steel's film – offers us a valuable and practical philosophy that appears well suited for

approaching this particularly unsettling documentary artwork. For one thing, Deleuze's practical philosophy is immediately ethico-political, and utterly inseparable from a lived way of life, in that its primary duty is to confront and formulate a response to the real problems challenging us in our actual lived experiences: otherwise it would be of absolutely no use. What remains true of ethical philosophy also stretches out to account for our ethical evaluation of Steel's thinking film, which we likewise argue appears capable of bringing adequate thoughts and perceptions into being, which increase the powers of those who encounter it to act and live.

In *What is Philosophy?* (2011) Deleuze and Guattari argue philosophy and art are comparable creative disciplines, with the philosopher and artist each unleashing productive forces into the world that become capable of transforming the individuals, populations and societies they encounter. For the purposes of this chapter we maintain that Steel's film bridges these two worlds or disciplines, emerging as an 'evental' artwork that inculcates a philosophical encounter with those who encounter it. As discussed in the introduction, in his *Cinema* (2005a [1986], 2005b [1989]) project Deleuze demonstrates how films provide material conditions for thinking and emotionally evaluating, by offering viewers affective and perceptive methods of making sense of their world. By extension, a film's psychomechanical capacity to generate movements in the viewers' brain, body and mind also harbour potentials for generating movements of world, creating change or igniting becomings. From this vantage, both philosophical thoughts (concepts) and film thoughts (affects and percepts) are understood as immanent assemblages, or difference engines, that intervene in and operate upon the very problem-worlds from which they emerge.

Of particular interest here is how, whilst working to disturb and agitate existing thoughts and feelings, and stimulate new patterns and associations, *The Bridge* emerges as an immanent and ethical 'machinic' force. Undoubtedly, Steel hoped that his film would contribute to specific pragmatic outcomes and real-world consequences. For one, he anticipated the film would draw public attention to an otherwise secreted problem, and by so doing, elevate suicide into a political rather than merely private discourse. Steel also hoped his film would inspire real-world action, and be a factor contributing to the building of a barrier to prevent further suicide bids from this notorious landmark. Concomitant with these pragmatic goals, *The Bridge* also emerges as an affective body or force that works to inculcate 'philosophical' modes of thought. For as a material exercise in film-thinking that circuitously approaches life via a confrontation with death, *The Bridge* builds associations with a long and illustrious line of philosophical thinkers. Indeed, in a statement which itself echoes a belief that 'has been the living formulation of philosophy since Plato', Deleuze describes the philosopher as he who 'has returned from the dead and goes back there', and as 'someone who believes he has returned from the dead in full consciousness' (2005b: 201). Going back further still, Enrique Dussel traces Plato's idea to the Egyptian sages, whom the Greek philosopher conceded were the 'originators of the wisdom of the Greeks themselves', and thus responsible for erecting the first ancient pillar of all ethical thinking. Before that, the *Bantu African* world too used the knowledge of death for thinking through 'what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice, and truth' (Dussel 2013: 6-7).

The strong ties between ethics, philosophy and death also becomes the subject of Simon Critchley's benchmark *Book of Dead Philosophers* (2009), which opens by reminding us that Socrates claimed 'all philosophers had to make dying their profession', that Cicero argued that 'to learn to philosophise is to learn how to die' and (of particular interest to our investigations below) that Montaigne felt that only those who learned how to die could unlearn how to be a slave (Critchley 2009: xv–xvii). There, as in his own philosophy, Critchley argues that in order to gain any true sense of freedom today, we should pragmatically structure our life (or our entire living existence) in relation to the stark *reality* of death. Somewhat tragically, however, 'the most pernicious feature of contemporary society is the unwillingness to accept this reality and to flee the fact of death' (Critchley 1997, 2009: xviii).

To recapitulate before moving on, then, we might say that *The Bridge* emerges as an immanent response to two different real-world problems encountered in the particular milieu it records and screens within: the sociopolitical problem of suicide itself, and the acculturated difficulty bound up with ignoring the stark reality of death (that interferes with living a proper life). By extension, by overtly making death one of its primary themes, *The Bridge* offers its viewers a rare chance to confront and think about life in a 'philosophical' manner. What is more, courtesy of the repeated convergence of death and suicide throughout the documentary, Steel's film appears to cajole viewers into an evaluative attitude, experientially inviting them to assess whether or not life is worth living (both in the concrete and in the abstract), and by such token can be understood encouraging viewers to grapple with what Camus refers to as 'the fundamental question of philosophy' (Camus 1955: 11). In the following sections we will also claim that *The Bridge* emerges as a powerful ethico-political force that demonstrates a real potential for imparting a renewed belief in the world.

Film Ethics and an Ethics of Film

Unquestionably certain film-makers and films address their viewers as emotional and moral beings, and inculcate viewing experiences that are tantamount to exercises in moral thought or psychology (see for example Downing and Saxton 2010; Nagib 2011; Kupfer 2012; Miller 2013; Choi and Frey 2014; Brown 2015; Sinnerbrink 2016). As a starting point we might pick up on two commonly touted ways in which film can be thought of as an ethical force during the screening encounter. The first relates to how, during its running time, a film builds up a distinctive evaluative *attitude* towards a given subject using formal devices and framing techniques. Thereafter we might concern ourselves with how such a film encourages an individual (or collective) to adopt its attitude or perspective upon that subject, object or event; particularly if this differs from their current attitudes, or those prevalent within the wider milieu. With these overlapping perspectives in mind, we might then try to decide whether the new attitude was better than the old one, by judging its moral value against some higher force or law. This immediately proves problematic however, for here we run

into problems of moral relativism: the belief that the *truth* of all moral judgements is individually or culturally relative.

If we were to ask whether or not a film is an ethical one from a Deleuzian perspective, however, our questions and assumptions about film need to be framed slightly differently, and force us to pay attention to the manner in which a film increases or decreases the powers, or ability to live and act, of those it comes into contact with. As already discussed in the introduction, Deleuze's larger philosophical project can be understood in terms of an ethical desire to be done with negative judgements (whether these be through a God figure, some associated system of laws or morality or even the opinion of some authority). For throughout his work Deleuze upholds that there can be no objective standard or transcendental moral ground from which to evaluate a life, an artwork, or indeed the state of the present, because any given judgement can be little more than an expression or opinion of the 'I' or body that evaluates, and this cannot take us very far.

A brief return to Deleuze's writing on Nietzsche helps us chart a path around the apparent 'moral relativist' roadblock, for there, Deleuze concedes that there can be a legitimate and ethical evaluation of life, but if and only if it is based upon an immanent *will to power*. In explaining why, Deleuze first warns us away from many of the age-old moth-eaten platitudes surrounding this greatly misunderstood Nietzschean concept. In the first instance, we must not mistake the will to power for a sinister Machiavellian desire to enslave or exercise control over others. Far from it, the will to power must instead be recognized as a positive desire for an enriched life. Thus, in following Nietzsche and Spinoza, Deleuze recognizes the will to power as being concerned with a given body's ability to affect and be affected by other bodies and forces, which amounts to saying that power does not reside inside any individual body, but rather is locatable in the empowering or disempowering relationships that any given body forges with other external bodies and forces. From such a perspective, we can only ever evaluate in terms of empowering or disempowering encounters. Disempowering encounters are those that affect individuals with sadness, or negatively impact or negate their power to live and act. Against these bad physical and psychological articulations, a positive encounter would be one that affects them with joy, and increases that body's will to power.

For the remainder of this chapter we should enquire into these ethical aspects of Steel's film, which on the surface appears to institute a somewhat standard reflexive documentary format, aiming to uncover a veiled truth by constellating an array of interviews and recordings that are edited together with various dynamic shots wrestled from over 10,000 hours of footage amassed throughout the 366 days of shooting in 2004. As already indicated, these images are intercut with 'surreptitious' footage of the bridge's human visitors, and contain twenty-three images of real suicidal actors and acts captured around the bridge. It is these images in particular that serve to differentiate *The Bridge* from most other documentary fare, and are responsible for profoundly unsettling and moving encounters with the film. The bold directorial choice of recording and screening these self-killings contribute to the film's affective intensity, and lead to several strange effects, including the shocking experience of time itself slipping out of joint.

Without doubt, foreknowledge of *The Bridge*'s disturbing content allows muted pre-emptive feelings to operate upon viewers before the screening even begins. For me this foreboding became manifest as a mild feeling of nausea or anxiousness the moment I emotionally committed to watching it. During viewing, untimely sensations are also kindled by the film's obsessive return to close-ups of human bodies lingering near the edge of the bridge. For whether these are actual jumpers or not, watching these precarious bodies immediately serves to dilate and fracture the experience of film time, at once evacuating the present from the image (as thoughts speed up and make it known in our viscera that whatever is about to occur has already passed), while at the same time trying to offset the shock by concomitantly splitting the image into actual and virtual components, wherein the virtual or compossible (they may jump) coexists with the actual and the possible (they do or do not jump). Further disquieting feelings are actualized and amplified by seeing atypical images of real people jumping to their death, which makes tangible the film's strange articulation or folding together of ethics and aesthetics, perception and affect, sight and moral insight (see Sobchack 2004: 231). Such unusual qualities ensure that *The Bridge* is a film that touches us before we see its first image, gets under our skin during the screening event, and stays with us and works upon us long after the final credits have rolled.²

With specific regard to the themes of self-killing, there can be little doubt that most film viewers will be predisposed to hold certain personal and deep seated (acculturated) beliefs about the phenomena and actions under scrutiny, and inclined to apportion causation or blame to certain already known factors, such as nature, nurture, biology, biography, pathology, etc. In its attempt to give shape to a hidden story and secreted situation without evaluating or judging, though, Steel abandons any mediating 'Voice of God' or first-person voice-over convention, allowing instead a dispersed multiplicity of talking heads, embodied voices, photographs, sounds, images and memories to map out a tangled and fractured rhizomatic picture.³ Throughout, the farrago film also begins to betray a 'will to art', made noticeable by the unleashing of subtle ethico-aesthetic vibrations that gather into a philosophical counter-rhythm. This only gradually becomes palpable to the viewer's senses, however, as they are prompted to grope beyond the realm of the visible and, as we will discover below, to grapple with the as-yet unthought of a 'pure event'.

Documenting Death

Much has been written of late about the ethics of depicting death in documentary films. Beyond my own work on the unethical framing of murder and suicide in twenty-first century 'Terrorist infotainment' (Fleming 2016), Joshua Oppenheimer's unforgettable 2012 docudrama *The Act of Killing* has now occasioned the spilling of much academic ink. The special dossier of *Film Quarterly* inspired by this 'lightening rod for debate' (Rich 2013: 8) offers some outstanding examples, which stand alongside Slavoj Žižek's typically insightful essay exploring the inversion of public and private space in *The New Statesman* (2013), and

Robert Sinnerbrink's more recent investigation into the ties between these historical murders and the Hollywood gangster movie genre (2016: 165ff). To me, *The Bridge* offers itself as a comparably provocative example of documentary film, albeit one that appears to have slipped under the critical radar, as such, despite the fact that it, unlike Oppenheimer's work, captures images of actual, as opposed to simulated, death/killing. Consideration of this film allows us to expand these cine-ethical discussions somewhat, while opening up another perspective on such issues and debates.

On account of its recording of twenty-three acts of self-killing, Vivian Sobchack's archaeological exploration into the recording and projection of 'nonsimulated' images of death in documentary film makes for a useful starting point for our ethical enquiry into *The Bridge*. For there, Sobchack takes time to unearth how it came to pass that human death became 'an antisocial and private experience' within advanced western cultures, and a fact of life that increasingly became voided from public representation (Sobchack 2004: 227). Engaging with Amos Vogel, amongst others, Sobchack illuminates how the 'ferocious reality' of death increasingly came to threaten the western 'social order and its value systems,' by calling into question, undermining and upsetting all the dominant cultural codes and semiological systems (Sobchack 2004: 232). During the twentieth century in particular, real images of death – as opposed to fictional representations thereof – increasingly began to circulate as the unrepresentable 'sign that replaces all signs' (Sobchack 2004: 233). Echoing Critchley's observations above, Sobchack notes how the progressive disavowal of death from public thought and conversation inexorably led to the members of advanced western cultures being shielded, and therefore desiring to shield themselves, from the stark realities of death.

Tying in to a comparable view, Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd R. Ramlow opine that we now live in a society that is so 'death-phobic' in the extreme that it is now virtually impossible for us to think about death in a way that is not always-already pre-digested, pre-judged and pre-thought in advance. That is to say, in consumer-oriented western cultures today we face the death of any real thought about death, so that images of real death are, cerebrally speaking, typically encountered 'dead on arrival' (as cliché). Cohen and Ramlow thus ponder if it is at all possible that death might still be 'rendered an affirmative event,' or made capable of 'igniting a becoming'? (2005/2006: 19). Or posed differently for the purposes of this chapter: could death ever be creatively or artistically deployed in the ethical services of life? Although Deleuze stated that there could be no 'art of death' (Deleuze with Parnet in Boutang 2011 [1996], see also Stivale 2010: n.p.), as we will soon discover, his own ethical philosophy offers itself up as a positive and life-affirming force (or difference engine) capable of transmutating how we predominantly think or understand death today. Recall, as Philip Goodchild puts it, the conditions of living a vital and full life from a Deleuzian perspective entails living in 'the world as though already dead' (1996: 206). That is, through *amor fati* (affirmation) or becoming entirely free or untethered from the negativities imposed by morality, judgement and opinion. As an immanent machinic force in its own right, Deleuze's ethical philosophy becomes capable of unbridling death (suicide and mental illness) from

deforming molar moulds (clichés), and allows us to re-perceive and re-think it in relation to life, and a wider more distributed rhizomatic web of external forces and social affects. Or as Finn Janning depicts it, by erecting a line of flight away from the Ancient Greek dictum of ‘Know Yourself’, Deleuze more precisely prompts us to ‘Know your location’ (Janning 2013: 31), and to interrogate how our thoughts and actions are constrained or enabled by our immanent encounters with the outside.

It becomes useful to recall here that in his writings, both with and without his erstwhile collaborator Félix Guattari, Deleuze distinguishes between two broad forms of living and becoming that we can crudely adumbrate in terms of the ‘mechanical’ and the ‘machinic’. The former are largely undesirable, essentially being fixed, repetitive and entropic in nature. These constitute exhaustive closed-loop processes that eventually become responsible for wearing down bodies and brains through ongoing closed cycles of habitual mechanized movements and action, gradually decomposing and breaking down their constituent relations. The latter are *different* in nature, being experimental, liberating and open, and understood to be benefitting or enriching all the bodies involved by positively increasing their ‘will to power’, qua their ability to create and act (more on which later). Turning to Deleuze’s own life and death can help us to flesh out what these different forms of living and acting entail, whilst divulging how his own practical philosophy – which allowed his own death (and our thinking of it) to return differently or otherwise – can help steer our ethical evaluation of Steel’s handling of suicidal themes in his documentary.

Deleuze’s Death

How people have thought, or been invited to conceptually re-think Deleuze’s suicide becomes of pedagogical relevance to our investigations into Steel’s film, particularly with regard to the complex intersectional interferences between philosophy and art on the one hand, and real-world problems and actions on the other: that is, between an empirical plane of consistency (where actors physically commit suicide) and an abstract plane of immanence (where the philosophical or conceptual meaning of such actions become evaluated or assessed) (see Buchanan 2015: 390–391). The circumstances surrounding Deleuze’s own decline in health that led to his defenestration at the age of seventy can be used here as a fruitful case in point. Indeed, during his life Deleuze had suffered from ongoing respiratory problems, and was a heavy smoker who eventually lost a lung to a pneumonectomy. By late 1995, the now voiceless and tracheotomized philosopher found himself ‘chained like a dog’ to a mechanistic breathing machine, and suffering from advanced pulmonary problems, that led to the loss of his ability to communicate through speech or writing. Deleuze thus found himself in an increasingly insufferable and alienated situation. What is known is that on the fourth of November of that year, he bounded out of a window to his death.

The question we must ask here, then, and which divides many commentators is this: does our knowledge of Deleuze’s conditions before his suicide warrant our thinking of

his self-killing as meaningful? Unquestionably, for some, Deleuze's suicide was utterly meaningless, being little more than a mechanical or auto-affective act. That is, what Deleuze might refer to as 'a mechanism of the body capable of astonishing us' (Deleuze 1988: 86). In this particular case, however, it can be framed as an astonishing mechanical act that reified his own Spinozist dictum that we do not yet know 'what a body can do'. Certainly, Stephen Perrella deems that there was no conscious decision at all behind Deleuze's bound towards his 'becoming-pavement event', for in it we can only see the desperate habitual reflex of an emphysema sufferer reduced to a mere 'animal' (this being made all the more tragic because he was 'not quite becoming-animal' in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense; see Perrella 1995).⁴ Michel Serres, Simon Critchley and Jean-Pierre Faye concur, upholding that Deleuze cast himself out the window because he couldn't catch his breath. From such a vantage, Deleuze was simply feeling smothered or drowned by his remaining lung, and succumbed to the overwhelming physical compulsion to force rushing oxygen into his chest 'by diving towards death, from the height of a window' (Faye in Colombat 1996: 244; see also Serres 1995; Critchley 2009: 237).⁵ Deleuze's actions here become little more than a reflexive or instinctual bodily (re)action, which occurred without any cerebral or philosophical mediation whatsoever, and might even have been a surprise to his own consciousness. However, if Deleuze's embodied actions were a surprise to himself, they would not have been to those who design, manage and maintain pulmonology or emphysema wards, for experience and legislation dictate that these be located on ground floors, or behind barred windows (see Critchley 2009: 237; Goodchild 2014).

Deleuze was not in a ward, though, but rather 'chained' at home, behind his unbarred third-floor Parisian window. For Alphonso Lingis, on account of this locatedness, even if we were to concede that there may have been some form of conscious intent behind Deleuze's suicidal act, the fact that his jump passed through the window of his own private abode (as opposed to some public place such as building or bridge) signals a decidedly private nature to his actions. Meaning that, for Lingis at least, 'Deleuze was not making a statement to others by the way he chose to die' (Lingis 2006: 1).⁶

If viewing Deleuze's death as either a habitual psycho-somatic response or a sincerely private action amounts to saying that there is little or no philosophical or intellectual meaning behind the philosopher's final actions, others think the events differently, often (re)turning to Deleuze's own immanent philosophical *persona(e)* to help guide them. Rosi Braidotti is one such philosopher, who reminds us that Deleuze himself had commented upon the suicides of Primo Levi and Virginia Woolf, reading both 'positively' through his Spinozian lens. By the same coin, and in a gesture more in keeping with the larger 'pure event' of Deleuze's life, Braidotti uses Deleuze's practical and ethical philosophy so that his own death might escape its historical fixity, and return differently, to speak out to all time.⁷ A return to Spinoza's *Ethics* allows us to see that Deleuze understood the individual in terms of a self-preserving *conatus*, or as a body that cannot freely will its own self-destruction (Spinoza [1987] 2001: 176–177). Following Spinoza, when a *conatus* encounters noxious bodies or negative forces, it is affected by sadness, and is cut off or blocked from the vital

flow of life. In extreme cases, such as coming into contact with a disease or poison, the result is to rapidly diminish or entirely decompose that particular body's optimal relations, radically decreasing its powers to live and act (Spinoza [1987] 2001: 176–177; Deleuze 1992: 241–243). Consequentially, the death of an individual, even to suicide, is always recognized as the result of a negative encounter with sad passions or actions that originate in 'the outside'. Thus, Deleuze upholds that, 'in reality, what is involved is always a group of parts that are determined to enter into other relations and consequently behave like foreign bodies inside us' (Deleuze 1988: 42). And with respect to these, Deleuze maintains that in situations where preponderant forces were at play that actively deformed and decreased one's ability to act or live an affirmative life, life can be affirmed by suppressing one's own life (see Braidotti 2010: 152).

By returning to Deleuze's practical philosophy, André Pierre Colombat and Paul Veyne likewise appear empowered to think positively about life, courtesy of Deleuze's suicide. Veyne, for instance, interprets Deleuze's 'voluntary and "reasonable" death' as an act fully in keeping with his Stoic roots; and as an event-act that helped actualize and complete 'a truly philosophical destiny' (Colombat 1996: 240). Other commentators have similarly been able to perceive Deleuze's leap as an ethical action, and as an eventual happening that prompts thought to weigh life against the *degree zero* of death. Amongst others, Greg Seigworth ethically evaluates Deleuze's 'final relay' as an 'instantaneous switch of theory into practice' (Seigworth in Cohen and Ramlow 2006). Similarly for Eric Alliez, Deleuze's final bound can be viewed as 'the last act of an exemplary philosophical life' (see Colombat 1996: 240). By a similar token, Janning describes Deleuze's 'altruistic suicide' as a *happy death* fully in keeping with the philosopher's larger life project (Janning 2013: 32). With comparable philosophical licence, Cohen and Ramlow proclaim that Deleuze ultimately:

ended his life with a fall, an arc that somehow sought an escape from a teleology of the flesh – from its medicalization, its Christianization, its reduction into morality. Deleuze leapt from the window in order to write with his own body that memorandum about Lucretius, to show that maleficent thinkers do not end in the 'terror and anguish' of deathbed conversions.

(2005/2006: n.p.)

Hari Osaki too is primed by the event-act to read Deleuze's final leap in terms of traversing the 'largest fracture', or as folding together the force of the outside while expressing the power of life (Osaki 2008). Accordingly, any contemplation of this 'infinite movement' becomes the definitive 'gift of Deleuze's death', allowing the event-act to (re)emerge as a 'call for beings to come which can live with the power expressed in suicide without committing it, in hope that we do not die as he did, but live otherwise, differently' (Osaki 2008: 98). And there is the rub, for it is these forms of machinic transformation that we must seek to detect operating within Steel's documentary film if we are, in the last analysis, to recognize it as an ethical artwork capable of thinking, or inculcating the thinking of difference.

To better understand the forms of machinic question we must consequently pose at *The Bridge*, we might here return to those that Cohen and Ramlow ask of Deleuze's suicide as an ethical event. For there, rather than negatively asking what Deleuze's suicide means or represents, they more pointedly, and positively, enquire into what it 'can it do?'

What are its affects, its vectors, its possibilities, and how do they form an assemblage with other bodies, other forces that might, in their own way, change the world? How might his death be read, or become, otherwise than the limits of humanist discourse, which could only see in his suicide a final, tragic, individual signification? And is to seek alternative significance/signification in Deleuze's death merely to fetishize suicide (or might it, to return momentarily to Spinoza-Hegel-Levinas-Butler, transform the negative into something else)? Was Deleuze's death necessarily a human, all too human surrender to despair, or can his death serve as a potentially creative, constructive event act – a last and affirmative rejection of the normative – that renders such a query beside the point?

Of course, in this instance we must specifically ask if Steel's ninety-four-minute documentary appears capable of transforming twenty-four suicidal event-acts into a creative political and philosophical force that increases the 'will to power' of the bodies it comes into contact with. Before considering these ethical dimensions, however, it becomes prudent to work through what many see as *the* insurmountable moral barrier preventing Steel's film from being an ethical force for good: the moral transgression of 'objectively' documenting death.

Beyond Objectivity and Morality

Above all else, it is because *The Bridge* records real images of death that it serves to upset and unsettle people, and raise a whole raft of moral barriers. Of particular interest here is a belief, or legacy, that suggests that the 'objective' nature of the documentary mode, as opposed to art or fiction (endowed with powers of the false), presents film-makers with terminal problems regarding a film's fundamental ability to 'think' suicide. For explaining why, we can here return to the ontological writing of the analytical philosopher Roger Scruton, who maintains that cinema's causal relationship to objective reality presents film-makers with an undefeatable problem when it comes to capturing and meaningfully representing images of death. Scruton's notion of an 'ideal' photographic document becomes of relevance here, particularly if read alongside a Bazinian notion of cinema's photographic ontology, wherein traditional cinema is understood as a photographic apparatus capable of embalming change twenty-four frames a second (hence the title of Laura Mulvey's *Death 24X A Second*). Although Steel works with digital cameras that do not share in the same indexical processes as the analogue cinema, Scruton's discussion of a photographed document of martyrdom (and by extension self-killing) retains some damning parallels to the forms of image Steel records throughout his film.

Bracketing the religious and moralistic undertones of Scruton's argument for the time being, the analytic philosopher notes that unlike a painterly representation of martyrdom, the photographic re-presentation of the same event can only ever be perceived as *horrific*. This being a necessary determination impressed upon the photographic image thanks to the indexical nature of its production, or the mechanical process of reproducing an 'objective' image of something actually laid out in front of the camera's technological inscribing surface. From this perspective, the image of a martyr reproduced by a camera becomes entirely transparent or continuous with reality, so that metaphysically speaking, they are no different to someone simply holding up an empty frame or mirror to direct a viewer's attention to a real event occurring somewhere 'over there'. It thus follows, for Scruton at least, that photographs and film are entirely unable to tell viewers *how* to see or think about the subject or object depicted (Scruton 1995: 101): *That is*, or *That was*, is all the documentary image can ever say. Accordingly, while it is perfectly conceivable that a painting of a suicide or martyrdom can be serene, aesthetic and thought provoking, Scruton contends that the documentary image simply cannot be, because 'one's attitude is determined by the sure knowledge that this is how things are, or were, in reality' (Scruton 1995: 103).

On account of its causally produced nature, Scruton contends that any interest in the object (or subject) depicted in a photographic document (unlike in a painting or play dealing with the same subject) can only offer a surrogate interest in the actual thing the image represents. Or again, the photographic (or cinematic) document(ary) essentially cannot be Art for Scruton, and is limited to merely re-presenting viewers with a reflection of the actual object/subject. If the application of artistic discourses to photographic documents is simply erroneous for Scruton, we can locate comparable sentiments expressed in the writing of the documentary historian and critic Bill Nichols, who similarly sees the application or expression of abstract concepts with regard to documentary images as profoundly flawed. Indeed, Nichols sees theory as an essentially generalizing practice that forever moves inwards towards 'abstraction', and is therefore useless for understanding documentary images, which fundamentally point 'outwards' towards an actual subject or object in reality. Nichols thus argues that the application of theory compromises the 'material effects of individual texts', and blind us to how the camera points *out* towards the 'full dimensionality' of the material world (Nichols 1992: xiii, 230).

For many, such extreme claims necessarily trouble taking up an artistic or ethical approach to Steel's documentary film in the first place, and undermine any claims that *The Bridge* invites viewers to think-feel suicide in an alternative ethico-aesthetic manner. For if there can be no art of the index or death (no matter how many times per second), Steel's documentary images would always-already be utterly incapable of provoking thought or mediating thinking. In countering such beliefs, however, we can first turn to some of the illuminating discussions gravitating around *The Falling Man* (Richard Drew, 2001) photograph – believed to capture an image of Jonathan Briley dropping to his death from the World Trade Centre on 9/11.

First and foremost, the frozen image encountered in *The Falling Man* is extremely potent because we know that it captures the final moments of a real human life. These feelings are amplified or compounded by certain other external, ontic and 'aesthetic' features of the chosen image, which impact our *decoding* of the image as a text. That is to say, the image as cultural artefact is always already *more than* just a horrific testament to how actual things looked, and recognition of this forces us to pay attention to what it is the image is able to 'do' (as well as 'mean') in the immanent encounter with its viewers.⁸ As such, *The Falling Man* offers us a useful opportunity to destabilize Scruton and Nichols' thought-image impasse at the same time as we begin to forge aesthetic-political links to similar forms of documentary imagery that originally kindled Steel's desire to make his own film in the first place.

For Damian Sutton, encountering *The Falling Man* was an intensely powerful and moving event. Even more so, he claims, than seeing moving video images of the same or similar material. Engaging with the writing of Rob Kroes on the subject, Sutton explores how the photograph engenders a qualitatively intense encounter that becomes manifest 'at the time of the look' (2009: 59). It is important for Sutton and Kroes that it is this *particular* image that was selected by Drew from within his larger movie-like sequence, which arrested the spinning and tumbling fall of the body during its descent towards the ground (2009: 59). This image was chosen on account of its 'unexpected yet true' pose, it is suggested, with the exceptional posture appearing suggestive of flying, rather than falling. This image, rather than another like it, they argue, manages to free itself of the chronological flow of a teleological action-image sequence by seeding a cerebral time-image crystal. Or put more plainly, during an encounter with the actual photograph, the image appears capable of shattering or annihilating the chronological movements downwards towards death, while creating other possibilities to the Imagination, and bringing thought itself into contact with 'the non-organic Life which grips the world' (Deleuze in Sutton 2009: 60). That is, the encounter with this photographic document ostensibly allows the falling body to escape the invisible forces around it, and to momentarily defy death, and gravity, even if we know that this is not really true (Sutton 2009: 59–60).

If Scruton and Nichols see such an image as a thoughtless or meaningless indexical photographic artefact, Sutton and Kroes similarly admit that Drew's image does operate at this horrific realist level. At the same time, however, the latter also identify something additional in their encounter with *The Falling Man* picture, another force that serves to ignite a creative movement of mind, and that opens up imaginative lines of flight and escape from the real. Here, the actual image gives birth to virtual images, which surround and affect its reception, irrespective of the fact that the catalyst for these creative movements of mind is an indexical image. *The Falling Man* here becomes a pertinent tutor image that allows us to recognize how a static recorded document can also contain or gain new life and aesthetic value – as well as contingent political/spiritual meanings – when in circulation, and can betray a quasi 'will to art' that many would find incommensurable with the image's mechanical or technological origins. Going further still, we can also begin to apprehend how a documentary film-maker, more than the stills photographer, may have an even greater

arsenal of tools and techniques at their disposal with which they can unmake and remake meanings with their audio-visual modes of expression.

In working to counter associated beliefs that the indexical nature of documentary film likewise forces us to look out towards a real objective world (even more so than stills photography in the case of *The Falling Man* for Sutton), rather than inwards towards feelings or thought with regard to documentary film-making, it helps to briefly turn to Tom Lundborg's survey of 9/11 documentary films that capture the same (or similar) horrific events indexed by Drew's photograph (Lundborg 2012). Amongst other things, these discussions can help us draw out a useful distinction between the mere recording and replaying of static and objective 'historical events' and the productive unleashing of dynamic movements associated with what Deleuze refers to as a 'pure event'. Indeed, Lundborg's interest in 9/11 documentaries resides in how some film-makers and films re-contextualize existing images in a manner designed to escape familiar and sedimentalized ways of experiencing the same old political narrative (as in a mechanistic recognition of the same static *historical event*). In particular, it becomes the disruptive affect of raw and untethered cinematic aesthetics that interests Lundborg the most, specifically for their ability to qualitatively re-create and re-interrogate the *pure event* that 9/11 both was, and is. Alejandro González Iñárritu's contribution to the 2002 assemblage film *9'11"01* (entitled *Mexico*) makes for a pertinent case in point here, for its calculated violence of sensation demands viewers to experience the disruptive and unsettling feelings in a way that disallows for any comfortable distance or 'common sense' positions from which to re-master a fixed knowledge of 9/11 as a stable 'historical event' (or political narrative).

Throughout *Mexico* Iñárritu harnesses the affective power of blank screens, silence, disorienting and disjunctive noises, and raw images of bodies falling from the World Trade Centre. His embrace of a fragmented and discordant form allows the raw dynamism of pure affective movements and unsettling sounds to repeatedly assault viewers, presenting only broken and disconnected fragments of the events so that we are confronted by confusion, disorientation and bewilderment in a manner that recalls the first encounter. That is to say, viewers are confronted by intensive movements of a pure event that escapes thinking. As such, the film's form and content force us to (re)experience the unsettling nature of the pure unfolding event, and (re)encounter and (re)think its 'problem-questions' afresh. Although *Mexico* contains looped documentary images of bodies falling or jumping from the World Trade Centre, the immanent encounter with the film forces viewers to confront the sheer 'inexistence of a whole which could be thought', and trades in that which Deleuze terms the 'inpower [impouvoir] of thought', or 'the figure of nothingness' (see Lundborg 2012: 92). Or stated otherwise, by disruptively forcing viewers to (re)experience and (re)encounter the pure event via an artistic encounter, *Mexico* offers viewers the opportunity to see and think the known in an altered or defamiliarized ethical fashion.

Although it displays a more subtle 'will to art' than *Mexico*, *The Bridge* can nonetheless be understood as a comparable evental 'documentary', which attempts to encourage viewers to confront the dynamic movement of a quite different event. For if Iñárritu's film aims to

revitalize perception by challenging its viewers to see the spectacle of an all too familiar historical event afresh, Steel more precisely tasks himself with exposing that which is invisible, or of elevating the unseen or overlooked to an object of political and philosophical thought. In this way, *The Bridge* can be recognized as a film that challenges its audiences to come face to face with public issues that although 'known about' are nonetheless rarely given sustained political attention, and are typically eschewed by the mainstream media. As a result of such factors, the film was ultimately destined to encounter fear and opprobrium, qua moral disgust, on its release, with some San Francisco City officials damning the film (before even seeing it) and branding it a morbid and immoral 'snuff film' that cashes in on tragedy tourism (see for example Glionna 2006). Such moralistic views (even if by non-viewers) cannot be flippantly dismissed, of course, and we must take pause to consider them in more detail. To help evaluate the texture of this complex documentary, then, we must now delve into some troubling ethical and moral issues and questions surrounding the actions and desires of the film-maker, his crew, their film, and the various subjects and actors with which it forms immanent articulations.

Not Falling but Jumping: From Spectacle to Seclusion

In interview Steel claims that the original idea for making his documentary was a synthesis of two personal encounters or events. One was coming across Tad Friend's striking 2003 *New Yorker* article entitled 'Jumpers', which reported on the strange ongoing phenomenon of the Golden Gate Bridge suicides. There, Friend describes that there remained (at that time) between fifty to eighty people who were prevented from committing suicide by bridge authorities every year, whilst around thirty 'successful' jumpers managed to slip through the security net (today these numbers have increased). Friend's article engages with the strange vital power and eerie spiritual draw the bridge has for those wishing to end their life there, and the cult-like status the monument now has for potential suicidal actors. To help explain why, Friend integrates the words of Mayor Al Boro, who claims that the 'bridge is more than a bridge: it's alive, it speaks to people. Some people come here, find themselves, and leave; some come here, find themselves, and jump' (Friend 2003). The other significant 'inspiration' for making his film, Steel says, stemmed from watching the powerful events of 9/11 unfolding live on television, and the particularly visceral experience of seeing people leap to their deaths in order to escape the furnace of the burning towers. In a press release statement for the documentary, Steel elaborates on this creative disjunctive synthesis: 'I imagined that the people who jump from the Golden Gate Bridge must be trying to escape their own private inferno' (Rosenfeld 2006).

Inspired, Steel set about preparing to make his documentary. This involved tasking his crew of twelve with turning up every day throughout 2004 to train their cameras on the bridge from a network of different angles. However, it is in desiring to create this multi-perspectival web through which to record the bridge jumpers that many initially begin to

feel that the ethical waters surrounding Steel's film-making practices and desires begin to become somewhat muddied. For in this urge to record suicidal event-acts his critics detect a taste for misery tourism, or else a vulture-like desire to opportunistically profit from the despair of others. But perhaps we get ahead of ourselves, for concomitant with the desire to film these event-acts arose another moral infraction or violation; this being linked to Steel's false bureaucratic application to obtain a filming permit, wherein the director openly lied to the State authorities in order to secure his licence to shoot the bridge for the full 366 days of 2004 (a leap year). Indeed, Steel had to submit a film-making application to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) on whose land almost all of the 10,000 hours of footage would be recorded. In his application Steel clearly outlines a different project to the one he intended to actualize, with the permit records indicating that he was slated to shoot a film that captured 'the powerful, spectacular intersection of monument and nature that takes place every day at the Golden Gate Bridge' (Rosenfeld 2006).

Although it is probably true that the GGNRA officials 'wouldn't have granted [Steel] a permit to film suicides' (Kottke 2006), as the director maintains in various interviews, the main reason he lied on the application form was linked to discouraging people who might seek out his cameras in order to capture their own self-killing for posterity (more on which shortly). A similar reasoning is also offered by Steel to excuse an altogether different, and arguably even more troubling deceit, this time involving the raw interviews he recorded with the surviving friends and families of the suicidal actors. Indeed, the majority of Steel's mosaic film is composed of interviews and testimonies of those who knew the jumpers captured in his film. However, none of the interviewees were informed by the director that he had actual footage of their friends and loved ones committing suicide when they agreed to be interviewed. Steel again links this to an ethical consideration or evaluation. Which he says was an attempt to avoid word getting out about his recording, and of generating undue publicity for fear of appealing to any potential jumpers that might desire to become 'immortalized' in his film.⁹ In both cases, Steel's ethical reasoning relates to his fear of spreading what is colloquially known as 'suicide contagion' or 'copycat suicides': linked to apparent statistical spikes in suicidal activity after prominent media coverage of such events.

In the years since Durkheim's sustained 1897 investigation into the phenomenon of suicidal 'imitation' (1997: 123–142), the notion of 'suicide contagion' has arguably become most famous today courtesy of Malcolm Gladwell's global best-seller *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell 2000: 216–252), which includes a case study of teenage suicides in the South Pacific Islands.¹⁰ There, Gladwell discusses how a kind of informal permission is apparently offered to potential suicidal actors by the circulation of stories covering suicide events in the media, which seemingly cause an exponential rise in suicidal event-acts by establishing a quasi-feedback loop (2000: 216ff). Both Friend and Jeff Stryker touch upon similar phenomena with specific reference to the Golden Gate Bridge suicides, with Stryker exposing the role of the local media in 'advertising' or 'promoting' further suicidal activity. In 1973, for example, both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Examiner* were witnessed initiating 'countdowns to the five-hundredth recorded jumper', which resulted in officials turning back 'fourteen

aspirants to the title, including one man who had “500” chalked on a cardboard sign pinned to his T-shirt’. In 1995 (the year of Deleuze’s suicide), as the title for the one-thousandth official Golden Gate jumper loomed, there was a veritable media ‘frenzy’, with a local disk jockey going so far as to promise a case of Snapple to the family of the ‘lucky’ victim (see Friend 2003). Thereafter, Stryker notes how new media ethics guidelines were put in place to prevent the media from reporting/advertising suicides, unless it was a celebrity jumper or bridge traffic was being held up (which in and of itself may inadvertently reveal something about the desires and values of that culture’s abstract desiring machines).

Whatever the case or validity of such beliefs, the new ethical guidelines generated unforeseen consequences, and by voiding the coverage of suicidal events from public discourses, began contributing to the phenomena’s non-politicization and increasingly taboo status. At this stage we should briefly return to Steel’s desire to film these suicides in the first place, for in the wake of such discussions his actions gain a renewed moral-political texture. Indeed, Sobchack reminds us that when death, and by extension suicide, ‘is represented in a nonfiction context, its representation seems to demand ethical justification (often generalised as the “public’s right to know”)’ (Sobchack 2004: 242). To wit, was there a story here the public needed to know? And if so, was Steel right to film the public self-killings as part of this right? For if, *prima facie*, Steel’s actions can arguably be linked to a professional politico-journalistic desire to expose and politicize a hidden or secreted story otherwise ignored by the official media, it is not immediately apparent that such a story, if it needed to be exposed, requires actual images of the suicide actors themselves in order to tell it. On account of this latter issue in particular, Steel’s decision is often claimed to reveal his ethical irresponsibility or moral turpitude, particularly by those unwilling to watch his film, precisely because it goes against the more common and comfortable media and moral guidelines crystallizing around such event-acts within that particular habitus.

An article about the film for *Kottke* makes clear that for many, the director’s greatest moral transgression centred around the desire to film death in the first place, for the ‘film crew’s basic job description was to wait for people to die [...] they needed people to die for their film. If there’s no good footage of people jumping, there’s no film’ (*Kottke* 2006). Of course things are rarely this black and white, and many reports and interviews concede that the film crew were in fact trained in suicide prevention, and that they did actually intervene in several attempts throughout the year (although these do not become part of the film’s story or thinking of the events). In defence of comparable accusations in various interviews, Steel works to tease out a nuanced distinction between his cameras ‘being out there waiting for people to die’, which he sees as being morally wrong, and his desire to bear witness ‘to something we knew was happening’, which is ethically sound (Steel 2006b). Whatever the case, Steel maintains that during filming he and the crew remained ‘human beings first and film-makers second’, with all film-makers having the phone numbers of bridge authorities on speed dial for the moment they spotted anyone crossing the bridge’s four foot safety barrier (Steel 2006b). All in all, when pushed, Steel maintains that the crew averted around six attempts at suicide throughout 2004.

If at this stage Steel's stated desire to 'bear witness' to a hidden truth might pass muster with some, it remains useful to interrogate further the evaluative and ethical nature of the gaze that *The Bridge* generates or inculcates, and how this in turn factors into the thinking of the events that viewers are made party to during the screening encounter. For if we can go along with the director's desire to record such images for later public display, the complicated ethical texture of the images themselves become further drawn into focus when we consider the actual forms of images Steel desired to capture for his film. Indeed, it apparently became clear to Steel after a few weeks of filming that simply recording the jumps was not *good enough* for his future documentary, for the images he had failed to pack a punch capable of making viewers sit up and take notice. Thus, in a BBC interview Steel describes growing increasingly dissatisfied with the rushes produced by the standard lenses he deployed at the beginning of the year, which only captured the splashes, or distant evental traces of the jumpers upon the sea's surface. With these images, he says, he would often only retroactively realize that the camera had captured a jump, maybe after noticing the Coast Guard arriving on the scene he had been recording. As director he thus made an ethico-aesthetic choice to try to get up closer to the jumpers and the action, and switched to larger telephoto-lenses in February. These, he believed, would allow him to get more intimate and 'close-up' images of the jumpers during their last moments, which he hoped would help make palpable 'the darkest corner of the human mind' by capturing all the bodily gestures, expressions and actions during the build up to the final event-acts.

A brief consideration of Sobchack's typology of ethical gazes can be used to guide us here, especially as these help to identify how Steel's telephoto sequences reify a 'helpless gaze': a form of looking that seemingly actualizes a technical, physical or legal distance from the observed events. Typically, these helpless forms of gazing expose the 'embodied situation of the filmmaker and thus his or her capacity to affect the events before the camera lens' (Sobchack 2004: 249). However, we must concede in these instances that any embodied relationships to the subjects and objects recorded are distanced or absented by the huge spatial gaps imparted and indexed by the unstable telephoto camera lenses. In Steel's case the helplessness of this distancing gaze is often counter-balanced by extra-textual or paratextual information, such as our knowledge gleaned from the BBC press of Steel arming his crew with mobile phones with direct links to the emergency services, and priming them to intervene as soon as they witness a body cross the barrier. Such extra-textual knowledge clearly infuses and recasts the film's helpless modes of looking with a more discernible 'humane' quality, which implicitly converges to express that although 'there is no tolerable point of view from which to gaze at such a death', by recording them we simultaneously assert that this 'horror must be witnessed and attested to' (Sobchack 2004: 253). On account of the extra-diegetic location of such information regarding the crew's duties to intervene, we might thus say that the ethical gaze of Steel's film is ostensibly helpless, albeit framed by a horizon of humaneness.

Due to its high production values *The Bridge* arguably also invokes a variation of what Sobchack refers to as the most ethically ambiguous documentary gaze of all: the 'professional gaze', which is understood to oscillate between the services of journalism

and humanitarianism (Sobchack 2004: 255). Debatably, Steel locates a molecular balance between these two, especially if we consider the film as a sober political documentary and ethico-aesthetic artwork, which aims to impact the spiritual life of the viewer. The complex intersection of these different forms of gaze becomes dramatically played out within a key scene featuring a tourist photographer named Richard Waters who crossed paths with, and pointed his own camera at, a potential jumper on the bridge one day. The inclusion of these images, along with a subsequent recorded interview with Waters, appears strategically inserted into *The Bridge* in order to help the film self-consciously reflect upon the role of documenting or observing suicide through a camera lens.

The dramatic retelling and re-presentation of this event witnesses the film crosscutting in-between Steel's helpless telephoto documentary footage of Waters and the probable female jumper upon the bridge platform, a talking-heads interview with Waters recorded at a later date, and the close-up photographs Waters himself took upon the bridge on that fateful day. Interestingly, Waters' images provide the only images within *The Bridge* actually taken from the structure itself, and as such provide a contrasting 'reverse-angle' perspective from the majority of the film's other perception images, which are invariably recorded from the Bay Area looking out to the bridge. Not only do these images geographically and philosophically look-back at Steel's own absent cameras, but their crisp and clear aesthetic also introduces an unusual stilled and intimate gaze that contrasts much of the documentary's own grainy long-shot footage.

From Steel to Waters

The reflexive sequence in question first introduces viewers to a hooded woman walking upon the bridge platform. Initially, just another of many human bodies isolated from within the red steel and cable landscape. Glimpses of Waters taking photos on and around the bridge are suddenly intercut, in a parallel montage fashion, immediately linking the two characters together. An alternative upbeat score is also sneaked in to parcel together these two particular bodies, drawing attention to an emerging quasi-narrative passage of an event-within-the-larger-film-event. Waters is here arrested intermittently leaning on, over, or across the bridge's barrier, all the while snapping photographs with his camera and gazing photographically as he carves up the scenery around him. As we watch him frame and click, one of his still photographs is edited into the film assemblage, depicting the cross-shaped shadow of the bridge upon sea from his point-of-view (POV). Several more 'quoted photos'¹¹ are inserted into the sequence, functioning to suture together a unique quasi shot-reverse-shot effect, at the same time as an alien 'stilling' trope and alternative way of perceiving (the familiar subject matter) is introduced into the film's thinking.

Returning to Steel's telephoto shots from the shore, the film presently cuts to images of the hooded woman coming to a complete standstill by some suspension cables, as she begins staring over the barrier contemplating the sea below. Moments later Steel captures

Waters and the woman in the same frame: Waters here walking behind the now statuesque female figure. One more stilled image enters from Waters's POV, as the photographer begins speaking to Steel's viewers in voice-over:

I was taking pictures of Alcatraz at the time, and whilst taking a picture I saw, like out of the corner of my eye, a girl walking by, and she climbed over the rail. And, she did it so smoothly, it was almost like she was going to her own little club house. Like, I don't know, like she was going to sit on the ledge and eat lunch.

As he says this, Steel's camera captures the woman's decisive clamber over the barrier in a single take, which is then intercut with Waters's still images of the same event from the reverse angle. Waters's voice continues:

So, I got a couple of pictures of her climbing over, and then I started taking pictures of her standing on a ledge, and I realised that this girl is about to jump. But when I was behind the camera, it was almost like it wasn't real, because I was looking through the lens. I was actually, like I guess, waiting for her to jump, because I thought there was nothing I could do, it was too late.

The sudden arbitration of Waters's photographs alongside his mediating voice-over account (during an interview with Steel) begin to fortuitously introduce a surrogate or double for Steel and his cameras into and within the body of the thinking film. Here, Waters also poetically describes or justifies why he initially continued to observe and take photographs of the unfolding event rather than (re)act and try to alter the situation:

As crazy as it sounds, I think of myself like [how I imagine] a *National Geographic* photographer must feel. When he's behind the camera filming, and there is a big tiger running at him, and his footage is so great that he forgets that [...] you know, in a couple of seconds that tiger's going to be right on top of him. And it's like, you're in that camera, and just behind, and you don't really think about what is going on. And that's where I had to separate, or get out of that mode of thinking, and act on it and actually do something to help her.

After taking two or three dramatic snaps of the woman poised afore the abyss – which the film shares with viewers – Waters says he suddenly broke out of his passive observer role and began actively intervening in the scene. Immediately, we return to Steel's recording of the events from the shoreline, capturing Waters reaching across barrier, and pulling the anonymous and voiceless woman back over onto the bridge. As she disappears over the rail onto the 'safe' side, beyond the film's gaze, viewers perceive fragments of bodies and movement which Waters's voice-over describes as the woman putting up a fight: until 'I sat on her chest' and dialled 911.

The inclusion of Waters's photographs and testimony intercut with, and run alongside Steel's film, serves to put Steel and Waters, film camera and stills camera, film-maker and photographer into direct relation, and draw into relief the core ethical issues surrounding the differences and similarities between observing and acting qua materially and practically intervening.¹² Waters's later description of how the woman he 'saved' then unexpectedly turned her gaze upon him as he left also serves to cast a troubling shadow over the idea that anyone necessarily has the right to intervene in such an event-act in the first place (one thinks here of David Hume and the individual's right to commit suicide). Steel here cuts to Waters's photograph of the woman being handcuffed by bridge authorities, staring back at him making the picture. Her return of his gaze caused him to feel guilt, Waters says, and to question his rights to intervene or block her suicidal desires (using physical strength and brute force). Waters's final image makes this all the more troubling, for in her face we can detect, or project, a continuation of her pain and suffering (and anger at his blocking of her 'free will'). These feelings are compounded shortly after when viewers are presented with one of Steel's images of the same woman returning to the bridge at a later date (we assume), and (again) peering over the edge into the void. Here, bridge security arrives rapidly in time to block her attempt. It is never made clear whether or not it was the film-makers who dialled 911 this time (but if so it serves to erect another link between Steel and Waters).

Directly following on from these abnegated attempts, the film returns viewers to an image of a now familiar lean figure dressed in black, Gene Sprague, as he restlessly paces up and down the bridge's platform. With hindsight he was the first human figure viewers were introduced to during the opening sequence, and is one of the few characters obsessively returned to throughout the film's running time. Courtesy of his unique look and his friends' testimonies, he also emerges as the only actor viewers become sure is actually going to kill himself before they actually see him doing so. Arriving at this point brings us to yet another troubling dimension of the film that raises moral questions with regard to our ethical reception of it, and forces us to engage with what it is Steel's arrangement of these images make viewers think and do during and after screening.

Documentary Ludology and Thinking Philosophically

The first suicidal jump viewers witness in *The Bridge* is shocking. The body falls through space, and pierces through time. The effect is to immediately institute a disturbing ludic viewing experience that changes what audiences actually see in and around the film's images. And for the majority of the film's duration thereafter, an unsettling and apprehensive mode of looking is ignited. The discomfort felt immediately instils a desire to try to (protectively) know in advance who is a jumper, and who is not: as if this foreknowledge might somehow offset the raw shock instigated by seeing the finality of a suicide action-event: which it never does. No, every lone body singled out upon the bridge's platform by Steel's camera ostensibly becomes, in the viewer's mind at least, a potential, or virtual jumper. As such, actual

documented suicidal actors come to coexist and comingle alongside a ghostly population of imagined compossible jumpers, whose numbers expand to include anyone framed alone upon the bridge.¹³

From the irruptive shock of the first jump, actual and virtual, the possible and the compossible, the visible and invisible become disturbingly folded together, concomitant with an unsettling erosion of any sense of having mastery or control over the emotions or feelings the film will subject us to. In lieu of certainty or foreknowledge, viewers are left to scrutinize the minutiae of body language, gait, mannerisms, facial expressions, micro gestures for clues. Viewers here sense, judge and analyse everyone framed by Steel's cameras, predicting who might, and might not be a jumper. The experience is to be left suspended and exposed, between a documented past event and a future shock or surprise (during the event of screening), between the actual and the virtual, and the illogicality of the soon to be and already been. But when the jumpers leap, we are always surprised. As are we when others do not.

Surprise thus becomes a powerful and intensive affect and sensation unleashed by the film. One image shows us a jovial man intercepted mid-life speaking on his mobile telephone, communicating with expressive pantomime gestures to some friend on the other end of the line. We can detect a smile as he hangs up. As he then removes his sunglasses, he inexorably moves towards, and then over the bridge's barrier, in one unforced movement. Four seconds later, he has departed this plane. We are caught off guard, punctured, deflated: his exceptional departure jarringly irreconcilable with the banality of his preceding (now final) everyday habits. Another image pricks us for a different reason, as we watch a man leaning out over the bridge's barrier, alternately staring into space and hopelessly sobbing into his arms. He suddenly hangs out, far over the safety of the railing, seemingly at the end of his tether. In the context of the film, many viewers might anticipate that this mortal must be contemplating his end, and visualizing his final leap into the void. As if confirming these premonitions, his body suddenly settles into a profound and pregnant stillness. But he does not jump. Instead, he wipes clean his face, takes one final look over the edge and walks away towards a life. Another likely suspect downs a beer alone near the barrier. Tossing the bottle over the edge, he stoops to watch the empty vessel tumbling towards the water's surface. After an expectant pause, he too seems to reject the jumping option, and strolls off.

Were these actually averted jumps? Last-minute changes of heart? A decision to live otherwise? Or were the only 'real' thoughts of their suicide in the minds of the film and viewer? In our surprise at their departure on foot, we are left to ponder the meaning of these anticipatory braces and emotional affects that impact us from a virtual plane or the realms of compossibility, and that on this occasion (or in this dimension) did not materialize or actualize. But were we not affected by these unsettling feelings or untimely experiences all the same? And was not our experiential brace met with real feelings of relief when nothing suicidal actually came to pass? Does it matter that these emotions that were so real in us had their origins in the virtual that split off from the actual? That is, the nonorganic Life that gripped our world, and displayed a very real power to act upon and affect us.

All the actual encounters with the suicidal leaps are marked by surprise. Even if viewers have rightly earmarked a jumper, or correctly anticipated that they are watching a human living out their last mortal moments on Earth. These palpable affects recall and recast the work of Jason E. Smith, who contends that the suicidal act by its very nature is always a surprise. Including for the actors: even if they have planned their self-killing down to the very last detail. For the suicide-act merely appears as the final action in a long chain of planned events, decisions and executions, wherein the ‘last glimmer of consciousness must be one of amazement, of desperate surprise’ (Smith 2010: 83). The fact that so many of the jumps jar us with surprise during our encounter with the film seems to bear out Smith’s view, as if the affect were somehow passed directly between jumper and viewer via the medium of film.

As indicated, there is but one actor that the film signals us in advance is a jumper. And although the action of his jump is arguably the most surprising, to my mind, the decision to draw attention to this figure presents us with one of the most unethical choices Steel makes as a film-maker on this outing. To understand why, we must recognize that formally speaking, Steel opted to mix up the calendric order of the suicides he captures as they appear on-screen. On the one hand this disregard for the chronological order of frozen ‘historical’ events can be understood as part of an artistic strategy to foreground the movements of a ‘pure event’, but on the other hand one cannot help but feel that this logic also betrays an aesthetic desire to intensify the dramatic resonance of the film as an experiential encounter. For Steel appears to save the ‘best’, or rather the most visually dramatic and memorable jumper and jump, for last. As if the film reaches some form of crescendo or peak with the suicide-act of Gene Sprague, whose leap from the bridge constitutes a spectacular and theatrical backwards open-armed tumble into the air. Over and above his leap, Sprague himself makes for an interesting and dramatic character, cutting a lean figure, bedecked from head to toe in black, wearing wraparound sunglasses and leather clothes, and sporting long black wavy hair that dynamically blows in the wind.

In interview Steel speaks of how Sprague spent about an hour and a half pacing up and down from the north to south end of the bridge before finally committing to his jump: a period of time with uncanny parallels to the film’s own running time. As is perhaps becoming evident, the real-time parallels are formally made evident by the film thinking, which employs Sprague as the first and last human image we see in and on *The Bridge*. Beyond bookending the film with this dramatic character, Steel also opts to intersperse images of him throughout as he restlessly prepares for his jump. It is the film’s obsessive return to this memorable figure, in combination with interviews and commentaries from his friends, that allows Sprague to surface as the sole actor singled out as an actual – as opposed to a virtual or potential – jumper before the fact. By so doing, Steel’s editing and formal arrangements ostensibly make Sprague a quasi ‘star’ of the film. This notion can be borne out somewhat by a brief consideration of the film’s Wikipedia page, wherein Sprague appears as the only jumper dedicated with an entire section.

Sprague’s distinct look and long preparation no doubt contributes to his ‘star’ status, as does his colourful biography and backstory, and the practical philosophical musings of his

larger than life godmother in her interview sections. Sprague also stands out for being the only jumper to climb theatrically up on the four-foot rail, turn his back to the abyss, face the bridge's public, and fall majestically backwards to his death whilst holding his arms aloft in a cross shape. My gut feeling is that as a by-product of this Hollywood-like dramatic action, with its proximity to the film's end credits and closing emotional score, Steel transforms Sprague into something like a romantic figure. Which in light of the director's self-professed knowledge of so-called suicide contagion appears to be an ethically inconsistent dramatic decision.

Others appear to hold a comparable view, albeit extending their indignation to Steel's more general use of suicidal images. Mark Chaffee, the President of the Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network-California, for example, argues that Steel's film is dangerous: 'it's irresponsible, exploitative, voyeuristic, ghastly and immoral, [...] The phenomena of copycat suicides come from people just reading about this. Now we're showing it in full colour on the big screen? That's just beautiful!' (in Glionna 2006). Celia Kupersmith, the CEO and general manager of the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District shares comparable beliefs, contending that there actually were observable increases in the number of suicide attempts off the bridge after Steel's film began to get publicity in festivals. Adding statistics to these (spurious or selective) claims, Rosenfeld quotes the bridge's official spokesperson May Currie, who maintains that in the two months following *The Bridge's* Tribeca Film Festival premiere, there was a marked 'increase in people contemplating suicide from the bridge and a spike in overall activity by fourfold': with incident reports and bridge statistics indicating 'that after Steel's movie premiered in April, the number of people who attempted suicide by jumping off the bridge spiked from three in April to [eleven] in May' (Rosenfeld 2006).

No conclusive links between the documentary and the suicides are ever firmly established, however, and no other explanations or other contributing factors are ever introduced into the equation (such as economic crashes, foreign wars and falling employment rates). All the same, if one is to believe these claims, Steel's actions appear to reify a cine-ethics with bloody hands. Bearing this in mind, it now remains for us to turn to the other machinic impacts of the film as an immanent force that strives to make a real (political, practical and philosophical) *difference* in the world.

A Practical Art and Political Machine

In interview Steel stated that he hoped *The Bridge* would achieve various goals. One desire was an utterly pragmatic one: to force the inert bridge authorities into erecting a safety rail that would make the act of jumping off the bridge, if not impossible, extremely difficult. Another associated goal was to force viewers to emotionally engage with the real issues of mental illness and suicide, and by so doing, catalyse a robust public, and therefore political dialogue. The director here, as elsewhere, describes a desire to create a film that articulates

itself with real-world problems, and aims to ignite an immanent movement of world by mobilizing bodies into action, and making a real difference within and upon the milieu it screens in.

If *The Bridge* can be understood desiring to make machinic connections to other immanent bodies, the first way in which it does this is by disturbing everyday modes of thinking about these taboo issues. That is, by provoking viewers to make new associations and to perceive or think new patterns. To this end, we might say that if *The Bridge* was about one isolated suicide and actor it would likely be received as an all too familiar human tragedy; likewise if it was ‘just’ about two or three self-killings at that particular spot. But Steel forces viewers to face one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three images of actual suicide, and evokes the twenty-fourth that eluded his cameras during the fifty-two weeks of filming. These, in turn, were linked to the unlikely survival story of the jumper Kevin Hines, and other images of Waters and bridge authorities intervening to prevent even more public suicides from becoming actualized. The film also interlinks the set of 2004’s twenty-four successful leaps to those of all the previous years at this particular suicide hotspot, so that this annual set joins up to the Golden Gate’s set of all sets, which began when the bridge opened in 1937.¹⁴ The film, in turn, connects these to a glut of national and international suicide forums and ‘help’ groups, which offer advice on how to succeed at suicide the first time. And it is in this sense that the film begins to think suicide in quantities that trouble and disturb common everyday attitudes, and encourages thought to zigzag from the particular to the general, or from the case of the Golden Gate to a wider national and international phenomenon, so that the issue of self-killing begins to take on an altogether different (political and philosophical) pallor. With regard to this, Steel describes wanting to make a ‘movie that stays with you, and makes you think,’ a film that ‘can change views about mental illness and suicide,’ by forcing people to engage with ‘the bigger picture’ rather than just focusing in on the smaller personal issues (Steel 2006b).

Indeed, throughout *The Bridge* the notion that the sum of all these suicides and cases of mental illness is greater than the individual pathologized parts gradually becomes discernible, so that viewers begin to think, feel or see these actors in terms of a sign or symptom of something different, something else (and not directly represented). As such, the images and stories of these spiritually crushed and mentally ill actors gradually gain different meanings, at the same moment as the *people* that the film focuses upon begin to emerge as a marginalized or missing people not too unlike those discussed by Deleuze as the focus of the modern political cinema. Related to this, many of the biographical stories recounted by the friends, families and acquaintances of the jumpers begin to link up and talk back to each other, with all too familiar details resonating in-between the gaps and fissures of the broken mosaic picture. Themes here travel freely in-between different back-stories, and resonate across the discussions of one actor and the next: Unemployment, depression, alienation, low self-worth, despair, unrealizable (implanted) desires.

If we return to Deleuze's work on Spinoza here, we can recognize these qualified feelings and emotions as sad passions, which modify beings from the 'outside', in a manner that serves to undermine notions of *all* of these individual self-killings being free 'choices' made by autonomous and free individuals. In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, for example, Deleuze outlines comparable sad encounters in terms of decreasing the individual's power to be affected with joy, or of diminishing their power to act, and as impacting them in such a way as the modified part 'behaves like a poison that disintegrates the other parts and turns against them', and in extreme cases results in suicide (Deleuze 1988: 34). Echoes here again of the Durkheimian notion of suicide as a social fact linked to broken or dysfunctional societies, or of individual suicides being 'provoked by society' to employ Antonin Artaud's (to whom we will return in future chapters) more blazingly polemical framing of comparable ideas (see Artaud 1948). Making such affects palpable allows Steel's film to promote thinking these missing people in terms of the 'the new wounded' (Malabou 2012), or as victims of the global 'mental health plague' (Fisher 2009: 19). Steel shows us those who are made sick through their disempowering encounters and gives shape to a hidden and informe non-population that are seemingly made ill by their interactions within a noxious inhuman assemblage.

On account of the absolute 'commonness' of mental illness in developed countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom today, crusaders increasingly demand that mental illness be recognized as a political category. This involves permitting the possibility that it is both the abstract logic and concrete sociotechnical practices of these neoliberal societies that are in part responsible for affecting so many with sad passions, which lead to endemic mental illness, and the current 'suicide epidemic'. Or, to conflate Spinoza with Durkheim here, we must become politically aware of the 'suicidogenetic' pathogens in circulation outside and beyond individual victims, which effectively render suicide 'one of the forms through which the collective affection from which we suffer is transmitted' (Durkheim 1997: 37). One thinks specifically here of the Institute for Precarious Consciousness's recent manifesto entitled 'Six Theses on Anxiety and Why it is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming it' (2014), which forwards the idea that each phase of capitalism trades in different negative affects, which become known to all that suffer them as a shared 'public secret' (2014: n.p.). There, three distinct phases, or historical phase transitions, of capitalism become linked by their tendency to blame 'the system's victims for the suffering that the system causes' (2014: n.p.). If nineteenth-century capitalism affected its working-class victims with misery, and the Fordism of the twentieth century produced confrontations with boredom, today most are subjected to feelings of anxiety: which is most often personalized, or pathologized, so that 'the problem is only visible at an individual, psychological level; [and] the social causes of the problem are concealed' (2014: n.p.). Similar claims were made by Mark Fisher, who earlier noted that the system at the root of the cause ultimately compounds matters by insisting upon a pernicious 'privatization' of stress and mental illness, which forecloses any political interventions and prevents us from asking how it has 'become acceptable that so

many people, and especially so many young people, are ill?’ (2009: 19, 2012). The major road-blocks to recognizing and tackling these political problems and acting to address them are, in turn, linked to neoliberal government bodies and Big Pharma corporations that desire profit and control. Fisher again: ‘By privatising these problems – as if they were caused only by chemical imbalances in the individual’s neurology and/or by their family background – any question of social systemic causation is ruled out’ (2009: 21). Therefore, all political possibilities or solutions are always-already foreclosed in advance, by a system that wilfully ignores the entanglement of the individual body and its wider assemblages, and desires its populations flee the stark fact of death in order to continue consuming neoliberal technologies of the self (including repeatable and profitable pharmaceutical solutions to personal anxiety, stress and mental illness).

It is by recalibrating our perceptions of these issues, or offering new vistas onto them that *The Bridge* primarily emerges as an ethical film, with its politico-aesthetic treatments of these issues forming into a counter-rhythm that works to make a real difference. Here we also might note that by so doing, *The Bridge* helps generate real movements of the world, and increases a wide range of actors’ will to power, allowing them to think, act and desire in new ways. To take a few illustrative cases here, we might note how Steel’s film clearly empowered the friends and family of multiple actors who ended their life at the bridge, inspiring them to self-organize into The Bridge Rail Foundation (2008–2012, and hereafter TBRF), a localized pressure group that campaigns assiduously for the erection of a safety barrier upon the bridge. On their official website, TBRF informs visitors that in 2005, before Steel’s film had actually debuted, the documentary was already demonstrating a backwards affect upon the material world from the vantage of the future. Indeed, the awareness of a forthcoming documentary that provided ‘visual evidence of ongoing death at the Golden Gate’ led to an emergency meeting of the ‘outraged and embarrassed’ Bridge District (TBRF 2008–2012). Thereafter, the website tells us that the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

The board, seated around a vast, oblong table, listened all morning to individual stories of suicide. So many people showed up with photos of their loved ones that some had to wait in the hallway. One by one, they stood or sat at the end of the table and spoke, a funeral procession of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, boyfriends and girlfriends, teachers and classmates. Knowing the statistics – 18–20 suicides a year from the bridge, around 1,300 since it opened – still doesn’t prepare you for the weight of the grief in a room packed with people who have endured such pain and loss. You wonder how a person hearing these stories could ever view the bridge the same way again.

(Ryan 2005 in TBRF)

While covering these reactive events, journalists form the Associated Press cascaded reports to *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, European newspapers and Japanese television. These helped in turn to trigger other bodies into action, including a group of ‘U.C. Berkeley Engineering students [who] produced a set of scale model suicide barriers’, which in turn

‘received extensive press coverage and [were] published in the influential *Journal of Architectural Engineering*’. *The San Francisco Chronicle* also decided to reverse its long-standing policy of not reporting on suicidal events, and tackled ‘the bridge suicide problem in a five-day, front-page feature series’. Marin County Coroner Ken Holmes was likewise moved to start ‘publishing a yearly death toll at the bridge – and included data from other counties as well as those missing and presumed dead’ (TBRF 2008–2012).

On the film’s release other articulations made with individual bodies continued to provide evidence of empowering and enriching assemblages that increased the will to power of all the parties involved. One powerful example can be located in the difference the film made to Kevin Hines, an unlikely character featured in the film who survived a jump from the bridge, found God on the way down, and later began touring the country with Steel’s movie to proselytize and lend his voice to the political cause.¹⁵ In an interview Hines describes *The Bridge* as a rare positive force in his life, that he believes is not only ‘going to save lives’ but will also force viewers to confront the fact that ‘these are beautiful people with terrible issues that a lot of people want to just shove under the rug’ (Hines in Rosenfeld 2006). After touring with the film, Hines subsequently became a celebrated public speaker and political activist in his own right, delivering lectures and seminars on mental health issues and suicide awareness. He also still advertises *The Bridge* on his public webpage and associates his success with Steel’s film (Hines 2015).

Other reports suggest that the increase in publicity surrounding the film’s release prompted bridge officials to fund a \$2-million study into building a pedestrian suicide barrier – a move they had long resisted. Although this has long been postponed due to economic reasons, at the time of writing a seventy-six million dollar ‘steel suicide net’ is under tender and due to be erected (see BBC 2015).¹⁶ When all is said and done, then, even if we cannot establish concrete empirical ties between the film and the erection of a barrier, we might concede that both apprehend each other as aspects of the same event. The practical result the film set out to achieve offers up a mixed bag. Around the film, mental illness and suicides are increasingly becoming recognized as a political category in the US political landscape, as the 2014 WHO Global Imperative on Preventing Suicide and the 2015 Republican and Democratic presidential candidate debates amply indicate. As arguably further aspects of the same event, the WHO report, the erection of a steel safety net and Steel’s film grasp each other and move into eventual relationships across time. But if these practical and political issues are still under way, while we wait on the pure eventual movement to stretch out and embrace more bodies, we can finally turn our attention to how *The Bridge* operates as an artistic force or affection that increases viewers’ will to power by inviting them (or providing the material conditions with which) to think ‘philosophically’ about life.

A Life Line

Philosophically speaking, *The Bridge* allows viewers to see and evaluate the shape of a life in a somewhat transfigured and trans-personal way. That is, the film allows viewers to perceive

life as an extended ecology of beings and inhuman becomings. These ideas are felt or signalled via recorded memories, documentary images, montaged collages and aesthetic sensations, which become artistically compounded or amplified by the film's playful unravelling of different indices of time, and exposing of a heterogeneous arrangement of entangled temporalities via the wider assemblage of shots. Thus, whether it be a year, a day, an entire lifetime recalled in oral reflection, a rainbow, a flash of lightning, a weather system moving over an afternoon, a photographically arrested sliver of a second, a gestural pause before a jump or the (seemingly slow-motion) four seconds of free-fall captured by the tracking camera, many different sensations of time become woven into the larger screening event. In and around all of these, the bridge's immense architectural stillness persists and insists, anchoring the events to a vital living structure. Such aesthetic touches gradually build into a minor counter-rhythm, as if the *metteur-en-scene* somehow conspired to intellectually and affectively convey an animistic-aesthetic presence, or endow the dramatic living-landscape with a mystical prehension of the all too human dramas unfolding at this monumental intersection of man and nature. Concomitant with this, and on an intersecting symbolic plane, the bridge also signals or speaks of the passage between the all too human world and the more-than-human world that lies (around and yet) beyond it.

Returning to the life, rather than death of Sprague here can help make this point clear. Indeed, Sprague, like all the jumpers in the film, is constantly isolated by the camera's framing and gaze alone upon the platform, before his body is tracked falling (in his case backwards) to his death. In extreme, his case makes clear that through Steel's telephoto lens, viewers always see the jumpers apart from, rather than as a part of their vital environment; or their extended body of friends, lovers, parents, colleagues, pets or psychiatrists, which together constitute the extended body of swarming becomings that delimit the real shape of a life. The talking heads sections and photographic montages help partially reconstruct and reinsert this distributed teeming body. In Sprague's segments, viewers see photographs, hear memories, anecdotes and stories regarding his past adventures, loves, hopes, desires, disappointments and depressions. In the faces, bodies and gestures of his friends we can locate the lingering traces of his life and its ongoing affects: via the involuntary curve of a smile upon the lips of a friend who recalls a happy encounter, or through the impressionistic mimetic hand gestures of another who re-animates an old debate. It is in these involuntary and impulsive movements that we catch a glimpse of what an immanent life after death might look like: distributed affective resonances.

Recalling the words of Rosi Braidotti, the concept of life that the film builds up and unfolds is neither a transcendental essence or quasi-religious concept, but rather a series of real and radically material acts, composed of memories and interminglings with other bodies (see Braidotti 2010: 152). Through these material traces and embodied memories, viewers are also invited to reflect upon their own living relationships with their fellow mortals. Other thoughts and ideas are unbridled and there for the taking too. For amongst other things, in and between the cathartic and emotional interviews, the film embeds realizations of the various different forms of love Alphonso Lingis discusses the living feeling for and towards

the dead and dearly departed. In one recorded interview, for instance, the interviewee expresses hopeless wishes for their missing friend to somehow return, for 'he had not yet lived enough'. In another, the sadness of the friend who had 'not loved the departed enough' is made emotionally tangible. In the interview with Sprague's godmother (a true stoic character), the film also unfolds that stranger expression of love that manifests itself in a person's relief, or their seeming gladness for the loved one's death, stemming from their knowledge that the one who was loved and suffered has now died, and therefore suffers no more. Evoking an Epicurean argument, time and again the film also makes perceptible that, indeed, it is the death of others, rather than ourselves, that is the hardest to face up to (see for example Critchley 2009: xxx).

With its repeated fascination with tracking the arc of suicidal jumpers down into the void, however, and lingering upon their eerie disappearance, or transfiguration into the inhuman landscape, *The Bridge* not only begins to image death as the 'degree zero' of life, but also as a strangely *impersonal* event. Indeed, if earlier we said that the jumpers appear surprised by their own action, Smith also maintains that the suicidal actor is simultaneously infused with the sense that one 'never dies *by oneself*, no matter how alone one may be' (2010: 83, emphasis in original). This latter notion is also made discernable by *The Bridge*, courtesy of a strange form of affective feedback loop that the film fixes up between the jumpers and viewers, which bridges the chronological gaps between the event of recording and the act of looking. For if the feelings of surprise pass from actor to viewer during the screening encounter, these emerge alongside an impossible and untimely feeling of being present with the jumper during their last moments, as if a reverse affective flow somehow sutures the yawning gaps in time between the past event-act and our perception thereof in the viewing encounter. Although, in the last analysis, this may be attributable to the encounter-flow between the camera operator, suicidal actor, thinking film, and viewer.

Despite our disjunctive viewing present/presence, the sense of the jumpers not being alone is also made felt by several other factors. At the most prosaic level, this is made palpable by the absented presence of the telephoto camera operator, whose hand shake and trembling make the human labour of recording present in and around the image. Coupled to this is a feeling of human presence that arrives courtesy of the very public nature of the event-acts themselves, which are always-already surrounded by streams of human and vehicular traffic contingently co-present with the jumpers during that particular moment in time. Even in the shots devoid of human witnesses this feeling remains, as a nonorganic vitalism or life emanating from the bridge, landscape and elements emerges and engulfs them. The presence of this vital force is in part a residual product of Steel's intercutting of dynamic and dramatic moments of 'nature' wrestled from his 10,000 hours of footage around the Bay Area, which grant the monument and landscape an animistic lifeforce. This is to say, the film allows us to think or feel a panpsychic or nonorganic life of things that is always-already co-present with the jumpers in the film.

The jumps themselves, in turn, mark a passage that forces viewers to recognize a strange doubling of life and by extension death. Here, it becomes useful to return to Deleuzian

models of life and death as it is outlined in *The Logic of Sense*, where any death is necessarily seen as double, being ‘the cancellation of the great difference that it represents in extension, by the swarming and the liberation of small differences that it implies in intensities’ (Deleuze 2004a: 333). Bruce Baugh explains how it is ‘at this very instant, impersonal dying makes death lose itself in itself, as the decomposition of one living body is simultaneously the composition of a new singular life, the subsumption of the dead body’s parts under a new relation’ (Baugh 2010: 64). From such a perspective, it becomes the ego alone that is confronted with death, which here formulates the end of subjectivity for the ‘I’, or the personal and recognizable anthropomorphic *form* of modern life. This can be understood as the personal death, or the actual death that ‘I’ mistakenly think ‘I’ experience when ‘I kill myself’. In a distant echo of Epicurus’ dictum, ‘where I am, death cannot be’, this death is ultimately impossible to realize. For where subjective death is, the ‘I’ that thinks and speaks likewise cannot be. Steel hints at this idea operating within the film when he discusses the peculiar moments of film that bear witness to the erasure of the jumpers as subjects within the restless elemental landscape. Here, in the passage from monument to nature, life to death (or the nonorganic life of things) within the film frame, Steel describes how the scene wipes clean the memory of the human action that suddenly pierced or penetrated it: ‘The bridge has this magical ability to practically erase what happens there. Someone jumps, there’s a splash, the boats come by and then it’s as if nothing has happened’ (Steel 2006b). Another interview embedded within the film offers a discussion of a friend’s choice of the bridge as a fitting location to kill himself. This too exposes a strange doubly disjunctive nature to his death:

I think the bridge has a false romantic promise to it. Because *he’s dead*. And he doesn’t get to benefit from the romanticism of it. He doesn’t have any benefit from it. [...]. [I mean] he doesn’t get *any* benefit from it. So what if his story has that at the end. *He’s gone*. [...] So maybe when he walked out there he had a romantic moment or two, or an hour. But hitting the water can’t be fun. [...]. [The bridge] just drew him with this [false] idea of, being famous [...].

For Deleuze, the paradox of ‘my death’ is to uphold a false subject and object distinction that death itself ultimately wipes away. Baugh again: ‘To this death, as founded in the personal self and the body, Deleuze contrasts the “event” of dying, which is impersonal and incorporeal, expressed in the infinitive verb “to die” and in the predicate mortal’ (Baugh 2010: 64). The death of the subjective ‘I’ marks an event horizon, then, which *The Bridge* demands viewers broach time and again as it forces them to encounter the event of death and of dying. The double death that passes into and overlaps with two forms of life too, as the erased subject crosses a threshold to enter into what Deleuze in his final essay calls ‘a life’, or the impersonal ‘singular life immanent to man who no longer has a name’ (Deleuze 2001: 29). Steel’s film thinks this, or makes it perceptible to the viewers’ senses.

The film ultimately communicates these as pure haecceitic qualities, made sensible by the excellence of a light that seemingly sculpts space in a singular moment, the restless texture and myriad hues of scattered colour rubbed across the water's surface by gusting winds, the shape and span of the bridge's magisterial shadow projected onto a green ocean screen, or the elemental movements of huge weather systems through the Bay. In short, the intense inhuman forces, expressive elements and vitality of matter that the film aesthetically envelopes, and endows with a secondary 'spiritual' nature. Through these touches *The Bridge* ultimately manages to create and impart an aesthetic counter-rhythm that offers a glimpse of a more-than-human presence, or vital haecceitic nonorganic life of things that resonates with and around all the jumpers. And it is on account of this that the film wilfully imparts a sense of uplift into the otherwise troubling situation, which surfaces as a 'counter-effectuation of a line of death' (Colombat 1996: 242). Or put differently, *The Bridge* offers a lifeline, a line of life, by creating a space for examination and emotive evaluation wherein viewers can ponder the shocking material and immanent reality of their own death, recognize an expanded concept of what life is, and have their will to power increased. For such reasons, and by such means, the film to me 'does' ethics, or constitutes a truly ethical encounter, and enables a rare opportunity to conduct a care of the self. As a machinic force, Steel's film not only serves to raise the plight of missing people to a political level, then, but also allows us to ethically perceive and ward off the invisible threats that loom everywhere outside, and to rediscover the power of life, while being better armed to think, live, love or act otherwise in the future.

Notes

- 1 Andrew Schaeffer (January 10), Philip Manikow (January 16), Frank Cuneo (February 6), Donal Congress (February 20), Anaya Hausner (March 7), James Singer (March 9), Elizabeth Smith (April 11), David Paige (April 28), Gregory Faulkner (May 6), Deborah Chedel (May 10), Gene Sprague (May 11), Joseph Robinson (June 14), Klaus Grasner (July 16), Dan Rubinstein (August 2), Luke Calsius (August 6), Rachel Lichtle (August 20), Bernard Blackburn (September 16), Lisa Camilli (September 28), Phil Holstein (October 26), Michael Barnard (November 11), Ann Noon (December 16), Davin Salo (December 29).
- 2 Scholars of film perhaps cannot help detecting echoes of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) in such untimely gestures. This after all is a film that famously depicts a suicide attempt framed under the looming shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge, and leads to an unhinging of time, alongside a tense mobilization of cinematic suspense. Indeed, within Hitchcock's narrative, Scottie's (James Stewart) witnessing of Madeline's (Kim Novak) suicidal gesture by the bridge leads to time itself slipping out of joint, and a spiralling return of jumping/falling bodies. Parenthetically speaking, Deleuze also wrote of Hitchcock's work as marking the proverbial bridge between the movement-image and the time-image modalities of cinema.

- 3 For a broader discussion of similar multi-perspectival approaches to truth in documentary, see Mitcheson (2013).
- 4 Stephen Perrella's short but potent commentary states:

The various speculations on Deleuze's suicide in relation to his philosophy, have for the most part, assumed some degree of Deleuze's conscious decision to leap toward a becoming-pavement event. The theoretical expressions here that most expressed the utter materiality in this act, were the most poetic responses to this radical empiricist's death, but still assumed his having consciously chosen suicide. It might have been, that this act was not at all once borne of any conscious choosing. But the (desperate) reflex of a human reduced to an animal; not quite becoming-animal. Isn't there something outside of conscious choosing, a subjectivity not specific to Deleuze's formulations, that better characterizes his death?

- 5 Serres writes: 'I don't think he committed suicide. It was impossible to breathe – he opened the window and [...]'. For more, see Serres (1995).
- 6 Others problematize this view by pointing to how Deleuze's body fell onto a public street, and would have created a very public scene. Thus, the public *would* encounter it, and public officials would have to clean up his blood, as well as record and remove the body, etc.
- 7 For a detailed exegesis upon the differences between the notion of a static 'historical event' and a gaseous 'pure event', see Lundborg (2012).
- 8 Viewers bring to the encounter with the picture an embodied knowledge of cultural symbolism, aesthetics and an understanding of the image's transformed meanings within different spaces or sites of emission (whether it appears in a western newspaper, an Art Gallery, or a Terrorist webpage). Together, these extra-photographic features modify and mediate the reception of the image, and what it connotes or communicates.
- 9 Steel maintains that none of the family members or interviewees complained about his footage or indeed the film itself upon its release, claiming that many in fact understood his reasoning and were happy that his film was made and brought these issues out into the (cinematic) light.
- 10 A range of fiction films such as *Suicide Club* (Sion Sono, 2001) and more recently *Brigend* (Jeppe Rønne, 2015) also directly reference this 'copycat suicide' phenomenon.
- 11 See Stewart (1999: 9).
- 12 We can draw parallels here between Waters' body and the film body, which is itself acting within the world. But as an observer-cum-actor Waters is both a metaphoric double and an ideal. For although Steel and his crew averted or thwarted some suicide attempts (in interview Steel claims the crew averted around six), they did not manage to intervene and avert all that they encountered.
- 13 Reflecting this idea in her review of the film, blogger S.F. Violet describes this how after seeing the first jump, she suddenly realized that: 'It could be anyone, any of the people I'm watching [could be] about to jump – and I was going to see it. Every new person I saw became suspicious, and I found myself trying to second guess the motives of each person looking at the view, or talking on their cell phone' (Violet 2006).

- 14 Numbers of successful and attempted suicides appear to have risen dramatically since the release of Steel's film. At the time of writing there is an average of one attempt every two to three days. One report states:

In 2014, 37 people jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge and 162 others were stopped by Bridge Patrol and California Highway Patrol officers. In 2013, 46 people jumped – the highest one-year total ever. In addition, 118 people were stopped from jumping. In 2012, 33 people jumped and 86 were stopped. In 2011, 37 jumped and 100 were stopped.

Today, the total number sits around 1700 jumpers. See 'The Final Leap' <http://www.thefinalleap.com/the-death-toll.html>.

- 15 Within the film Hines describes his ongoing troubles with depression, the dramatic build-up to his decision to jump, and of how he found God on the way down as time dilated on his rush towards the water. Thanks to quick thinking, speedy actions, and the intervention of a Bay Area seal, Hines managed to survive his attempt that day long enough for the Coast Guard to rescue him.
- 16 See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-34533779>.

Chapter Two

Cinema and/as Autism: Disorder-ing Movements from the Intellect to Intuition, Ego to the Eco, and 'Pre-chunked' Perception to In-forming Haecceitic 'Shapes' (via Deligny and Guattari)

Too much of a trait causes severe disability, but a little can provide an advantage.

Temple Grandin (2013: viii)

'Trying to understand autism from within' is the first axis of our approach to understanding autism. In the first instance you need to try to share the mind of someone who is different.

Theo Peeters (2003: 17)

The world can be conceived as a medium for the transmission of influences.

A.N. Whitehead (1978: 286)

This chapter maps a series of movements. Philosophically and theoretically speaking, it is marked by a deliberate drift from Deleuze towards Guattari (for reasons that will soon become clearer). Thematically, it moves from the forms of psychological sickness and mental illness explored in chapter one to explore fundamentally different modes of being in the world linked to brain (or sensory) 'disorders'. As such, we also necessarily chart a course through and away from narrative forms of cinema that favour 'normopathic' re-presentations of reality to investigate multi-stream gallery installations and agential 'autie-type'¹ *art brut* films that disclose a dynamic vital world within, beyond, beneath and parallel to our everyday 'neurotypical' reality. Finally, in our exploration into these stimulating films, we are forced to trace a series of movements beyond the screen into the sensory realms of the viewers' brains and bodies.

Autism Now

A whole tangle of interweaving political, medical, legal and moral truth games gravitate around the pathologized state known as autism. For example, whether or not an autistic person lacking in a 'theory of mind' – or suffering from so-called 'mind blindness' – can be considered an equal member of the community is pertinent to moral philosophy (see e.g. Barnbaum 2008: 71–105); and by extension, whether or not such a being can be held accountable for their actions or their consequences becomes of importance to those practicing the law or safeguarding justice. With regard to discourses of human and civil rights, organizations such as *MindFreedom International* and *Mad Pride* contest and

dispute prevailing views upon the autistic condition, forwarding counter narratives to those deployed by 'neuro-normal' authorities (with their power/ knowledge) in the fields of medicine, psychiatry and pharmacology. The *Autistic Rights Movement* (ARM), for example, contest orthodox practices of categorizing autism as a 'disease', 'disability', 'disorder' or even a 'problem'. Associated political groups such as *The Aspies for Freedom* likewise rail against what they perceive to be unethical forms of treatment and therapy, particularly those that physically restrict or chemically inhibit natural embodied autie-type modes of thought, feeling, expression or movement. What is more, recent neurodiversity debates work to confront the politics of funding research into 'cures' and prenatal screening tests, defiantly recasting these practices as modern (neurotypical or neuro-normal) forms of eugenics, linked to a dubious bio-political desire to actualize an autistic 'genocide'.²

Whatever ones thoughts on these divisive issues, many writers, scholars and historians have made strong cases over the years against framing autism exclusively in terms of problems, handicaps and disabilities. One effective strand mounts a counterclaim wherein many of humanity's greatest creative geniuses (whether they be inventors, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, artists, engineers, musicians and so on) are shown to be touched by, or located somewhere upon, the autistic continuum (see inter alia Fitzgerald 2004; Brown 2010; Bogdashina 2010; Grandin 2006). In this chapter we look to art and *art brut* for answers, paying attention to what happens to the form and content of films that forge articulations with these alternative ways of perceiving, thinking, acting, expressing and being; and by so doing directly invite viewers to re-think or re-perceive autism, or to feel differently about these affective conditions. We thus probe into what an ethical autistic cinema might look or feel like, and explore 'what it can do' as an immanent machinic force.

Setting up a three-tined structure to approach these multivalent issues, we initially work to adumbrate some key differences between an 'all too human' mode of neurotypical perception and an (abstracted) 'alien' autistic form. Thereafter we move on to interrogate mainstream cinema's treatment of characters on the autistic continuum, noting how these offer a tantalizing glimpse into what an alternative autistic worldview may be like. The final section picks up and then moves beyond Art cinemas in order to explore affective forms of audio-visual expression that unsettle both classical models of film language and indeed the cinematic apparatus, whilst affectively pushing perception beyond the typical world of the ego, into what we can here call the in-forming heteromorphic *eco*. Which is an expanded vibrational ecology of things that *disorders* and disorganizes the Other (qua social) as its primary structuring coordinate, and which invites participatory viewers to become touched by, or in-habit, a dynamic enclave of non-symbolic and pre-linguistic experiential energy-matter. We thus end the chapter by exploring very different forms of unbecoming autie-type cinemas that find expression in the art therapy film *Le Moindre Geste* (*The Least Gesture*, Jean-Pierre Daniel and Fernand Deligny, 1971), Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato's three-channel video installation *Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism* (2010) and the non-cinema *art brut* YouTube microfilm *In My Language* (2007) by

autistic film-maker Amanda Baggs, which Erin Manning recently discusses as expressing an alternative autistic ‘leaky sense of self’ (2013). By allowing viewers to sense or perceive the dynamism of the inhuman confederation of preconceptual and prepersonal affects as it experientially enfolds and unfolds as a range of unique in-forming haecceitic ‘shapes’, all three of these disorder-ing and defamiliarizing art works display different a-signifying and non-representational strategies to make perceptive alterity palpable to the viewer’s senses.

To help expose the practical, political and ethical value of decentring subjectivity in these ways, we explore how these films can be understood transversally marshalling affective aesthetics and intensive sensations to unsettle, revitalize, recalibrate or reorient sedimentalized or habitual neurotypical perceptive-cognitive models (see for example Mullarkey 2009; Jullier 2010; Tarnay 2010; Brown 2015: 133–146), whilst concomitantly unveiling an alternative human perspective onto the world. Or put differently, by forming an assemblage with autistic themes and modes of thought and perception, these unbecoming cinemas of autism and animism unleash contagious forms of experiential alterity that add new supplementary dimensions to our ‘private’ (neurotypical) understanding of the immanent relations between body, brain and material plane.

From Classical to Conceptual Autism

As indicated, advocates of neurodiversity increasingly maintain that autism is best conceived of as a ‘spectrum’ of different conditions embedded upon a continuum. However, because a spectrum is such a linear schema, it might better be thought of here in terms of a nodal constellation or network of different conditions. Indeed, amongst many other diagnostic categories and syndromes that this would permeate out to include, we would discover neurotypicals touched with (what are called) ‘shadow traits’, individuals diagnosed with pervasive development disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, Rhett’s syndrome, Kanner’s syndrome, Asperger’s syndrome, savant syndrome, high- to low-functioning autism and schizophrenia (Manning 2013; Skott-Myhre and Taylor 2011; Bogdashina 2010; Tammet 2009; Barnbaum 2008; Prince-Hughes 2005; Grandin 2006, Grandin and Panek 2013; Ernsperger 2006). From a neurodiversity perspective, autism, or rather a range of autisms, effectively constitute alternative forms of being, which as we will shortly discover, many see insisting or persisting beneath the ‘normal’ or neurotypical perceptual world (of the ‘Other’ and the social), and can best be grasped as constituting ‘a certain kind of border dwelling between modes of consciousness and affect’ (Skott-Myhre and Taylor 2011: 45).

For the purposes of this chapter, and in a manner inspired by the way in which Deleuze and Guattari divorce their productive model of schizophrenia from the desolate schizophrenic deposited at the asylum door, so too will we abstract a productive notion of autistic perception from any pathologized individual. Albeit at times, incorporate autie-type writings or experiences to help delimit a plane of conceptual consistency. But why? In the first place – and as Steven Shaviro recently notes – the neurodiversity movement

increasingly helps us to recognize that 'autistic modes of thought should not be stigmatized as deficient just because they are evidently *different* from neurotypical ones' (Shaviri 2014: 132). Indeed, self-identifying autistic 'spectrum' people such as Dawn Prince-Hughes argue that autism offers 'a beautiful way of seeing the world' (2005: 2), and a radically different way of living or being that (she and many others claim) no one should ever desire to 'cure', medicate or otherwise 'normalize' out of existence. Similarly, Jim Sinclair maintains that: 'My personhood is intact. My selfhood is undamaged. I find great value and meaning in my life, and I have no wish to be cured of being myself' (Jim Sinclair in Barnbaum 2008: 15). For Olga Bogdashina, because the sensory processing functions in autism differ considerably from those of the 'normal' population, knowledge of autistic forms of perceiving and thinking provide us with a valuable alternative human outlook onto the same world (Bogdashina 2010: 15). Michael Blastland goes further still, claiming that 'people with autism may understand life better than those of us who seek to impose narratives on its rather random events, because they have a better sense of how random things can be' (Blastland 2007: 2). Certainly, as many autistics appear to be entirely blind or generally indifferent to 'the entire field of representation', Hans A. Skott-Myhre and Christina Taylor recognize autistic perception offering rich, untapped potentials for new revolutionary forms of practice and becoming (2011: 35–42).

Building on similar – what we might here call – autie-type ethics or insights in her philosophical project *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (2013), Manning strives to transform typically negative encounters with autistic thought into an enriching and productive one, whilst arguing that we should all strive to become as autistically perceptive as possible. There, Manning sees the multiple, complex and continually diverging forms of autistic perception as being productively united in their liberating movements beyond rigid pre-fabricated ego-centric and/or anthropo-centric moral systems and desires. In point of fact, autistic perception promotes recognition of an expanded ecology of practices and things that collectively foreground a co-constituting 'hyperrelationality', or dynamic vitality that endlessly flows in-between humans, animals, spaces and energy-matter. As such, certain heterogenous forms of autistic being surface as 'a modality of becoming before it is any kind of individual pathologized state', constituting an intensive thinking-feeling that charts lines of escape from the neurotypical's representational universe, while opening up an alternative 'ethic of the more than human' that Manning argues is so urgently needed today (2013: 220).

In his more recent monograph *Unbecoming Things* (2014), Shaviri makes comparable claims regarding what he calls an autistic form of 'noncorrelationist thought', which offers 'an alternative image of thought that is nonintentional, nonreflexive, and most often nonconscious: a kind of 'autistic' thought that is not correlative to being but immanently intrinsic within it' (Shaviri 2014: 12). Situating his Whiteheadian-inspired work in the wake of what we might call the speculative-realist turn (which includes a range of different speculative realisms such as 'vital materialism', 'agential realism', 'object-oriented ontology' and 'alien phenomenology'), Shaviri argues that noncorrelationist autistic modes

of perceiving-thinking promise to help redress the legacy of (what Quentin Meillassoux calls) western philosophy's 'Kantian catastrophe' (68), by pointing towards different ethico-political potentials for perceiving, thinking and acting within the world (11). In short, such modes of thinking help 'get at the *strangeness* of things', while denouncing 'Man' as 'the measure of all things': a philosophy Shaviro argues humanity needs more than ever in today's (biospherical) climate (66).

Perhaps counter intuitively, then, from an autistic perspective, 'normal' senses and habitual perception are understood as favouring a perverted, distorted, inaccurate, incomplete or impoverished picture of 'reality' or what is 'out there'. No doubt, neurologists, cognitivists, philosophers, psychologists, autistics, mystics and media scholars have been known to argue that 'normal' human perception is always-already mediated, negotiated, generalized and reductive. This is to say, from a cognitive top-down model of thought-perception, neurotypicals often only perceive what they mechanically expect to perceive. As a rule, when a neurotypical enters a new room, they pass through *a* door and perceive *a* table to sit at: rather than seeing *that* particular door, and *that* singular table, bedecked in all their matchless haecceitic refraction, hapticity and shadings. Bogdashina links this to both Henri Bergson and Aldous Huxley's discussions of the 'normal' human brain's eliminative filtering processes, which strain out excess perceptual information to protect perceivers from a paralysing sensory overload (or overwhelming encounter with the infinite, absolute or the Real).

Writing before the pathological 'event' of autism, or the disorder being a clinically diagnosed concept, Bergson engaged with people with what he called 'superabilities' (arguably autistics *avant la lettre*), who displayed a lack, or different levels of, perceptive filtering in the brain (see Bogdashina 2010: 29; Bergson 1998, 1999). Influenced by Bergson, Deleuze describes 'normal' sensory-motor perception and affection in terms of being a 'subtractive' affair, wherein neurotypicals only sense or perceive things partially, stripped bare of all that does not interest 'us as a function of our needs' (Deleuze 2005a: 66). We might playfully say here that neurotypical perception is more excessively censor-ry than excessively sensory. For Huxley, language plays a compounding role in creating a 'restricted' mind and worldview, with the enveloping form of conceptual intelligence we typically call 'normal' in matter of fact being detrimentally constraining, particularly in comparison to the fluid intelligence of the unrestricted mind (2011). These notions find echoes in Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the *collective regimes of enunciation*, which always pre-exist subjects, and provide them with the linguistic tools and order words for living and working within and upon their milieu. This impersonal 'fourth person' aspect of language is ultimately linked to schizophrenia for Deleuze and Guattari, with individuals becoming situated within certain impersonal flows and murmuring fields of immanent language. The processes of assembling with these collective regimes essentially help reduce all perception to the quotidian and claustrophobic drudgery of the all too human universe of everyday experiences and implanted 'molar' desires.

In sketching out the major differences between the autistic and neurotypical modes of thinking and perceiving as we understand it today, Manning argues that neurotypical

perception can be understood ‘to quickly parse objects from the field of resonance, whereas autistic perception tends to dwell in what is called a shaping’ (Manning 2013: 256). As such, neurotypical brains engage in a process that Anne Corwin describes as the conscious breaking up and sorting of the immediate environment into conceptual chunks: such as ‘door’, ‘floor’, ‘table’ and so on (Manning 2013: 310). For autistics, neurotypicals are thought to ‘chunk too quickly’, though, as if the world somehow came pre-chunked. In articulation with dominant modes of perception-thought and action today, this might be thought of as a form of vertical or top-down capitalist perception, wherein chunking occurs as an egotistical process of determining the use-value of objects in the environment. As we will later discover, many autistics appear to retain access to that absolute relational field beneath or beyond this neurotypical or capitalist chunking, and can tune in to that pre-conscious, filtered out or backgrounded world of affective animism. That is, a world that Shaviro argues is alive with ‘panpsychic’ forces, and is best tapped into through a kind of autistic ‘phenomenality without phenomenology, or a nonconceptual “what-is-it-likeness”’ (Shaviro 2014: 132). In contradistinction to a neurotypical or ‘sapient intelligence’ then, Shaviro values these forms of ‘noncorrelational sentience’ because they are more precisely aligned with ‘what Whitehead calls “feelings” rather than articulated judgements of Hiedeggerian implicit preunderstandings’ (Shaviro 2014: 132).

Such a noncorrelational sentience would necessarily be *aesthetic* Shaviro points out, and consequently free of culturally imposed meanings (Shaviro 2014: 133). In his updating of Whitehead, Shaviro links these perceptive models with what François Laruelle calls ‘irreflective thought’ or ‘blind thought’ (Shaviro 2014: 130), which in turn recalls Deleuze’s arguments that real thought ostensibly occurs at ‘a level below or before what he calls the “structure-Other”, in that ‘primordial point at which “consciousness ceases to be a light cast upon objects in order to become a pure phosphorescence of things in themselves”’ (Shaviro 2014: 131). A noncorrelationist understanding or artistic sentience of autistic forms of perception may help us to step outside the neurotypical ‘magic circle’, then, while granting us a valuable glimpse into another world free of imposed meanings, cliché and conceptual baggage: wherein things may appear as ‘complete, immediate, diffuse’ and as they are in themselves (Deleuze 2005a: 66).

Consider then in this light that for many autistic people, concepts or enunciations like ‘door’ have little connection to their multimodal experience of *that* particular door, and the vibrant (near animist) poetic *language* of phosphorescent things. Consequently, many autistics report a qualitatively different form of perception from neurotypicals, or outline encountering intense and dynamic bundles of stimuli and sensations, that reach out to meet them half-way. Or put otherwise, they encounter qualitatively vibrant matter, intensely material *actants*, which release intense in-forming vibrations that embrace the senses as they move in and experience the matter-space continuum. In her work on autisms Bogdashina relates this to a ‘literal perception’, or sensing things without any filtration, which results in a paradoxical *Gestalt perception*, wherein all sensory information ‘is received in infinite detail and holistically at the same time [...] as a single entity with all the details perceived

(not processed!)’ (see Bogdashina 2003: 45–48; 2010: 61–62). Donna Williams defines her personal version of this as like having ‘a mind with no sieve’ (1999: 42), whilst Daniel Tammet describes his enfolded experiences in terms of embracing an infinity of detail, which always precede their objects (2009: 177). In the parlance of contemporary neurology, this phenomena is referred to as a ‘sensory gating deficit’, or else an ‘overperforming’ brain (Bogdashina 2010: 29; Freedman et al. 1987), and is often classified as an affective illness that results in the intense perception of in-forming vital vibrations that materially embrace the sensorium and provoke shifting synesthetic patterns. Here, intense percepts and affects overpower, overwhelm or overrun concepts (or concept forming), so that an experience of *that* door would involve directly enduring intense and qualitatively unique sensations produced by the in-finite in-forming matter and qualities that the autistic inhabits space *with*, before any noun or notion of ‘dooriness’ could parcel together or envelop this nebulous galaxy of affects and percepts.

Echoing Williams, Tito Mukhopadhyaya indicates how unruly intensive elements, such as colour, saturation, light, texture, the grain of the wood become more immediate and significant than the conceptual place-holder neurotypicals use to parcel them all together. Accordingly, the sound that the door hinges make; the particular heft and density of the wood, and the noise it makes when tapped by a fingernail; the scraping sound of the door’s underside skimming over that particular carpet, all provide a far better way of ‘knowing’ the immanent and singular thing than the insufficient reductive noun ‘door’ (Bogdashina 2010: 111). Williams accordingly outlines her autistic perception as ‘a kind of non-physical body-mapping’ or an embodied experience that sidesteps interpretation through an unfiltered ‘system of sensing’ or ‘tuning-in’ to the environment, which results in ‘a sort of “resonance” with matter’ (Williams 1998: 37). Here, we can locate echoes of Whitehead’s notion of the world signalling or communicating with the processual human body directly, which is always-already a part of, rather than apart from, the world (as medium).

From these vantages, the encounter between subject and object becomes radically redrawn, with immanent affective datum, qua matter as vital energy, entering into experiential composition with the ‘subjective form’, resulting in the emergence of a *subject-superject* (see Whitehead 1978: 52). Or perhaps more precisely in the case of autistisms, a form of perception that bypasses being ‘clothed’ in the usual ‘subjective forms’ (the Emperor’s clothes) and are better understood in terms of the worldings of a processual *superject* (Whitehead 1978: 52). This rich synesthetic mode of in-habiting reality helps highlight why a neurotypical perceptual experience is often referred to by neurologists as part of the ‘Grand Illusion’ (Bogdashina 2010: 32). Or in Huxley’s terms, a pathetic and impoverished state of imbecility that we can contrast with the rich multisensory autistic ethic of relations, and which sheds valuable light upon the embodied and enworlded relationship between the human body, brain and inhuman material plane.

Of interest to our discussions below, these modes of perceiving also appear to be promoted by specific artworks and digital technologies more generally, courtesy of the contrasting ways in which they invite attention and stimulate embodied action and affection. In *New*

Philosophy for New Media, for example, Mark B.N. Hansen exposes the extent to which ‘post-cinematic’ or ‘post-medium’ digital technologies speak to the ‘framing function’ of the human body, rather than addressing themselves to the separating and distancing eye (2014: 10). Our interaction with digital images here increasingly promote ‘frameless’ modes of perceiving that Hansen describes in terms of an ‘absolute survey’, or as a form of ‘vision that grasps the entire visual field in a single instantaneous take’, rendering ‘a nongeometric, nondimensional space directly and immediately correlated with the surveying “I-unity”’ (Hansen 2014: 174). In such models the human body increasingly surfaces as a medium for processing and modifying informatics. For William Brown, the interaction or entanglement of the human body as a medium with digital technologies results in the emergence of a new concept of realism (and by extension reality). Important to our discussion below, certain of these serve to evoke a sense of being ‘enworlded’, a concept Brown fashions after Karen Barad’s notion of quantum ‘entanglement’, itself inspired by discoveries in modern physics (2015: 78). In the first place, Brown convincingly demonstrates how digital technology has in and of itself ultimately taken cinema ‘beyond’ itself (Brown 2015: 12). This ability of films to affectively bring about new thoughts is one of the greatest values of digital cinema, then, and helps us to grasp the ways in which the creation of new realisms can help us ‘to *think*’ differently (Brown 2015: 6). A thinking film such as Gaspar Noé’s *Enter the Void* (2009), to take an example we worked on together, employs an alternative form of digital realism to provoke viewers to perceive of ourselves as being radically enworlded rather than being solipsistic beings (Brown and Fleming 2015). In this example, the ‘assemblage’ of viewer and film ‘can/does take the viewer beyond the human, and as such it is profoundly “philosophical”’ (Brown 2015: 8). In such instances of digital film-thinking, as we become conscious *with* cinema, we come to recognize that we are ‘profoundly in, or with, the world’, and are as much the producers of perceptions as we are the passive receivers of them (Brown 2015: 3, 60).

Digital imaging technologies here marshal perceptions and affections in a manner that helps expose how an immanent non-human force helps us as viewers to think and perceive differently. We might recall that for Deleuze, affects are always-already prior to our encounter and experience of them. Below I wish to move on to specifically interrogate how different forms of cinema are ethically employed and affectively deployed to help us think more ‘autistically’, and how the artistic techniques and digital technologies are variously used to help communicate what an alternative autistic relationship with the world might feel like.

Cinematic Autism

Generally speaking, mainstream films about autisms and autie-type people can be divided into two broad overlapping categories. One kind tends to focus on exceptional ‘high-functioning’ savants or Asperger types with ‘superabilities’, and includes films such as *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988), *Mozart and the Whale* (Petter Naess, 2008) [both written by

Ronald Bass], the *Temple Grandin* biopic (Mick Jackson, 2010), and films such as *Cube* (Vincenzo Natali, 1997), *Pi* (Darren Aronofsky, 1998), *A Beautiful Mind* (Ron Howard, 2001) and more recently *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2015). These typically foreground the interactions between socialized neurotypicals and less socialized autistic-savants-cum-schizophrenics with super and intuitive mathematical abilities (arranged on a continuum from idiot to genius), often driven to the brink of enlightenment or insanity by fleeting glimpses of an alternative or subsisting affective (panpsychic?) universe of emergent mathematical patterns. The other broad grouping focuses on the emotional and spiritual strains, tribulations, and rewards of living with 'lower functioning' autie-type people. Films such as *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (Lasse Hallström, 1993), *Breaking and Entering* (Anthony Minghella, 2006), *I am Sam* (Jesse Nelson, 2001) and *The Black Balloon* (Elissa Down, 2008) would all belong to this category.

Collectively, these mainstream films are useful for exposing how autistic people inhabit a qualitatively different (parallel) perceptual universe to neurotypicals, and offer tantalizing hints as to what this may be like. *Temple Grandin's* opening sequence gestures towards this by depicting an enclosed cubic room-space that appears to recede into a 'normal' vanishing point from the camera's fixed framing (with its inbuilt mastering perspective and receding renaissance perspective). Temple's (Claire Danes) subsequent diagonal movement across this room from the back left corner to the front results in her body's impossibly rapid growth, as if she suddenly expands in size and scale like a swelling Alice in Wonderland. This trick shot is later unfolded or revealed as the effect of an anamorphically skewed 'Ames room', the distorted form of which interacts with the camera's in-built cycloptic apparatus to create a spatial illusion or perspectival special effect.³ The opening shot thus immediately embeds and enfolds two different 'mathematical' perspectives or spaces into the same aesthetic shot, ostensibly overlapping and collapsing together two coexisting shape-worlds or planes – the normally perceived cubic room viewers apparently see beyond the cinematic fourth wall, and the actual trapezoidal world that the autistic experiences from within. In this case, it is the autistic person (with)in the room that has the privileged, correct or truer view of reality (as from an inside-out view of autism), whilst the film's viewers are aligned with an impoverished or false neurotypical illusion (of reality). The expressive opening sequence thus appears to parcel many of the themes relevant to our understanding of autistic perception, and aesthetically reifies Bogdashina's claims that although autistic people inhabit 'the same physical world' and deal with the same 'raw material', the perceptual universe they experience turns out to be strikingly different from that of non-autistic people (Bogdashina 2003: 44). Beyond aligning and enfolding mainstream cinema's apparatus and normal gaze with neurotypical perception, we also begin to perceive an autistic prehension of a different *shape* and texture to reality, or of a co-present mathematical enworlding or shifting patterned architecture of angles, curves, gradients and rhythms that is significantly different to the everyday ones neurotypical people perceive. This cinematic realization chimes with the writing of autistic authors such as Dawn Prince-Hughes, who describes experiencing an intense 'physical thrill' when

sensing symmetry that seems to exceed and transcend a neurotypical's perception of the same: 'I love the lines and colour of tennis courts' she says in a not too defamiliarizing manner, but then 'I love driving through tunnels and being surrounded by their roundness' (2005). The opening shot of *Temple Grandin* might here stand in as an apt synecdoche for not only the larger film of which it is a distilled expressive part, but also mainstream treatments of autism in cinema more generally, which make autie-type experiences intellectually perceptible rather than sensorially sentient to their viewers.

To get a better sense of what such a universe may be like involves exploring different intensive and qualitative dimensions that dwell in a liminal border zone between the outside and the inside. To go to one extreme first, we might help achieve an inside-out view if we briefly turn to the writing of Daniel Tammet, wherein he recounts his personal experiences of reciting Pi to 22, 514 decimal places:

Although the digits of Pi are, mathematically speaking, strictly random, my internal representation of them was anything but – filled with rhythmic strokes and structures of light, colour and personality. From this random assembly of digits I was able to compose something like a visual song that meandered through every contour of my mind, through which I was able to hear the music of the numbers.

(2009: 58)

In both the novel and stage version of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Mark Haddon 2003, adapted to stage by Simon Stephens 2013), the main character Christopher offers readers and viewers a chance to intercept his inside-out view of such an autistic world, which exposes a dynamically vital universe of shifting mathematical patterns and symmetry (using sophisticated 4D projections to realize this on stage).

Films like *Temple Grandin* and *Mozart and the Whale* go some small way to representing or revealing the inner subjective experiences of these panpsychic mathematical worlds onscreen, employing special effects to overlay or mediate the cameras' recorded images of reality. This aesthetically augmented animation again depicts moving mathematical symbols, angles and patterns not normally perceived by neurotypicals. These special effects often open up a liminal space (with)in or in-between the autistic brain and the rhythmical substratum of mathematical material-energy, without moving us out from mainstream cinema's 'correlationist circle'. In *Mozart and the Whale*, for instance, viewers perceive Donald's (Josh Hartnett) mind visualizing number games that are ignited by passing car registration plates. There, post-production special effects depict his brain rapidly and dynamically 'solving' their cubes and primes through vital animation. As viewers access the restless mathematical mindscape of the autistics, then, animation offers them a glimpse into the animist autistic world wherein – as Diana Kruminis explains – everything suddenly becomes 'somewhat alive' (Kruminis in Manning 2013: 150). And it is here, in recognizing this breath of life that insists within, beneath or beside our neurotypical universe we can begin to identify how the world of autistic perception unravels an alternative polyphonic universe of vital in-forming

affect and animist forces. Which is to say, the immanent realm that Shaviro describes in terms of being a panpsychic plane of reality, which we neurotypicals need to first embrace a kind of ‘stoned or crazy thinking’ in order to appreciate (Shaviro 2014: 86): and more of which in the following chapter. In the mainstream films, however, such images serve to reveal an overlapping collision of world and brain, information and processing, which although appears non-reflexive and non-conscious on behalf of the autistics – in that it is not consciously directed, as such – at best serves to disturb rather than destroy the ‘correlationist circle’: that which binds together the bifurcated notions of an objective ‘being-in-itself’ and the subjective realm of human thought-perception (qua a human being-in-the-world) (see Shaviro 2014: 67). Thus, we might say that such autistic image forms describe and make tangible the parameters and perimeter of the correlationist circle, rather than truly stepping ‘*outside* it’ (68).

These latter experiences are, in turn, also often related to an autistic sensory experience or phenomena called ‘echoemotica’, wherein the person sensing is often outlined experientially merging with sensory stimuli, as if somehow becoming ‘with’ objects, environments or in-forming forces. Here, Bergson’s notion of ‘intellectual sympathy’ considered alongside Gilbert Simondon’s conception of ‘internal resonance’ can help account for how certain autistics appear to feel an affinity with what it is they sense, and risk actually losing themselves within the stimuli, while experiencing a form of resonance or extreme becoming-with. Bergson writes that intellectual sympathy is a state wherein an individual is able to intuitively place oneself ‘within’ an object and coincide with it. To understand this, however, involves a shift in modes of perception from the intellectual, which only ever moves ‘around’ an object, towards an intuitive mode of perceiving that enters *into* what it perceives: the latter shifting from the relative and symbolic towards the (unrepresentable and inexpressible) actual and absolute. ‘Normal’ minds have to do themselves a violence in order to achieve this intuitive state, Bergson argues, but if successful, can result in a radical disordering and reordering of normal categories and concepts (1999: 51). Shaviro goes even further still, arguing that in order to achieve such intuition, thought must ‘commit suicide, as it were, in order to be resurrected in an entirely new and different form’ (Shaviro 2014: 113).

Simondon describes a comparable internal resonance that always-already connects human beings to an outside system of preindividual reality. There, human beings become both an agent and theatre of ‘ontogenetic’ individuation, simultaneously undergoing a primordial process of participation that brings the ‘individual-milieu dyad’ to light whilst exposing the ‘supersaturated system’ that constitutes being (1992: 301). From this vantage, ‘beings’ no longer appear as stable bounded subjects with a unitary identity, but rather emerge in tandem with an entangled ecology of human and inhuman bodies, or through a dynamic ‘transductive unity’ that joins together form and matter. Thus, for understanding our true nature ‘[we] must begin with individuation, with the being grasped at its centre and in relation to its spatiality and its becoming, and not by a realized [*substantialised*] individual faced with a world that is external to it’ (Simondon 1992: 310).

Such radical ideas clearly chime with much autistic literature, and the writing of authors such as Donna Williams, who describes resonating ‘with the sensory nature of the object with such an absolute purity and loss of self’ that it felt like ‘merging with God’ or becoming ‘part of beauty itself’ (1998: 15). Francesca Bierens similarly relates experiencing an autistic ‘fluidity of boundary between the self and the outside physical world’ (2009: 208), which in turn recalls Manning’s autie-type descriptions of a ‘leaky sense of self’ (2013), which spreads out to include the inhuman worlds of animals and objects. For Manning, recognition of these alternative modes of perceiving and sensing compels us to think an alternative ethical form of being *with*. Echoes here too of Roger Caillois’s famous work on insects and ‘psychasthenia’ (2003), where the troubling of the individual-milieu-continuum is even more radical still. For in the insect world, Caillois notes, the entanglement of body-brain and milieu is at its most profound, to the extent that it actually becomes a threat to insect existence. Indeed, any milieu becomes dangerously seductive and infectious for insects that inhabit it, to the extent that over extended durations of time, insect bodies-brains get dragged into a deterritorializing block of becoming with their environments. The result is unparalleled forms of mimicry at a level that goes far beyond utilitarian camouflage, and reveals extreme forms of ‘depersonalization through assimilation into space’ that surpasses survival tactics and expose the extent to which body and environment are radically entangled, or distributed across each other (Caillois 2003: 100). Arriving at these blurred borderlines, we can now turn to another associated notion of autistic being thought by mainstream cinema, which is related to animal thresholds and worlds.

Animals and Alterity in Mainstream Cine-Autism

So far we have seen that mainstream narrative films focusing on autistic characters often explore or reveal supersaturated or sympathetic modes of being that gesture outside of the neurotypical or correlationist circle. But another overt manner through which they do this can be fruitfully investigated alongside Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘becoming-animal’, which as Patricia Pisters (2003: 142–152) reminds us, is intimately linked to a heightening of the human senses (or super-senses). In putting to one side the pejorative associations that words such as ‘animal’ and ‘autism’ often gather or evoke in schoolyard parlance, we might first approach the extent to which various medical and scientific reports indicate that due to unique forms of *neuronal micro-architecture*, certain autistic brains can be understood as being tuned in to higher sensory-perceptive frequencies than most neurotypicals. These ideas are often accompanied by descriptions of autistic perception that are tellingly related to the paragon of animal perception. In their biographies, both Williams and Grandin discuss having intense experiences of audio ‘hypersensitivity’, or a superhuman ability to hear sounds more typically located in the animal-hearing range or spectrum. Bogdashina likewise makes known her anecdotal experiences of working with high-functioning autistic adults who were able to ‘smell like canines’, and of autistic children with ‘extra-acute sight’

(or ‘hypervision’) who are able to see ‘like an eagle’ (Bogdashina 2003: 53–54). Ashwin et al. introduce the results of lab experiments wherein autistic participants appeared to exhibit a visual acuity so superior to that of a neurotypical test group that it ought to be mapped in a region typically reserved ‘for birds of prey’ (2009: 17).

Autistic sensory-perception can here be outlined following along a line of becoming-intense towards becoming-animal, which finds parallels in the work of novelists like Carlos Castaneda and Herman Melville (the latter, according to Julie Brown [2010], being another autistic artist before the fact), and the autie-type writing of Grandin and Prince-Hughes amongst many others. Prince-Hughes makes for an illuminating case in point here, as her writing outlines how she both instinctively and sympathetically comprehended the communication-patterns of the gorillas and bonobo apes she began to resonate with, and how she was able to feel an affinity with the animals that in turn became nothing less than a ‘mirror’ for her own soul (2005). On first encountering the apes, Prince-Hughes describes how she appeared to go ‘backward in time into the most primal and ancient part of myself. Back into the quiet recesses of my mind, where evolution has paused to breathe, bringing its people with it’ (2005). Comparable forms of animal affinity (as opposed to neurotypical ‘empathy’) appear as a tropological feature scattered across many mainstream autism films. A staged ape performance by the autistic character in *The Black Balloon* arguably makes an oblique nod towards this, as does a scene in *Mozart and the Whale* that witnesses Isabelle (Radha Mitchell) moving and communicating with animalistic body gestures *with* a caged baboon at the zoo.

Similar notions of becoming-animal that extend beyond apes are also introduced via Temple Grandin’s biographical writing and film. Grandin opines: ‘Animals and autistic humans don’t see their ideas of things; they see the actual things themselves.’ In attempting to incorporate scientific discoveries to back up her claims, she forwards her belief that ‘[a]utistic people’s frontal lobes almost never work as well as normal people’s do, so our brain function ends up being somewhere in between human and animal. We use our animal brains more than normal people do, because we have to [...] Autistic people are closer to animals than normal people are’ (Grandin and Johnson 2005: 57). The biopic movie visualizes Temple’s notion of becoming-animal in a variety of ways, but perhaps most overtly through a digital body-shifting morph that depicts Claire Danes transforming into a calf in an attempt to think-feel the animals’ affective perspective of a troublesome industrial cattle run.⁴

In the film, Temple is also shown to affine with cows and horses in another augmented ‘shaping’ sense, as is evidenced by multiple scenes framed from a God’s eye view of moving horses and cows that become overlaid with rhythmically animated images representing the angles and dimensions of their lines of sight and ‘flight zones.’ Similar intuitive volumetric experiences highlight clear examples of what Manning terms autistic ‘shapings’, which she outlines in terms of hybrid speciations that are neither purely human, environmental or animal, but all three and more simultaneously. Linked to this, much of the existing autistic literature and the mainstream films unveil the existence of what some refer to as autistic ‘mental maps’, or an alternative (hyper-dimensional) insisting reality or substratum that

exists beyond the animal and indeed beneath the material plane. That is to say, what Deleuze and Guattari term the abstract or geometric ‘Planomenon, or the Rhizosphere’, which as its dimensions increase towards n , ‘is called the Hypersphere, the Mechanosphere’, or the abstract cosmic machine that reveals the intersection of all planes (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 278).

In mainstream cinema, certain autistics appear to sense the co-existence of such abstract mathematical architecture. *Rain Man* offers us a famous example of one such autistic savant, who not only boasts incredible mathematical skills, but is also blessed with a brain capable of perceiving hidden patterns and probabilistic expressions (truths): being variously depicted ‘absorbing’ how many tooth picks have been spilled onto the floor from a fresh box (‘82, 82, 82’), calculating complex multi-decimal multiplications or fractions, and counting Vegas cards into multiple decks. Many other autistic film characters are similarly shown becoming obsessed with viewing and recreating geometric patterns or shapes that they encounter in architecture, wallpaper, carpets, tiled floors, etc. (or else are depicted drawing pictures, taking photographs or ‘correcting’ asymmetries with their movements of body and mind). Arguably the puzzle-maze horror film *Cube* makes this autistic ability to perceive hidden mathematical truths most overt, employing it as a plot device within a sci-fi setting.

Indeed, the entire narrative of *Cube* (itself a mathematical function used to raise the number of dimensions) is set in a deadly moving four-dimensional labyrinth world, where understanding or even perceiving the hidden logic governing the ever-shifting maze of rooms means the difference between life and death: with different forms of booby-trap lurking within certain spaces and becoming activated at precise spatio-temporal locations. Burkard Polster and Marty Ross majestically unpack the complex mathematics behind the manifold maze design in *Math Goes to the Movies* (2012), which for reasons of space I must forego going into in any great detail about here. What is important to grasp on this outing, though, is that it becomes the autistic savant Kazan (Andrew Miller) – with his superability to ‘automatically’ and rapidly calculate and factor prime numbers – who becomes the only prisoner-participant able to solve each room’s unique three-number-triplet and unlock the deadly maze’s complex four-dimensional geometry. By ‘solving’ the primes, he effortlessly decodes the hidden mathematical rule defining the nature of the hidden room-within-the-room. Kazan is thus able to perceive an overlapping or insisting mathematical architecture folded into *Cube*’s mobile maze in a manner that the neurotypicals cannot. Reflecting the opening shot of *Temple Grandin* somewhat, he is able to perceive an alternative reality folded into, or subsisting within, each of the cube rooms (or a different four-dimensional mathematical pattern embedded within the three-dimensional space). The reality he perceives is more ‘true’ than that of the neurotypicals’ on this outing, but unfortunately, his ‘low-level’ social skills mean many of the other participants overlook his abilities, writing him off as an idiot. Although Kazan’s perceptual mathematical prowess is highlighted and celebrated, then, the film only offers viewers an outside-in view of his perceptions of this mathematical world.

The alternative reality autistics inhabit-experience or map-express with their bodies is also revealed across all the films throughout a series of affective-performative-movements and defamiliarizing speech performances. Here, various actors deliver comparable affective-kinetic performances defined by psycho-somatic rocking and sporadic 'neuro-stereotypy'. Typically manifest as intensive re-active movements that surface as affective expression events. A close-up of an anxious foot frantically tapping in *Temple Grandin* or *Rain Man* furnish examples of these, as do other involuntary body-tics captured and conveyed across many of the films, or the impulsive or compulsive cartwheels and acrobatic movements performed by the autistic child in *Breaking and Entering*, which signals her altered form of spatial awareness. As performative events, these create what Deleuze, after Alain Masson, calls a 'degree zero'. That is, a loaded movement or hesitation, a discrepancy, a making visible or a sudden and dynamic birth of affective movement that generates a movement of world. Here, the non-normative sensory-motor movements expressively and qualitatively clash with habitual ways of perceiving-acting in or through space, and therefore rub up against the edges of a familiar or known world. Or put more plainly, they deposit and delimit the boundaries or borders of an alternative parallel autistic world that subsists or insists with-in our neurotypical reality. One that is not necessarily visible to, nor communicating with the closed sensory gates of the neurotypical.

Taken together, these embodied performances work to unfold an alien form of perception-reaction, or different forms of ongoing 'conversation' that the autistics have with the tonal environments they inhabit. For these affective movements make palpable an intensive range of non-neurotypical interactions with the material environments and affective forces composing it, which in turn signal a radical parallelism between the autistic mind and body (and brain) in relation to the external world, which threatens to empty them out, or inside-out them. The autie-type performances further alter and defamiliarize typical speech functions, so that scripted dialogue and language is often made to stutter, stammer, stim, break down, break apart or deterritorialize into pure intensive rhythms and sounds – in a manner distantly reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's description of a minor literature (to which we will return in chapter four). Speech and voice are here deployed in an affective sensational manner, breaking language's dominant use as a delivery system for content. Instead, voice surfaces as a range of intensive and vibrational sound-waves that push language and collective regimes of enunciation beyond their articulatory edge, and give life to a fluminous universe of nonsense, clicks, humming, stuttering, stimulating, glossolalia, psycho-babble and intensive sonic expressions.

These vocal performances also help topologically unfold sonic-territories, which the autistic characters often erect or enter into, creating tonal audio-spaces that display a different form of rhythmically patterned environmental quality, which at once expands and encases the autistic body, while creating a protective space in which the autistic seeks refuge. Deleuze and Guattari write about similar forms of sonic 'territory' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, wherein the child is described humming or singing to cocoon and comfort themselves in a familiar and protective sound-space. Therein, the 'forces of chaos are kept outside as much

as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do' (2004b: 343).

Across many of the mainstream films the savants also tropologically get caught up repeating scenes and dialogue from movies they have encountered, which illuminates a dual retreat into a comforting memory of watching a film, and the rhythmical sonic landscape of the scene in question's dialogue or speech. In *Rain Man*, Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) endlessly repeats Abbott and Costello's 'who's on first' sketch when pushed out of his comfort zone, while in *Temple Grandin*, Temple verbally loops a scene from a comedy in an attempt offset the overwhelming anxiety produced by her encounter with the unfamiliar and new. This sequence is actually replayed on screen amongst her verbal-loopings of it as if lifted directly from her own photographic brain-screen, which is shown functioning like a meta-cinematic apparatus capable of 'thinking in pictures', and governed by a modulating database-memory that can be accessed at break-neck speeds. In such moments, it appears as if the cinema and computers have formed an articulation with the autistic brain-world assemblage. Or again, in a manner that echoes Patricia Pisters's work on the 'psychopathological assemblages' that exist between modern media machines and mental disorders (2013: 162) – or between media technologies, brain and world more generally (Pisters 2012) – the autistic brain is compared (in film and literature) to non-human technologies such as a photographic memory, a rapid Internet image search-engine or a complete video recall. Resonating with such ideas, Grandin compares her brain's recollection abilities to accessing 'a videotape in my mind' (2006: 5), whilst Prince-Hughes describes her eidetic memory (which began recording all events in her life from her birth onwards) as a device that can be rewound and replayed as a sensually and sensorially complete 'three-dimensional tape' (2005) (like a futuristic 'holodeck' technology yet to be invented).

If these brain machines share certain principles or erect vectors with actual contemporary film-making technologies, or even certain virtual technofantasies (see e.g. Ihde 2006), the mainstream cinema can only take us so far with regard to understanding the life of an autistic other from within. Below we must therefore move on to explore other forms of Art and art brut that forge articulations with autistic modes of thought, and which work to simultaneously ignite an unbecoming of the cinema as we know it from its mainstream manifestations, at the same time as it works to unsettle viewers' expectations of what films actually do.

Autism, Art Cinemas and the Unbecoming of Neurotypical Cinema

As these commercial films invariably address audiences as normopathic subject-consumers, and implicitly enfold a neurotypical 'theory of mind' regarding the viewer positions – via generic action-driven narrative forms and their associated expectations of verisimilitude and entertaining storytelling conventions⁵ – the representational mainstream products

ultimately fall short of sensationally conveying what autistic thought, perception and feeling are like. Arguably, a range of art cinema films take us one step closer to this. At least this is something the work of Nikolaj Lübecker suggests, particularly with regard to his explorations into narrative films that harness the critical and heuristic force of the anti-dialectical Dostoevskian *idiot* to critique the ‘representational logic that dominates in conventional film-making’, and to lay bare the everyday structures undergirding social and ethical life (Lübecker 2013: 14). Although not an exact equivalent to the autistic personae and modes of film-making explored below, as both an artistic vehicle and thematic trope, the simple-minded ‘idiot’ does display some fruitful overlaps worth plumbing here.

For Lübecker, films such as *The Idiots* (Lars von Trier, 1998), *L’Humanité* (Bruno Dumont, 1999) and *Elle est des nôtres* (Siegfried Alnoy, 2003) can be understood employing the ‘idiot’ as a trope to literally render poetic forms of being-in-the-world ‘if not visible, then, at least, palpable’ to the viewers’ senses (2013: 15). In such films, Lübecker argues, film-makers embrace haptic aesthetics, a raft of technical devices and a ‘free-indirect’ style that helps reveal, or allow viewers to artistically participate in, what he terms a ‘phenomenology of the idiot’. Moving back through these key terms: the notion of a free-indirect style replicates Deleuze’s adaption of this literary term to account for a character and director (qua film-thinking) taking a step towards each other in a block of artistic becoming. Lübecker’s notion of haptic aesthetics, in turn, draws on Laura U. Marks’s Deleuzian work from *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002), wherein she describes haptic aesthetics disrupting dominant ethico-political viewing practices while helping film-makers to disturb or unsettle the prevailing sociotechnical language of cinema, which typically grants viewers a distancing mastery over objects and space (recalling the Hiedeggerian notion of ‘world as picture’). Against these trends Marks highlights the works of certain ‘minor’ political film-makers who attempt instead to stimulate embodied sensations in their viewers courtesy of close-ups of textured or haptic surfaces, which directly stimulate feelings and sensations. By disorganizing and rejecting industrial standards and conventions, and deploying their affective aesthetics and violence of sensations in a comparable manner, the defamiliarizing idiot films trouble what it is viewers actually see and feel when watching. Furthermore, as experiential cinemas ‘of imbrication’, these idiot works artistically uproot and reorder ‘normal’ space-time relations, literally lifting viewers ‘out of their everyday perceptions [to] reveal the invisible poetry fundamental to reality’ (Lübecker 2013: 9–12).

In a similar exploration of the ‘etiological psychohistory’ of *The Idiots*, Trevor Ponch exposes how von Trier creatively puts film form and content into expressive relation, literally *handicapping* his film-making abilities with the strict Dogme 95 rules, and thereafter purposely ‘spassing’ the film-making process by embracing a non-polished guerrilla ‘idiot technique’, which amongst other things, exposes excessive behind-the-scenes ‘realities’ typically filtered out of normal cinema’s quotidian verisimilar illusions (2014: 165–166). And we can go with both Ponch and Lübecker up to a point here, for if mainstream cinema

did not go far enough in revealing the alternative perceptive worlds of the autistic, by bringing form and content into expressive relation, these shocking and thought-provoking art films of the idiot do take us one step closer. However, to my mind, because these films continue to rely upon action-driven narrative forms, they still ultimately fall short of the intensified disorder-ing impact we discover in the a-signifying and agential forms of autie-type and animist productions such as *In My Language*, *Le Moindre Geste* and *Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism*. That is, in artworks and art brut films that terminally deflate ‘narrative’ conventions and explode the correlationist circle by unleashing unalloyed artistic forces and intensely raw *inaesthetics* (see Badiou 2005) which dramatically and affectively disorder viewers’ normopathic expectations of film.

Here, we might recall that imposing ‘a narrative’ upon reality, qua overlaying *zoe* with *bios*, is in and of itself a particularly normopathic trait. Contra this, *Blastland* maintains that the ‘profoundly autistic mind does not possess any sense of narrative’ at all. Instead, life is basically ‘a series of ‘car crashes’ [and] random events that seemingly come from nowhere and cannot be predicted or understood (Blastland in Brown 2010: 22). Katherine P. Beals introduces an upsetting and unsettling side to this reality (at least from the narrative-making neurotypical perspective) when she talks of her autistic son’s inability to understand her existence as a human being, or a social ‘other’. Which is, as a separate and complete person with their own mind, thoughts and feelings: ‘I’d tickle him, and he’d look at my hands; I’d chase him, and he’d watch my feet; I’d put a flashlight in my mouth, and he’d stare at the flashlight’ (Beals 2003: 36). Although many autistic children become incentivized to recognize other human beings, or learn to parcel together all the in-forming parts into a ‘singular’ territory or bounded biographical assemblage, Bernard Rimland upholds that many autistic persons naturally experience people and indeed life ‘as an incoherent series of unconnected events’. Thus, as Julie Brown describes it, even if all the details are there, ‘the story isn’t. It’s as though the autistic individual is looking through a shoe box filled with random handfuls of pictures and cannot organize them into a photograph album that tells a story’ (Brown 2010: 21). In such descriptions we might also detect echoes of Deleuze’s description of the brain and its imagination, which are likewise an ‘assemblage of things’ in the most vague sense of the term like a ‘collection without an album, a play without a stage, a flux of perceptions’ (Deleuze 1993: 22–23).

As indicated above, beyond declining narrativization, the autistic mind also appears to sidestep the entire world of symbolism and representation, perceiving ‘things’ in a profoundly different way. As the autistic person has little or no use for the ‘currency of symbolism’, Skott-Myhre and Taylor argue that their experience of reality is better understood in terms of a pre-linguistic ‘collision between bodies’ of heterogeneous forms, including organic and nonorganic material (Skott-Myhre and Taylor 2011: 46–47). Looking to religion and philosophy for cognitive paradigms to help explain this mode of being, they argue that the autistic universe can be understood resonating with Taoist, Buddhist and Hindu thought-models, and of particular interest to this and other chapters of this book, as revealing a distinctly Spinozian vector with regard to the Expressive and animist nature

of the universe (2011: 47). In a 'flexible' and 'adaptive' Guattarian metamodelling of similar philosophical positions, Mat Wal-Smith outlines an analogous autistic picture, albeit while describing a 'simultaneously distributed and intensely embodied' affiliation between mind and matter (2008: n.p.). If the 'neurotypical' retains an 'agile (quasi)autonomy' (Wal-Smith 2008) within this continuity of movement and perceptive-sensation, by contrast, the autistic without the neurotypical sensory gating filters, or the protective barriers of the linguistic and the conceptual, experiences these random car crashes as violently in-forming spacings, which continually de-form and re-form, dis-order and re-order their ongoing experiences of being and becoming (in a modulating manner distantly reminiscent of Caillois radical insect psychasthenia).

Such perceptual models also recall and intensify what Mark B.N. Hansen refers to as 'bodily self-intuitions', wherein the world is experienced 'as spacing' (Hansen 2014: 190). At its most intense autistic extreme, however, stimuli (or in-formation) is felt rapidly rushing in via all the senses in a way that continually reshapes the autistic's entangled experience of the environment-body-continuum, generating unique shape-worlds that vary depending on the particular assemblage of forces and factors at play. Expressionistic spacings, or shapings, constitute the in-formed sensory experiences of being that Hansen refers to as the 'I-unity' (2014: 174). That is, the ever-changing experiential folding together and infolding individuations of the perceiver and the supersaturated ecosystem of affective experience (their thinking-feeling of and with the environment). Or put more plainly, a sensual or sensory co-mingling with the affective space they in-habit, and an experience of becoming that leads outside the familiar world of the divided and separated self, or the separated I/eye that exhibits mastery over objects and space: and all its attendant social symbolic enunciations associated with acculturated or atomistic actors, egos and others.

To exit this neurotypical magic circle we must now move backwards through the open sensory gates into a heteromorphic realm of speculative realism, of pre-individuated intensities, ever-shifting in-formational matter-energy, panpsychic patterns and expressions, and affective autistic poesies. Therein, subject-object divisions suddenly collapse and enfold, so that the world and the body appear 'startlingly, painfully, exquisitely, processually one' (Manning 2013: 222). In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) Brian Massumi similarly foregrounds a comparable conflation or codetermination of perception and cognitivism that serves to radically erode any stable sense of boundaries between the inside and outside, the perceived and the thought, object and subject. Instead, the sensing subjective form and the dynamic sensations they experience are recast and unframed, forever meshing in an ongoing dance of individuation.

It is a qualitatively distinct form of non-clichéd experimental film that best allows its viewers toprehend (grasp) what these overwhelming autistic experiences might be like. As must also be becoming clear by now, these harness agential or expressive bundles of affects and percepts (inaesthetics) that are designed to unsettle a viewer's normal relationship with projected film images, and nudge their thoughts and feelings beyond established codes

and habitual practices. As such, a truly autistic-type cinema would be partially defined by its attempts to allow viewers to encounter an ‘alien’ form of film-thinking, which ideally unsettles their habitual cognitive trends and disrupts or defamiliarizes the familiar viewer-image relationship, and by extension their understanding of the immanent body-brain-world continuum. In this regard Viktor Shklovsky’s notion of *ostranenie* becomes an important conceptual touchstone, particularly as this relates to processes of cognitive ‘defamiliarization’ or radical ‘deautonomization’ through the encounter with art and its expressive formal attributes. In a recent edited collection that revisits Shklovsky’s work, the notion of art ‘making strange’ is picked up by Laurent Jullier, who points to two problems that arise from a cognitive and evolutionary-cognitive perspective with regard to artistic-deautonomization from a ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ model of perception (from within the correlationist circle):

If ‘I can see only what I believe’ (a constructivist vision in which human beings tend to select in their environment what they already know they can find), no defamiliarization will be able to challenge my habitus as, literally, I will not perceive it. If ‘I believe only what I can see’ (an ecologist vision in which human beings tend to dictate the qualities of object in their environment by their senses), defamiliarization may challenge my habitus, but I will tend to attribute it to the mediation process between objects and myself. Yet these observations share a common point: in both cases, for defamiliarization to have a chance to operate, it will have to be repeated many times.

(Jullier 2010: 140)

The repetition process, or having repeated encounters with multiple works, speaks back to our discussion of the evental nature of multiple-singular artworks in the introduction. Indeed, it is only through multiple forms of autistic encounter experienced through film, art and our bodies that the evental transformative potentials of these ongoing works emerge. In the same collection of articles, Lázló Tarnay offers another route out of the correlationist circuit by layering Deleuze’s notion of deterritorialization to Shklovskian concepts of cognitive defamiliarization/deautonomization. Although at their core both concepts help foreground a process of ‘making strange’ the viewers’ extant relationship with art or reality, Deleuze’s models are more precisely configured around what the body senses: ‘Capitalising on Bergson’s reflection on creative evolution, Deleuze assigns the role of deterritorialising to the senses and the sensible. For [Deleuze] the radically new, a radically new experience, can only come through the senses and not through some rearrangement of the already known’ (Tarnay 2010: 155): which is to say, because the affective realms are pre-individual, that which is sensed as novelty is not cognitively recalled or remembered, but rather encountered, experienced and assimilated. Thus, ‘deautomatizing perception is tantamount to constituting a challenge to the intellect which “normally” can only classify’ (Tarnay 2010: 147). It now only remains to turn our attention to three different forms of ethical autistic-type cinema that work to ‘make strange’

defamiliarize or deterritorialize viewer perceptions and thoughts, and collectively (as multiple-singular works) constitute part of a wider (neurodiversity and speculative realist) autistic event.

Affective Autie-Type Audio-Visual Art

In turning to autie-type artistic bodies we can begin by considering the earliest film *Le Moindre Geste*: an amateur avant-garde film that uses its form and content to provoke viewers into an artistic affinity with autistic modes of thinking and perceiving. With regard to the film's title, it is worth parenthetically noting here that while teasing out parallels that emerge between Viktor Shklovsky and Leo Tolstoy's thoughts on the political and ethical functions of revolutionary art, Yuri Tsivian observes that for the latter, 'primal gestures' are the starting point for all art: 'The maker of art engaged in the creative process searches speculatively within himself for those primal gestures. They excite him, and they open the bone casket of the human skull to his eyes' (Tolstoy in Tsivian 2010: 22). As an experimental art brut film, *Le Moindre Geste* more specifically attempts to open up the bone casket of the (already radically open) autistic skull to its creators' (and viewers') eyes and brains. The film was originally conceived as a therapeutic exercise, and was produced in and around a Cévennes psychiatric hospital as part of a cooperative process between Jean-Pierre Daniel, José Manenti and the psychiatrist Fernand Deligny as 'a method of observation of a young artist' named Yves Guignard (Champetier 2009). Recorded between 1962 and 1964 in 16mm black-and-white film, the amateur exercise blurs documentary and fiction modalities as it traces the path of Yves and a young boy named Richard as they embark on an andante stroll, or line of flight, across the French landscape.

The edited 1971 version of the film opens with a title sequence played over black frames. This is scored with the sounds of rushing river water. The first visual image thereafter depicts a rough child-like sketch of two human figures, one larger than the other, which Yves is in the process of drawing from the far side of a white silk-screen. Through the vaguely translucent whiteness of this screen-within-a-screen device, viewers can partially make out a silhouetted hand and arm as Yves scribbles wavy lines in-between the two basic figures, composed of circles and lines. Here, the camera takes up position in front of the silk-screen, creating the effect of the autistic artist's sketches magically appearing, and then partially, or entirely disappearing courtesy of editing. All the while Yves can be heard howling and murmuring. The first edited cut delivers us to what appears to be an earlier iteration of the opening drawing, now containing only the larger human figure, as the smaller body appears bit by bit as it is drawn in. A third cut foregrounds completely blank frame, where a long solitary figure is inscribed down the centre of the screen: its narrow body stretching down to the bottom of the canvas. As the opening presents us with these artistic images of bodies in the ongoing process of being made and unmade, a disembodied male voice-over interjects:

Deligny speaking. This sort of man, it's the hand of a 25 year old young fellow which traced it. 'Mentally retarded' say the experts. Such is he in *Le Moindre Geste*. Such he is in real life as we lived it for 10 plus years together. Such he is for us, never-ending cause of laughter, no matter what happens. And in this film like in daily life, I certify his voice is not mine. Could we say this voice is his? But why should a voice belong to someone? Even if someone voices it out.

In this opening gesture, the strange film immediately unfolds an alien form of autistic thinking, wherein, as Shaviro outlines it, 'everything exists on an equal footing': 'Form and ground, recto and verso, past and future, foreground and distance, foreground and horizon, etc. – all this now exists fully outside any ontological hierarchy' (Shaviro 2014: 132). Thereafter, the loosely structured ballade film follows Yves's escapades with (and around) the smaller boy, Richard, as they trace a drifting path away from the asylum. On their already rootless journey, a series of unravelling lines of flight are unpredictably opened up by Yves's various encounters with affective objects and disrupting materials within the landscape. Perhaps on account of the film-makers' having had no professional experience of conventional (industrial) film-making, the experimental practices and emergent non-cinema techniques often serve to disorder norms regarding the conventional framings of bodies and space, and work to artistically defamiliarize the viewers' relationship with the image and story. When the boys sit down, for example, the camera lingers on images of Yves's feet, as he removes his shoes and stretches and fans his toes. In a review of the disordering film, renowned cinematographer Caroline Champetier describes the accumulative effects of these formal decisions, and how the proliferation of non-conventional framings gradually synthesize to unfurl an abnormal viewing encounter. In a distant echo of Pisters's descriptions of certain ties between mediated modes of perceiving and mental illness, Champetier describes the film's disordered style revealing something decidedly inhuman at the core of the cinematic medium, which exposes film as a deeply penetrating 'scientific thinker' (2009). Champetier's description of the sections that introduce Yves and Richard not only help make this point clear, but also illuminate how the content of the images divulge a somewhat irregular and unsettling reality:

[...] first image of Yves and Richard near the stream. Zoom on Yves's back. Strange body. [...] Yves stops to drink water from the stream, using nature naturally. Water runs down, he drinks it. [...] The body of Yves, the autistic, the so-called 'retarded', walking this Cevennole nature, as if being part of it, without crossing it. Almost a moving tree. A rolling stone. A cat. A lizard pointing his face to the sun. All this contained in the image, dilated.

(Champetier 2009)

Beyond focusing upon Yves's autistic movements, expressions, rhythms and gestures as he passes through different territories, the camera documents-inscribes his resonating, or

becoming and unbecoming with his environment: intercepting molecular thresholds of his becoming-animal, becoming-plant, becoming-elements. The camera operator also takes time to frame and foreground close-ups of various details that pierce or grab Yves attention: ants scurrying along a cable, the haptic texture of stones. The vagaries of these close-ups and the seemingly unmotivated attention to this excessive in-formation is shown to lead to reactive gestures and movements that in turn push the figures in a series of unpredictable directions: culminating in Richard becoming trapped in a pit. Demonstrating the film's utter abandonment of normopathic cause and effect principles of narration, Yves ostensibly remains oblivious to the boy's plight, and unaware of any need to help him. Being a non-agent, or what Deleuze might refer to as a pure seer, or maybe more precisely a pure sensor, he simply drifts on.

In this manner the form and content of the film, as well as its micro and macro architectonic structure, begins to express an alternative form of autistic abstract diagram, recalling those that Deligny devised in his broader work with autistic children, and which would in turn impact the thinking and writing of Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, in a passage (worth quoting at length) from *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe how:

Deligny transcribes the lines and paths of autistic children by means of *maps*: he carefully distinguishes 'lines of drift' and 'customary lines'. This does not only apply to walking: he also makes maps of perceptions and maps of gestures (cooking or collecting wood) showing customary gestures and gestures of drift. The same goes for language, if it is present. Deligny opened his lines of writing to life lines. The lines are constantly crossing, intersecting for a moment, following one another. A line of drift intersects a customary line, and at that point the child does something not quite belonging to either one: he or she finds something he or she lost – what happened? – or jumps and claps his or her hands, a slight and rapid movement – and that gesture in turn emits several lines. In short, *there is a line of flight, which is already complex since it has singularities: and there a customary or molar line with segments: and between the two (?), there is a molecular line with quanta that cause it to tip to one side or the other.*

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 224, emphasis in original)

Throughout, not only does the visual image index Yves's physical lines of drift, and inhumanly trace his corporeal gestures, and his becomings and unbecomings, but the film simultaneously enfolds and unfolds audio and 'linguistic' lines of drift and escape that intersect with these visual aspects of the film. The film's recorded images are accordingly offset by Yves's demented glossolalia voice-over, with his 'infra-language' (Tuttle 2006) intensively fluctuating between unhinged rage and half-formed memories/fantasies of prior mistreatments.⁶ These mad sound-images clearly open up alternative realities and recorded timelines that erect complex criss-crossing lines of flight. Formally speaking, the recorded sound track in and of itself actively scrambles and defamiliarizes viewers' habitual relation

to (normally authoritative) voice-over conventions, and by so doing opens up further Delignyeen lines of flight:

As Deligny says, it should be borne in mind that these lines mean nothing. [...] It is certain that they have nothing to do with language; it is, on the contrary, language that must follow them, it is writing that must take sustenance from them, *between* its own lines. [...] The lines are inscribed upon a Body without Organs, upon which everything is drawn and flees, which is itself an abstract line with neither imaginary figures or symbolic functions [...].

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 224, emphasis in original)

These audio-visual dimensions of the film led Champetier to champion Deligny's unconventional non-narrative and non-representational use of the cinematic language, particularly lauding the manner in which his film divides sound and image in a way that forces us 'to see and to listen,' whilst making palpable the 'mysterious exchange' forever taking place in-between the two (2009: n.p.). As such, the expressive film's illogical yet ludic soundtrack serves to open up a disjunctive interstice in-between sound and image, at the same time as it enfolds competing informing 'realities' that force thought to flit around in-between different timelines and mental territories (the reality of Yves being recorded for the soundtrack, and the half-formed memories the content of these rambling recordings give birth to). At other points these effects are stepped up as the film employs pure intensive expressions such as screams and yelps, or else introduces unmotivated sound effects – including the disjunctive noise of bagpipes and snare drums – which unleash affective sonic sensations indicative of schizophrenia, delirium or drift.

In these various senses we can recognize how a disorganizing and disordering use of the film's form converges and diverges with its recorded content (both audio and visual) to unearth an alternative type of thinking-feeling that dislodges or discloses an alternative relationship to the forms conventionally utilized in 'normal' neurotypical film-making. Thus, if von Trier could be understood handicapping and spassing the form and content of his art cinema, Deligny et al. more precisely embrace the productive potential of sensory 'disorders' to unsettle and disorganize conventionalized film-making techniques: forcing the medium itself to take sustenance and flight from its articulation with autistic modes of thinking, feeling and inter-acting with the environment. Or stated differently, by forming an articulation with alternative autistic modes of thought, *Le Moindre Geste* ultimately ignites an unbecoming of cinema as we typically know it. The film accordingly emerges as a kind of 'intercessor,' which as Ronald Bogue reminds us, introduces a form of 'positive dissonance,' that is 'made possible through an openness to interferences that disturb one's regular harmonic vibrations' (Bogue 2012: 14).

The next work to which we turn our attention, Lazzarato and Melitopoulous's installation artwork *Assemblages*, appears to amplify the immanent and dialethical nature of contemporary screen art, especially through its attempts to provoke intense disordered

thoughts and feelings in its viewers' brains and bodies during the artistic encounter. Certainly, theirs constitutes a radical art project that is both inspired by, and reflects upon, the work and ideas of Guattari and Deligny (amongst others), and employs both form and content to help unleash a deluge of competing image streams (with their own distinct form and content), which move into direct composition with viewers' bodies and brains in a gallery space: as asymmetrical rhythmical flow of images, text and sounds are unleashed in a manner that makes viewers physically and mentally 'do things'. Although the centrifugal artwork is usually in process when viewers enter the gallery space or move into composition with it, the key to understanding it arguably lies in what we might call the film's 'opening' (even if it is looped), which is diegetically anchored to the space of La Borde: the alternative psychiatric hospital in France's Loire Valley where Guattari practised along with Deligny and Jean Oury. Worth mentioning here is that in this revolutionary setting Guattari et al. embraced madness and creative artistic expression without fetishizing either, and felt free to experiment while engineering dynamic and ever-changing 'group subjects' in an effort to 'seek out the creative element [in madness], to have the clinical observer be attentive to what we called the madman's transcendental dimension' (Dosse 2010: 47).

Burkhard Meltzer outlines how the *Assemblages* installation exploits and harnesses the La Borde institution and its radical art therapy practices as its 'principal theatre', combining images of performances and events (including images from *Le Moindre Geste*) alongside an interview that the artists recorded with Guattari shortly before his death in 1992, and a multitude of reflections and reflexions voiced by his colleagues and friends regarding their alternative methods of institutional psychotherapy (Meltzer 2010). First and foremost, *Assemblages* appears to be a meta artistic project primarily concerned with inculcating difference, especially with regard to viewers' thoughts and feelings about 'madness', its relationship to artistic forms of expression and the *treatment* of both. At the same time, the form of the multi-stream installation also appears to artistically draw attention to, and actively modify the 'normal' relationships between screen(s), screening space (a different form of institution) and the viewers' brain and body. Indeed, the decision to hang a confederation of multiple screens within a gallery space immanently attests to *Assemblages* having taken on what Alison Butler refers to as a 'deictic turn': a term used to describe modern 'hybrid' artworks that fundamentally dismantle or destabilize the familiar subject-object relationship between viewer and screen, while generating an alternative sense of presence (as opposed to cinematic absence) by promoting movement, participation and the acknowledgement of modulating or competing viewpoints (Butler 2010: 306–323). The deictic refuses to hide or downplay the importance of the space in which the screen or screens hang, and thus guides attention outwards beyond the frame to endow the screening-event with a Benjaminian aura, and simultaneously inwards towards what is framed.

In attempting to map out beyond the screen and trace how the encounter with such an unbecoming film might in turn ethically disorder the habitual modes of thought, we must

foreground the extent to which modern screens operate as entangled material aspects of our subjectivities, which directly impact how we think, feel and act. From such immanent perspectives, images are redrawn as active agents that perform in or operate upon lived reality itself, to the extent that the viewer and the viewed radically coexist and come into being. That is, we must pay heed to what the film-maker and philosopher Brown calls the immanent ‘film-spectator-world-assemblage’ (2015: 123ff), and what Mullarkey describes as the active screen’s overlapping participation ‘in the Real’ (2012: 39). Or again, as Brown says: ‘If, for Deleuze, “the brain is the screen” (Deleuze 2000), and if, after Damasio and others, the brain and the mind are embodied, then the cinema screen is also a body that touches us. That is, we do not observe films in a detached manner, but instead we have a physical relationship with films’ (Brown 2015: 141). In a comparable Deleuzian-neurobiological manoeuvre that draws our attentions to the material articulations of brain and screen in our modern media-saturated environments, Pisters argues that we must increasingly recognize screens as dynamic ‘dialectical’ agents. Or again, as powerful forces that are neither purely external (objectively out there before us) or internal (as a subjective brain-image) (Pisters 2012: 38–41, 88ff).

The confederation of screens and brain-screens that constitute *Assemblages* explicitly trade in transversals, lucidly and ludically employing/deploying form and content to unleash trans-subjective ecosystems of images, or overwhelming bundles of affects and percepts, that compete and congress into singularities. All bodies assembled within, and encountering *Assemblages* create or contribute their own ‘noise’, of course, which interfere and co-compose, creating new haecceitic arrangements, affections and synthesized confederate bodies. These, in turn, demand viewers distribute their bodies, attentions and movements, and pay consideration to the admixture arrangements of other relative actors, bodies and forces mobilised or at play with in and around the institutional space of the gallery. What is more, the dialectic and deictic aspects of the project become vertiginously compounded and confounded by the distributed performative-artworks-inside-the-performative-artwork, the assemblages nestled within *Assemblages*, such as films-within-the-film, or the institutional-spaces within whatever institutional-space the installation now screens in.

One embedded documentary sequences and interview in particular brings viewers into a ‘meta’ clinical and critical discussion about the role and function of art itself. There, Guattari discusses his employment of radical art (works and practices) in an attempt to challenge the practices and assumption of Western Psychiatry (qua psychology), which he felt were wedded to an impoverished normopathic and neurotypical world view, and all too rational notions of structured subjective forms. Guattari’s beliefs and practices lead to other discussions and exegeses throughout the film, that forge concrete links between the productive powers of art and madness, while illuminating the potentials of art to help both the sane and the mad escape their mental prisons and think *difference*. In one interview with the artists transcribed elsewhere, Jean Claude Polack, another La Borde psychiatrist, explains how to this end Guattari felt that:

There is a certain very particular ‘animist’ sensibility that one could call delirium. Of course, it is a delirium by our standard; it is something that cuts the psychotic off from the social reality that is completely dominated by language, social relations, thus effectively separating him from the world. But this brings him closer to the other world from which we are totally cut off. It is for this reason that Félix maintained this laudatory view of animism, a praise of animism.

(Polack in Melitopoulos and Lazzarato 2012: 242)

The notion of animism touched upon here, and expressed by the work itself in a multitude of different ways, can also be linked to the animist work of Bruno Latour (1996), Manuel De Landa (1997) and Jane Bennett (2010), whose notions of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and agential assemblages force us to pay heed to the vibrant and vital contributions of non-human materials and forces upon how and what human beings think and do. For Bennett, the animist nature of *vibrant matter* itself force us to recognize that human beings are always-already part of larger networks of agential assemblages, which directly imprison or enable the forms of decisions, actions and thoughts they actually make. Assemblages are best understood as emergent wholes, then, and thought of in terms of dynamic living ‘ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts’ which human bodies, brains and societies move into composition with; to form larger ‘living, throbbing confederations’ wherein agency must be understood as being distributed (Bennett 2010: 23–24).

Assemblages reifies such models through its form and content, becoming an agential inhuman force in its own right that moves into composition with the viewer’s sensorium. As such, the inhuman artwork can be understood trading in a form of therapeutic Guattarian aesthetics that rises above the purely representational to become contagious, agential or viral in nature. For indeed, Guattari (and Deleuze) argued that affective art at its best, or most productive, must wield a performative ability to unsettle the subject/object dichotomy, whilst stimulating new ways of thinking and acting. As a provocative and deterritorializing artwork *Assemblages* does this by, amongst other things, attempting to overwhelm its viewers by forcing them to try and absorb multiple streams of in-formation all at once, rather than comfortably filtering and focusing upon one element or stream. This, in turn, reinstates the importance of the lived body and sensory motor system during the encounter with an agential artwork, as it is stimulated into different movements and disordering perception-actions.

It is in this sense that febrile links between art, autism and animism begin to raise their head within the installation, playing out upon different scalar levels in the actual gallery space and (with)in the on-screen images recording art therapy sessions within La Borde. As comparable affective art therapy performances take place across time, and in very different forms of institution, each unleash novel impressions, stimulating vectors and ‘disarticulatory vibrations’ (Reynolds and Bryx 2012: 295) designed to release agitating and affective movements (of bodies and brains) in the viewers/patients so that familiar

subject-object relations come into crisis. Here, it is not exclusively the images projected onto/ into the screens that become important, then, for by deterritorializing traditional cinema's 'fully institutional framework', the installation itself demands that the viewer's attention dialectically and deictically include the site of the screening, and the singular arrangement of other bodies moving around and through the institutional gallery space. In like manner, each visitor's embodied encounter with the artwork helps 'actualize meaning in relation to concrete spatio-temporal contexts shared with audiences', in a way that mainstream and Art cinema often does not (Butler 2010: 310–311).

In trying to tease out this complex interaction between form and content, screen and viewer, bodies and space, we can turn to one key scene from *Assemblages* where Deligny appears sitting outdoors brandishing one of his famous cartographic tracings or autistic maps. He here holds up a broad sheet that transcribes the movements, rhythms, lines of drift and flight that an autistic child undertook within the grounds and buildings of La Borde. As he describes his map-making, he gestures to one diagram that contains a series of repeating circular scribbles that trace their movements (these representing the places he or she stopped to spin or resonate). By gesturing to the space behind him where these spinnings occurred, Deligny and *Assemblages* conceptually enfold an autistic mapping into the territory he and we (as neurotypicals) see beyond (in a real landscape spatially mastered by the camera's inbuilt Renaissance perspective). During any given screening event, Deligny's drawings and discussions also move into rhizomatic composition with other images of autistic persons upon the installation's other screens (or on the same screen at different temporal points). One particularly arresting and memorable image captures the 'animalistic' movements of Yves perched on all fours staring down into a babbling stream: rocking and rolling his head and neck in stereotypic loops as he resonates with the qualia of the rushing water's own movements, sounds and intensive momentum. In an act of artistic *mise en abyme*, perhaps, the artwork's own form begins to mirror content and thus demands comparable movements from its viewers' bodies. We might recognize that the three competing screens and streams (enveloped by a sound-territory and arrayed within a gallery space) toy with the viewer by pushing and pulling their attention in different directions, as sound and image drift in-between and across the screens in a manner that demands that they, like Yves, shift and adjust their body, head, neck, eyes, ears, feet and attention in affinity with the flowing screen-streams of in-formation.

The overall effect gradually prompts viewers to unfocus their attentions, to allow their consideration to dilate and encompass all the different vectors, screens and sound streams, or else to zigzag and drift in-between different aspects of each, or maybe to momentarily circle around one or other in a manner that finds other affinities with Deligny's tracings and maps. This abstract autistic diagram, which is shared by both *Assemblages* and *Le Moindre Geste* (on its own, or in its embedded machinic assemblage with the former) also serves to forge connections with the final film we will consider here, *In My Language*: the autistic art brut work of Amanda Baggs, that was recently discussed by Erin Manning (2013). This non-cinema work constitutes a paired down YouTube posting that actively challenges

viewers to move beyond everyday thoughts and feelings regarding Baggs's so-called autistic 'disorder'.

Baggs's film formulates a short portmanteau piece that unfurls into two asymmetric parts, each designed to challenge viewers' habitual modes of perception and thought regarding autism. The first half unfolds in what she calls her 'native language', while the second communicates with viewers via English enunciations, which are given voice by a synthetic computerized speech programme that mediates between Baggs and her online audiences. The first image of the posting introduces the film-maker poised before a window, framed from above as she restlessly rocks back and forth with her arms rhythmically flapping. The performative expression of her autistic stimming or stereotypy combines with the extradiegetic sounds of Baggs's biological 'vocal-chords' making a modulating vowel sound: the topological wave form of which erects and expands what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a sonic territory. In this instance, a resonating and amplifying wave-form that envelopes her 'dancing' body and meshes with its own audio reverberations from the surrounding environment – as if actualizing a form of environmental sensing and resonant listening (reminiscent of how dolphins or bats employ echo-location to garner an auditory sense of space).

Throughout the first half of Baggs's film a modular audio architecture is thus erected that appears to have the effect of drawing a circle around Baggs, her environment (in a manner reminiscent of Deligny's maps) and the viewer. Gradually, this sound territory expands to include additional 'sonic bricks' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 434) or assembled elements fashioned courtesy of Baggs's playful embodied interactions with material objects in her environment, which build into a bricolage cacophony of interactive sound-images. Accordingly, the enveloping humming-singing becomes back-grounded as a looping sonic montage is built into the film: the elements of which include the tympani sound of Baggs stroking a wooden door with a cane, the noise of her hand stroking a plastic computer keyboard, the clicking and jangling of a twisting metal chain, the xylophonic sounds of her fingernail scraping against a grill, and the flickering and fluttering clatter of paper being wafted around. Each individual sound element introduces their own unique audio textures and sonic 'shape' into the soundscape, but in combination create another audio form that is more than the sum of its parts, and in combination, point towards an alternative way of in-habiting and interacting with the immediate environment (offering examples of what Deleuze calls pure optical and sound situations divorced from narrative and action).

If Baggs's film unfurls an alternative form of felt sound that points to a territorial listening from within, this could also be recognized as an unfocused and receptive form of listening linked to a haptic orality. This autistic form of inter-active-listening finds its visual counterpoint in the alternative modes of looking likewise foregrounded by the video montage, which offer extreme and disorienting out of focus close-ups of the objects and materials responsible for generating these sounds. Although such images initially feed the viewers' eyes with information, they also find parallels in the alternative haptic forms of visuality discussed above, which Baggs autodidactically creates, instilling sensual modes of looking that invoke a combination of 'tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions'

that mirror 'the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies' (Marks 2000: 162). We can locate a choice example of these haptic forms of perception at the end of the first half of the film, in an image that records Baggs's experience of exploring a book – traditionally a site of linguistic and narrative forms and representational symbolism for socialized neurotypicals. Baggs here frames herself in medium close-up pushing her head deep into the book, then rubbing the skin of her face sensuously over the smooth surface of its pages, whilst inhaling deeply and smelling its folds. Viewers then see her flicking through its pages in haptic close-up, making the pages bend and rifle through her fingertips as she plays them like a musical instrument. During these sequences the aroma, smoothness and rigid edginess of the material object is made tangible to the viewer's senses, whilst its traditional representational and neurotypical use is – like the film language by extension – deterritorialized and defamiliarized in to a qualitative universe of pure sense data.

Thereafter the first and second halves of the film are bridged by a blackened intertitle frame with 'A Translation' written upon it. Viewers are then presented with a close-up of Baggs's hand playing with flowing water under a faucet. This sequence is scored by a computerized 'female' voice-over, which addresses viewers directly:

The previous part of this video was in my native language. Many people have assumed that when I talk about this being my language that means that each part of the video must have a particular symbolic message within it designed for the human mind to interpret. But my language is not about designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings. In this part of the video the water doesn't symbolise anything. I am just interacting with the water as the water interacts with me. Far from being purposeless, the way that I move is an on-going response to what is around me. Ironically, the way that I move when responding to everything around me is described as 'being in a world of my own.'

The film then cuts from a shot of Baggs's fingers playing with the flowing water to a medium close-up of her rocking and waving her arms inside her front room. Behind her, a dog sits on the couch. The computerized voice-over continues:

Whereas if I interact with a much more limited set of responses and only react to a much more limited part of my surroundings people claim that I am 'opening up to true interaction with the world.' They judge my existence, awareness, and personhood on which of [sic] a tiny and limited part of the world I appear to be reacting to. The way I naturally think and respond to things looks and feels so different from standard concepts or even visualisation that some people do not consider it thought at all, but it is a way of thinking in its own right. However the thinking of people like me is only taken seriously if we learn your language, no matter how we previously thought or interacted.

The film thereafter switches to an image of Baggs sitting before her computer typing, still over scored by the extra-diegetic voice-over: 'As you heard, I can sing along with what is around me.' As Baggs finishes typing within the scene, the extra-diegetic electronic voice switches to become an embedded diegetic one, emanating from the computer she presently types upon within the documented room, suggesting it has switched its own spatio-temporal position (from the programme used in the editing of the film within the computer, to the electronic speaker recorded inside the filmed room itself), momentarily offering the scene and voice a different spatialized position or point of origin (as if switching from a mental to spoken voice). Diegetically, the voice software continues: 'It is only when I type something in your language that you refer to me as having communication.'

The following montage is thereafter explicated by the extra-diegetic machine voice: 'I smell things', accompanying an image of Baggs smelling her hand; 'I listen to things', accompanying an image of Baggs twirling an object by her ear; 'I feel things', accompanying an image of Baggs rubbing her face in a towel; 'I taste things', accompanying an image showing Baggs putting a marker pen in her mouth; 'I look at things', accompanying an image of Baggs eyes obliquely engaging the camera. Baggs's autistic perception is here shown to be far from a withdrawal from the world, and rather a passionate polysensory embodied embrace of the environment and its various inter-active multi-sensory elements. Baggs elsewhere explains: 'conventional language only allows me [the] terms [of the neurotypical], so I have done my best to point out the enormous and beautiful world of experiences that lie between those words and beyond the limits of a language never equipped to describe them' (see Manning 2013: 256). If the message or content of Baggs's art brut autie-type work concerns conveying and opening up an alternative form of aggregated or distributed perception, we should also take pause to consider how her chosen medium or form of unbecoming cinema – an online YouTube video – may also (contingently or accidentally) contribute to another autistic affect.

In *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010) Nicholas Carr considers some of the ways in which the Internet, as a relatively new technology or sociotechnical practice, inculcates a form of 'intellectual ethic' by rewiring or re-routing the hyperplastic neural pathways of the human brains that move into regular composition with it (Carr 2010: 77). There, the Internet is understood as a communication technology that materially impacts and affects its human users, and displays a real ability to alter the brain's hyperplastic mental architecture and modes of processing information. Although Carr does not explicitly link this to autism, some of his findings suggest that this could be a useful vector to consider. At a physical level, Carr highlights how our interactions with the web often result in a high repetition rate of the 'same or similar actions', usually in response to permutations of comparable external informational cues or stimuli. At a superficial level we might argue that these find subtle resonances with autistic forms of stereotypy, as with our repeated clicking and tapping of mouses and screens. Arguably further reflecting the autistic's experience of reality, Carr incorporates Cory Doctorow's ideas of plugging into the Internet as being akin to plugging into an endlessly distractive and distracting 'ecosystem of interruption technologies' (Doctorow in Carr 2010: 91). Accordingly, Carr suggests that

the web may in the end encourage its users 'to borrow cognitive strengths from autism' in order to help neurotypicals become 'better infovers' (Carr 2010: 222). Or stated otherwise, in forming articulations with web-based technologies, the human brain and computer technologies meet half-way in a block of becoming that transforms how 'normal' brains perceive and process information.

It is interesting to recall here that in *The Imitation Game*, it is hinted that the father of the modern computer, Alan Turing (Benedict Cumberbatch), was himself located somewhere within the autistic constellation. If so, we might argue that today, the agential descendants of his inhuman computation machine have become responsible for hijacking and rewiring the brains of those who increasingly assemble with them, inculcating autie-type modes of interacting with their increasingly mediated information spaces. We can spare readers from a detailed argument regarding such issues here by pointing to Pisters's work on similar themes in *The Neuro-Image* (2012) regarding our current era of 'perception 2.0', which emerges in tandem with our hyper-mediated digital culture, and to Mathew Fuller and Andrew Goffey's work on contemporary 'Evil Media', which assembles with and impacts our minds, bodies, actions, work and socio-political organizations (2012). Bearing such perspectives in mind helps us to understand how the articulation of the autistic artist Baggs, her camera, computer, software programmes and online video sharing sites combine into a wider form of agential assemblage that allows viewers to join up and physically interact with, and become a networked part of, an ever-expanding abstract autistic diagram.

Drawing Conclusions

All three autistic works considered above can be understood transducing normal modes of perception, with their affective aesthetics allowing neurotypical viewers to agentially sense another universe below and beyond their pre-chunked reality, wherein an alternative dialectical form of autistic 'shaping' emerges. Here, *shapes* are understood in terms of haecceitic singularities, or emergent 'topological forms' that are uniquely relational and always singular to the local qualities present in the environment and affective conditions of its formation (including site of projection) qua individuation. Baggs's film, for example, clearly displays how autistics offset neurotypical chunking by tuning-in, singing or resonating *with* their environments, and indulging in a rich multi-sensational and multi-modal body-mapping or shaping that takes place where concepts and language are 'not-yet' (see Manning 2013). These alternative modes of being become communicated by all three artworks via bundles of affects and percepts that chime with what Francis Tustin similarly calls encounters with 'autistic shapes': which are 'not the shapes of any particular object', but just 'a shape' (Tustin in Manning 2013: 186). A *shape* here being a specific or haecceitic ecology of things, or a sensed affective conglomeration of swarming and intensive actants that collectively constitute the relational milieu of sensory experience.

As several images throughout all these autistic films make clear, these shapings or worldings emerge from being within what Tom Morton terms the 'sensual ether' (2011), or a pre-conscious culture of objects and materials (as energy) that collectively constitute an alternative relational milieu of experience, without for all that, ever being reduced to it.

Autistic shapes must be understood as being as unique and singular as a snowflake or prime number, and as a sensual nexus of different in-forming patterns, intensities, qualities, gradients, rhythms and movements waiting to be actualized or created in an emergent encounter. Yves and Baggs in particular helped us understand how this can be comprehended as a resonating experience of dwelling in the conceptless flux where perceiver and perceived slip and slide into each other, and the human and inhuman overlap as they perform their 'intricate dance' (Bennett 2010: 32), entering into ongoing processes of becoming and unbecoming. In *Assemblages* the installation itself made this shaping palpable, by impacting and agitating the viewers' body and senses with overwhelming streams of competing in-formation. Each film in its own way also forces us to recognize how immanent materializations actualize what Deleuze and Guattari call the body without organs (BwO) and unleash images of thought-without-image. At the end of Baggs's film, the electronic voice intones in a language neurotypical English speakers can understand: 'I want you to know that this has not been intended as a voyeuristic freak show where you get to look at the bizarre workings of the autistic mind. It is meant as a strong statement on the existence and value of many different kinds of thinking'. We hope that these laudable sentiments can also be expanded to cover our larger enquiry into autistic modes of thinking, feeling and sensing here, and that in assemblage can help illuminate the ongoing value of unbecoming films and art that ethically reconnect us to the real, via the disordering means of affective autie-type art.

Notes

- 1 The use of the prefix 'autie' has arguably gained most popularity and traction through the writing of Donna Williams. In *Autism an Inside-Out Approach* (1996), for example, Williams introduces her readers to a unique type of 'autie-speak' (237). In her blog, Williams also regularly discusses interactions between her 'non autie friends' and other 'autie spectrum people' (see <http://www.donnawilliams.net/ntwhenaword.0.html>). The notion of 'autie-type' art is one I borrow from existing scholarly and academic work, including articles and books by Ralph Savarese (2012), and Erin Manning. In Manning's Deleuze-inspired monograph *Always More Than One* (2013), she draws on and expands Savarese's earlier work on 'autie-type' writing (2012: 186). Following Savarese, Manning relates an 'autie-type' of artistic expression to a spontaneous poetic form of language and typing that constitutes a genre all of its own. She likewise expands this to her consideration of Amanda Baggs's YouTube films, which we explore an example of here for its 'autie-type' film poesies.

- 2 See for example 'The autistic genocide clock' <http://wrongplanet.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=104387>
- 3 The *New World Encyclopaedia* describes an Ames Room as 'a distorted room used to create an optical illusion of relative sizes.' The trick effect room was named after its creator, 'American ophthalmologist Adelbert Ames, Jr.' and was likely 'based on the late-nineteenth-century concept of German scientist Hermann von Helmholtz.'
- 4 This werewolf-like transformation reflects a passage from Grandin's diary where she talks of resonating with a cow about to go to slaughter: 'When the animal remained completely calm I felt an overwhelming feeling of peacefulness, as if God had touched me [...] As the life force left the animal, I had been completely overwhelmed with feelings I did not know I had' (2006: 238).
- 5 In a paper entitled 'Cinemaautism: Provisional and super knowledge in the (rooms and) social space of cinema' film-maker and academic Steven Eastwood argues that the implicit principles governing the language of mainstream cinema can be pedagogically adapted to teach autistic people about the social rules and spatial conventions of neurotypicals' social interaction, courtesy of the 'subconscious' visual rules regarding framings (figure-field relations), body space (the two shot), emotional expressions (close-ups), the rules of conversation (shot-reverse-shot) and what it means to be an other.
- 6 The notion of 'infra-language' is associated with the work of Bruno Latour and his Actor Network Theory (ANT). It can be understood as a reflexive practice used by the analyst to help them become more attentive or attuned to the complex inter-relations of different human and inhuman 'actors' and the role of their own metalanguage in what they are able to say about the network of relations under discussion.

Part II

Distorting and Perverting

Chapter Three

Head Cinema as Body without Organs: On Jodorowsky's Bitter Pill
Films and Their Spinozian Parallels

I am not the feeling. I am what is felt. The man who feels. Everything is so subjective. If someone [says] to me, I am mad, I say yes, I am absolutely mad like all the civilisation and like all the persons in this planet. I think all the humanity now is absolutely crazy and mad.

(Jodorowsky 1971)

... the less human the world is, the more it is the artist's duty to believe and produce belief in a relation between man and the world, because the world is made by men.

(Deleuze 2005b: 165)

One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity.

(Albert Camus 1955: 40)

In one of the mythological planet-dimensions sidestepped into during Alejandro Jodorowsky's epic LSD-film *The Holy Mountain* (1973), viewers enter a bizarre art gallery owned by an industrialist named Klen (Burt Kleiner). As he strolls through his latest exhibition with his chauffeur and female lover in tow, the trio begin interacting with a series of sculptural objects that are part art-machine and part naked human body. The threesome here begin performing as interactive viewers, teasing, manipulating, groping or playing with the exposed flesh and protruding organs of the psychedelically painted art-human installations (subject-objects). Klen's lover stokes an exposed penis with feathers while he is lowered beneath an exposed female bottom, whose anus he joyfully teases; first with gusts of air bellowed forth by his clapping hands, and latterly by groping the buttocks and 'playfully' inserting his finger (Cobb 2007: 147). The living sculptural-machines writhe and react to these interactive attentions. Tracing a reverse line, we also witness the active and participatory viewers becoming increasingly stimulated by their experiential encounters with these animated human-artwork hybrids.

Moving into an adjacent room, Klen then introduces the visitors and viewers to a strange rectangular box-machine. In voice-over he asserts: 'We created a love machine. To make it live the spectator has to work with it, guide it, receive it, give himself in the act of love.' The industrialist thereafter encourages his male chauffeur and female lover to take turns stimulating and agitating the machine with a large electronic pheremin-like phallus, which appears to disturb and pervert the invisible energy fields emanating from or embedding

the machine. Klen's voice-over observes how 'the skill of the spectator will determine the machine's ability to reach climax'. After a few laboured movements with the phallus, the clenched chauffeur fails to activate the machine and gives up. The female lover thereafter strips herself down to the waist, expertly wields the staff, and begins steering it around, coaxing and stimulating the enthused machine into an orgasmic climax. Her successful interaction results in the unfolding and dilation of the love machine, at which point she swiftly inserts the staff, which ejaculates viscous fluid everywhere. A cut thereafter reveals the birth of a smaller crying 'desiring-machine'.

Such bizarre poetic scenes are not rare in Jodorowsky's work, but here specifically reveal one of his many self-reflective musings upon an ideal participatory film-viewer relationship that is built into his unbecoming 'head cinema': a type of drug film targeted at US 'head audiences' (cult filmgoers with a preference for watching movies high on marijuana or drugs such as LSD) that were celebrated in their original context as alternative psychedelic underground cinemas fuelled by a vitriolic and nihilistic 'will to be against'. Somewhat pretentiously, at the time, Jodorowsky also imagined his head films as material agents of spiritual change for his 'western' viewers – which is to say, as actual alchemical forces that could enlighten audiences during and after the event of screening. Certainly, the eccentric artist billed his drug films as mystical artworks that could help disorder and reorder his young viewers' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, and by so doing, increase their will to power. In one typical interview at the time, Jodorowsky famously proclaimed that in order to deal with enlightenment as a thematic concern, the 'first thing a film must change are the actors who are in it; and then the audiences. If a young boy takes acid and experiences a change, the least a film can do is give him more than acid gives him; you must give him the pill' (1971: 150).

Throughout his oeuvre, film form and the performers' bodies repeatedly surface as the most powerful and affective agents Jodorowsky wields for spiritually and metaphysically communicating with his viewer. As a director, he was well aware that these immanent artistic forces move into direct composition with the viewer's body and brain during screening, contributing to the way in which they feel-think the filmic encounter. To a similar end, David Church observes that in a manner:

reminiscent of Artaud's ideas about transforming the spectator, everyone making and viewing his films (himself especially) should be destroyed and reborn as new people. For this reason, he shoots his films in sequence from beginning to end, using the filmmaking process as a search for spiritual illumination, beginning with an initiation rite (i.e. violence, for he believes that art must be violent) and moving towards enlightenment.

(Church 2007)¹

In this chapter we dive into Jodorowsky's weird and unbecoming drug diptych *El Topo* (1970) and *The Holy Mountain* (1973), two 'event films' that attempt to engineer a

metaphysical encounter through the body and skin, by unleashing bundles of warped perceptions and raw corporeal affects that challenge viewers to see and think differently about the state of contemporary life. In giving themselves in the act of love, and individuating with his bad trip pill films, or intensive corporeal cinemas of *cruelty*, viewers are invited to encounter affects and sensations that render palpable the invisible forces that always-already pervert and distort life, and by so doing alchemically reawaken them, or give birth to a new world, or new ways of thinking-acting.

Accordingly, the midnight movies are explored as ‘event’ films in two very different, and yet inter-related ways. In the first instance, the febrile hallucinatory films are designed to agitate, shock, assault and prick complicit viewers during a contrived deictic and dialectic screening encounter, getting under their skin, agitating their nerves and provoking them to feel-think alterity during a screening event. As bad trip cinemas go, these deranged and hallucinatory Bataille-esque Artaudian encounters unbridle a raw violence of sensations, alongside a heady blend of physical and spiritual violence, rage, and abject despair. Of course, as Angelos Koutsourakis reminds us in his recent rethinking of Artaudian cinema, as is the case with the work of Bataille, ‘Artaud’s cinema of cruelty was inherently political, as much as it was sensual’ (Koutsourakis 2016: 67). In Jodorowsky’s films too, we can perceive how raw sensational violence is marshalled to help distort and pervert, in a ‘minoritarian’ political manoeuvre that allows the real to be seen and felt differently. It is in this sense too that Jodorowsky’s films begin to point towards two bifurcating poles of the event, and reveal an ethico-aesthetic affinity with the wider *gaseous* movements of – what we might call after Deleuze – a ‘pure event’. Or stated otherwise, Jodorowsky’s pill films distil the distributed affects and precepts that properly belong to a broader *zeitgeist*, or a wider spiritual movement of world, and narcotically deliver them to the embodied head-film viewer as ferocious (dis)affections and twisted perceptions.

The ‘narratives’ we focus upon in this chapter unfold and drift along within surrealistic spaces of panpsychic autopoiesis, wherein strange picaresque characters interact with a vital and dynamic animist plane of perverting forces, and interact with a range of defamiliarizing embodiments of sociopolitical and psychological insanity, domination and perversion. These forces, actors and actants are essentially entangled upon and within a supersaturated expressive substance that blurs the mental and material, physical and psychic, actual and virtual planes. Both within and beyond the screen, stable notions of fixed identity or (a concept of) ‘being’ are also replaced by fluid and oneiric images of shifting identity and swarming distributed mind-body becomings (see Fleming 2009). What is most interesting to this chapter, though, is how these delirious black humour exercises also appear to think a complete *philosophical reversal*, by focusing upon characters with ‘parallel’ mind-bodies that appear radically (immanently) ‘enworlded’, and thus act and desire upon and with-in a chaotic and shifting *Expressionistic* plane of vital images, matter, forces and energy. As such, within the films the meaty and fleshy body becomes a privileged site of spiritual revolt and empowerment, whose powers

become increased or decreased courtesy of the different spiritual or physical articulations, connections and compositions it moves into with other immanent bodies and forces.

To my mind, as a consequence of this, the 'pill' films clearly express the ethical condition of immanent existence, and explore what it is a body 'can do' under changing material and spiritual conditions. Jodorowsky's drug films certainly appear to advocate experimental and artistic modes of living and being that involve deterritorializing sad passions, and actively distancing oneself from the negative desires of the state apparatus and its libidinal machines. On account of such, it remains strange to me that the philosopher Benedict Spinoza remains a figure so-far neglected from considerations of Jodorowsky's head films, not least because these blazing cinematic diatribes against the distortion and domination of the human body and spirit have been compared to the concepts and works of almost every other philosopher and mystic around. To redress this somewhat, we set out here to explore how Jodorowsky's 'counterculture' films not only politically and spiritually resonate with the eventual spirit of the times, but eventually begin to operate as life-affirming ethico-political agents or machines that invite viewers to reject *ressentiment/resentiment* and bad conscience in order to reconnect human and world in an empowering Spinozist manner.

If we stop short of saying Jodorowsky's films *do* philosophy at this stage, we can begin to approach them as minor cinemas that invoke or provoke the thinking of certain philosophical concepts upon an adjacent artistic plane. Thus, in a manner comparable to the way in which Deleuze and Guattari extract an art 'of Spinozism' from the writing of Antonin Artaud, Herman Melville and Franz Kafka (Deleuze and Guattari 2011: 67), so too can we set out in search for a Spinozian style of philosophical expressionism in Jodorowsky's work. That is made palpable to the mind and senses courtesy of his raw and cruel Artaudian aesthetics. Saying this, we must concede that it is only the second of Jodorowsky's pill films that is most accurately Spinozist, with the first being decidedly more Nietzschean in its intense embrace and expression of suffering and rage, as well as the eponymous protagonist's (played by Jodorowsky) ongoing desire to flee the filthy and corrupt world of men. Ben Cobb certainly demonstrates that Jodorowsky borrowed heavily from Nietzsche's novel *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883–1891) for *El Topo*, not least by evoking the central themes concerning the death of God, the Superman and the theory of Eternal Recurrence (Cobb 2007: 97). If Jodorowsky's politico-aesthetic remains provocatively nihilistic or Nietzschean in this film, this ultimately appears to be a path (or process) that the artist and artworks reflexively pass through, before returning with a renewed spiritual and mystical conviction in his next pill film, which surfaces as the more positive and joyful of the drug diptych. Before getting to this, however, we must first take a moment to somewhat disentangle the different aspects of the term *event* we are deploying throughout this chapter, and sketch out the extent to which the subjective experiences catalysed by the warped film's psychomechanics relate to the distributed affects and percepts associated with the 'outside' happenings or the site of the event.²

Evental Happenings and Counterculture Movements

In France, Deleuze described May 1968 as a *pure event*. That is, an irruptive revolutionary becoming that 'stripped bare all the power relations wherever they were operating', and bore witness to the emergence of new problems and questions, 'as if a society suddenly saw what was intolerable in it and also saw the possibility for something else' (Deleuze 2006c: 234). In his preface to *Anti-Oedipus* Foucault similarly highlights the contagious transformative power of these 'five brief, impassioned, jubilant, enigmatic years' which, amongst others things, led to the production of Deleuze and Guattari's august book of ethics.

At the gates of our world, there was Vietnam, of course, and the first major blow to the powers that be. But here, inside our walls, what exactly was taking place? An amalgam of revolutionary and antirepressive politics? A war fought on two fronts: against social exploitation and psychic repression? A surge of libido modulated by the class struggle? Perhaps. At any rate, it is this familiar, dualistic interpretation that has laid claim to the events of those years. The dream that cast its spell, between the First World War and fascism, over the dreamiest parts of Europe – the Germany of Wilhelm Reich, and the France of the surrealists – had returned and set fire to reality itself: Marx and Freud in the same incandescent light.

(Foucault 2004: xiii)

Foucault's synthesizing of Reich's philosophy and surrealist politics with regard to anarchic ethico-political happenings in 1968 reveals certain affinities if not vectors with Jodorowsky's iconoclastic ethico-aesthetics. At the same time, however, this statement also helps us to begin drawing out an important and pragmatic distinction between two very different ways of thinking of 'events'. The first pertains to the more common narrativization of past 'historical events', which results in a fixed and stable (hi)story. Against this extensive model, the alternative foregrounds the living and intensive throbbing energies of 'pure events', which, amongst other things, can witness the past *return differently* in the present.

Tom Lundborg (2012) stresses that if we adopt the former form of modelling of 'historical events' we are forced to view history reductively, diminishing it to a recalcitrant succession of static and stable moments somewhat like the Deleuzian action-image. Adopting the other allows us to better recognize the power of pure events, which always remain unstable and intensive, and reveal fluid and dynamic modulating movements (more like a time-image) that are liberated of historicity. Consequentially, pure events always retain undetermined and untapped potentials, and appear *gaseous* in nature, like the unhistorical vapours within and between fixed historical moments. In the switch from moments to movements, the pure event always retains untimely potentials to suddenly erupt within and transform (our understanding and thinking of) both the past and the future, or to suddenly take on new

contingent meanings, existences and subjectivities (see e.g. Lundborg 2012: 99). Necessarily, any true change ignited by these forces is difficult to be pinned down, and always retains (real or potential) deforming-reforming abilities to transform how we, or the future, perceive or understand the event.

In Badiou's models, the event similarly flashes in and out of existence within the evental *site*, giving form to what was previously formless. The artwork here operates as an immanent site wherein the event can flash or pass into existence, and might ignite or nudge others, encouraging or interpolating them to become swept up in the larger evental movements. An event necessarily inhabits multiple sites therefore. As Badiou has it, because the event is constituted by a group of works, we must also think of the individual artwork as being a singular multiple, which individually and collectively serve to make actual the virtual or a new truth (see Badiou 2013: 66–91; 2005: 112). It is in this singular-plural manner that the 'Reichean' and surrealist features common to 'Jodorowsky's' event work become relevant, and speak of his films belonging to a wider more distributed multiplicity of movements (including manifestoes, happenings, posters, protests, books, novels, and so on).

If pure events necessarily escape tenacious temporal historicity, so too do they move freely and dynamically across geographical territories. For like the movement of peoples and things, they cannot be easily pinned down within neatly bounded national borders. As a nomadic artist, Jodorowsky is a character whose life and work at once actualizes and forces us to recognize this fact, and demands we always indulge in an active exercise of – what Dina Jordanova refers to as – 'watching across borders' (2010: 51). With regard to the global events of 1968, for example, which we do not have space/time to go into in any great depth here, the reader might well grasp how a consideration of the art, archival footage, news, literature and cinema from many different nations during this era would expose a series of gaseous transnational inter-regional transmissions. Thus, events that may appear to be static historical moments within one particular nation's respective grand narrative might from another perspective concomitantly appear to share in an affinity with the dynamic energies and intensities of a wider evental mo(ve)ment. Accordingly, we could argue that if 1968 was the high water (or gas) mark of an event in France, these local movements were also interacting and resonating with a broader global expression that witnessed the ignition and eruption of other events within an expanded milieu that included sites distributed across the United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, Chile, Mexico and the United States (to name but a few).

Clearly, with its protests, rallies, happenings, concerts and capturing of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury in mid to late 1960s, the so-called 'counterculture' events in the United States offer an interesting parallels with the French events described by Foucault above. Coinciding with this wider event site in the United States in particular was the emergence of new pharmaceutical technologies and forces such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), which were enthusiastically embraced by the youth as another legitimate and liberating mode of social protest and spiritual revolt (see e.g. Lee 1994). Turning on, tuning in, and dropping out – to momentarily intercept Timothy Leary's famous drug dictum – thus increasingly came to help define a new generation's pharmacologically assisted flight from the stifling

libidinal economies and desires of the embedding conservative culture. So much so, in fact, that contemporaneous commentators such as Sheldon Renan linked LSD to the emergence of a new sociopolitical concept of 'man'. In Deleuzian terms we might even say that this new form of man was 'becoming-woman': Not least because of LSD's well-known interferences with 'normal' perceptual patterns, and the agential chemical's intense disordering of habitual affective arrangements, which historically helped ignite freeform experiments with existing ways of living and creating (Renan 1967: 46). Highlighting the connections between the use of this drug and a wider evental happening, Renan notes how the LSD-taking 'new man' increasingly began to challenge dominant conventions, including cinematic ones: 'Ideally, the new man sees more, feels more, is willing to experience more than the "conventional man." He is the new species for a new age' (Renan 1967: 46).³

Although ostensibly a 'minor' or nomadic 'third cinema' produced outwith the United States, Jodorowsky's psychedelic pill films clearly tapped into and resonated with the feelings and events historically impacting his US audiences. This of course works on a level above and beyond mere drug experimentation, for if the US counterculture had enthusiastically investigated new modes of thought, feeling, and action during the mid to late 1960s, things were destined to fundamentally alter due to several local reactionary events happening in 1968. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April dealt a heavy blow, for example, which recast the events of Malcolm X's murder a few years earlier. Robert Kennedy's assassination later that same year similarly sent another disruptive shockwave backwards and forwards in time, at once painfully recalling and re-framing that of his brother five years before, whilst surging forward to point to a new Nixon era. Closely linked to these tragedies (and the events in Paris at the same time) was the growing anti-Vietnam sentiment, marked by an ever-growing series of civil protests where university students up and down the nation began boycotting their classes. This movement gained in momentum until 1969, when around half a million anti-Vietnam protesters marched upon Washington, with returning veterans leading the march and being documented tossing their medals over the White House fence at the dirty and corrupt ideologies encrusted in its edifices. Although Nixon rode into The White House on an 'end the war' ticket in 1969, by 1970 American troops were still in Vietnam, and appeared to be pushing deeper into Cambodia. We might also recall that on the home front an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University was met with brutal state repression, with the Ohio National Guard opening fire on protesting students. On May fourth, four unarmed students were murdered and nine others seriously wounded by the military. The US authorities violently struck back, then, reasserting their exclusive rights to violence, power and control. As such, blood and tragedy marked the retreat of the defiant counterculture wave, and marked a new phase in the struggle to control or repress the powers of a threatening pure event.

Of course, it would be too simplistic to say that the renewed hopes and ideals born with the 1960s 'new man' died at the close of the decade with him. But in the US context it wouldn't be too far wrong either. Hunter S. Thompson arguably summarizes these

generational sentiments best in his dark and novel search for the fading American Dream in a new disillusioned era:

We are all wired into a survival trip now. No more of the speed that fuelled the 60's. That was the fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling 'consciousness expansion' without ever giving a thought to the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him seriously [...] All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped create [...] a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody [...] or at least some force – is tending the light at the end of the tunnel.

(1996: 178–179)

Importantly, it is in this transformed sociopolitical crucible that Jodorowsky's expressive bad-trip event films emerge and are encountered by US audiences. His disturbing, horror-oriented exploitation artworks materially embodying a poetic image of 'freaks' and 'cripples' encountering new grim meat hook realities. If in the US context the pill films opened up an emotional and spiritual space for catharsis and change, by concomitantly watching Jodorowsky's films 'across borders', we can also begin to recognize how his work shares an affinity with the movements of a much wider spatially distributed event. To continue with this line of thought and argumentation, however, it now becomes important to back up slightly and introduce a brief consideration of Jodorowsky as a nomadic artistic and conceptual persona.

Contingent Considerations

Defining Jodorowsky's artistic style is notoriously tricky – in part due to the director's unruly career and his knotting together of different artistic disciplines, modes of expression, and national traditions. However, in striving to build up a useful and relevant topography (or taxonomy) of influences and antecedents all the same, we can fruitfully intercept a well-known line of argumentation offered by Jorge Luis Borges from his essay upon 'Kafka and his precursors' (2000). Borges there maintains that although Kafka's work is as 'singular as the phoenix', it remains possible to recognize his practices within a diverse range of texts drawn from different literatures and periods (Borges 2000: 234). Borges teases out three main predecessors to Kafka's style, which he discovers in Aristotle's problem with movement in the Zeno paradox, the tone in Han Yu's prose, and a spiritual affinity with the work of Søren Kierkegaard. What interests Borges the most, however, is that it is only after Kafka's writing comes into existence that these similarities or affinities become discernible. Which

is to say, although the heterogeneous pieces Borges enumerates undoubtedly resemble Kafka's work, it does not necessarily follow that they resembled each other. For even if in 'each of these texts we find Kafka's idiosyncrasy to a greater or lesser degree, [...] if Kafka had never written a line, we would not perceive this quality; in other words, it would not exist' (Borges 2000: 236). In this sense, we might talk of a Kafka 'event' that can be understood actively transforming the past (and the future) in a contingent fashion, by revealing hitherto unforeseen elements in the work of other artists and philosophers that were not apparent before.

Of relevance to Jodorowsky's minor films, comparable untimely and eventual insights can also be located in Umberto Eco's (2008) exploration into what constitutes a truly 'cult' film. There, as with Kafka's minor literature, Eco describes a cult classic such as *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) as a work that actively alters our perceptions of the past (and future), not least by evoking and invoking a heterogeneous range of antecedents that often share little in common with each other. *Casablanca* is thus described as a 'plurifilmic' film about films, which echoes and recalls many other movies while we watch it. Nowadays, a later film like Woody Allen's *Play it Again Sam* (1972) demonstrates how the original-without-an-original, in turn, impacts a range of films appearing afterwards in its wake, compounding and continuing its singular-plural status as an eventual cult text.

If *Casablanca* is plurifilmic, Jodorowsky's work is more precisely pluriartistic. Consequentially, critics regularly have to resort to making schizoid comparisons that zigzag backwards and forwards in time and space. Rita González and Jesse Lerner, for example, argue that Jodorowsky's films are best understood in the context of esoterica, pre-Hispanic cultures, eastern philosophies, and new age fascinations that incorporate 'stylistic elements of the baroque and Gothic – plus a dash of Pop and psychedelia.' They also draw connections to Kenneth Anger's occult work, Maya Deren's 'ethnopoetics,' beat hysterics and 'a myriad of other influences' that include body performances and sculptural forms that were popular during the 1960s and 1970s (1998). As transregional and transmodern hybrids, the two pill films are in turn often hypertextually or paratextually linked to religious tomes, tarot, myth, fairy tale, folklore, psychology and philosophy, and have been described in terms of intertextual libraries referencing every book, play, artwork or film Jodorowsky ever encountered. Cobb, for instance, describes *The Holy Mountain* as a 'very old gangster movie' based on the 'mystic and friar St John of the Cross's (1542–1591) *Ascent of Mount Carmel*' (2007: 119).

Jodorowsky's anarchic free-form experimentations also often results in a heady blend of different styles, genres and modes (ranging from the experimental theatre, avant-garde film-making, Surrealism, Expressionism, Biblical Epics, sci-fi, documentary, pornography, horror, thriller and silent cinema) that introduce conflicting rhythms and deliberately disjunctive experiences into the viewing encounter. Many critics and commentators (including Jodorowsky) also regularly link his films' prominent utilization of 'freaks' and disabled bodies to the work of Tod Browning, or else draw connections to the films and ethico-aesthetics of Federico Fellini, Luis Buñuel, Ingmar Bergman, and the videos of

Marilyn Manson (who was famously inspired by Jodorowsky).⁴ Beyond these, we might also add that his characters' movement through cinematic space reflects Joseph K's in Orson Welles' adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* (1962), while the spaces themselves invite comparisons with Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950) and Andrei Tarkovski's *Stalker* (1979). A South American vector is also detectable, recalling and anticipating the work of directors such as José Mojica Marins, who likewise directs and stars as the egotistical 'philosophical' denizen of his own warped body-horror brain-fuck cinema.⁵ Jodorowsky's satyricon style further reflects the oneiric-guided meditation of directors like David Lynch, albeit implementing a more fleshy and filthy dimension that in turn helps establish parallels with the abject body cinema of Dušan Makavejev and John Waters. One also thinks of David Cronenberg's cerebral-corporeal oeuvre, which expresses a comparable Spinozist model of a mind and body parallelism.⁶ All this to say, if Borges uncovered three main tributaries for Kafka's style, Jodorowsky for his part inherits these within a more scattered and heterogeneous galaxy drawn from a broader range of divergent practices, cultures, traditions and timelines. Seemingly aware of this, the director takes an old Spanish or Surrealist proverb as his motto: 'In art, he who is no one's child is a son of a bitch. And I say, that I'm everyone's and everything's child' (Jodorowsky 1971: 132).

Beyond forbearers and antecedents, though, a truly evental or minor artist must also be understood introducing something unique. Which amounts to saying, Jodorowsky's own auteur identity and contingent contextual experiences must alchemically alter how we understand and think all these disparate forces and affects. And for this reason we should now turn our attention to the artist's own life and circumstances, and explore how these impact and influence his film-thinking.

However, before going there we must first concede that the value and politics of using auteur approaches have been fervently debated for over half a century now. And although for reasons of space we must refrain from dragging these debates back into the open here, due to this chapter (and the next) foregrounding the artistic persona behind very personal films, we might take pause to minimally justify adopting such methodological approaches. A good guide to such debates can be located within a lively monograph that explores the inimitable work of Fernando Arrabal – one of Jodorowsky's peers and close theatrical collaborators (and to whose work and influence we will return to below) – wherein Peter L. Podol offers us a useful line of argumentation. For there, Podol highlights how knowledge of an artist's experiences and life can significantly enrich our understanding and appreciation of their art, especially if the artist appears to be someone who is 'entirely' immersed in their work, and/or is a unique product of their time and place. That is, if an artist appears to be picking up on and resonating with the vibrations of wider happening. In such exceptional cases, Podol maintains, a biographical and contextual interface becomes at once necessary and enriching, for amongst other things, these help grant readers 'a familiarity with the various forces that helped to shape [the artist's] thought processes and produce his concept of art and aesthetics' (Podol 1978: 15). Beyond their concepts of art and aesthetics, though, we can also add 'philosophy' here to Podol's list, especially as we

set out to explore what Jodorowsky's (singular) life can tell us about his pill films' strange (plural-evental) thinking.

Artaudian Auteur Machines

At the time when Jodorowsky was making his drug films, he was a self-proclaimed and self-styled outsider and anarchist-artist. Beyond his own description of being an 'atheist-mystic' (Halter and Galinsky 2000), Jodorowsky made himself a restless and rootless character difficult to pin down or define in many traditional ways. For example, when asked about his background in one interview Jodorowsky characteristically reposts: 'since the world is continually being created, *why*, in this universe, should I live the life of a being instead of one in the process of becoming' (Jodorowsky 1971: 160, emphasis in original). Further highlighting his deterritorialized take upon normal identity categories, he answered Uri Hertz: 'You must not have an age. You must not have a sex – interior, in your soul. No name. No nationality. No form. You are ego. You are self [...] in the myth' (Hertz 1978). In yet another interview he simply declared: 'As soon as I define myself, I am dead' (Babcock 2000). Although his typically playful and evasive attitude to conventional interview questions may appear to work against establishing any easy biographical determinations, in matter of fact, these collectively serve to delimit a distinctly *nomadic* attitude and Nietzschean outlook that I elsewhere explore in relation to his restless and protean film characters who correspondingly display fluid and shifting identities (Fleming 2009).

If Jodorowsky's most recent biographical film, *La danza de la realidad/The Dance of Reality* (2013) becomes a useful tutor text for understanding the early life of the director, we can pick up his life story from around the time *The Dance of Reality's* narrative ends, and a teenage Jodorowsky was about to set off from his family's adopted Chilean home (his father was an exiled Russian Jew and his mother an Argentinian) for Mexico, and then soon after to France (around 1953 at age 23), where he hoped to 'revive Surrealism'. Indeed, in various interviews Jodorowsky outlines arriving in Paris and being appalled by the un-Surrealistic behaviour of André Breton (then nearly 60), who refused him a 3am audience on the night of his arrival. Disenfranchised, the young Turk thereafter set about devising a new movement that would become known as *Producciones Pánicas* (from Greek *pan* meaning everything or all), and eventually boasted members including Fernando Arrabal and Roland Topor. All felt that *Panic* art, in order to be productive, must be shocking and violent, and ideally deployed to shake viewers out of their habitual modes of perceiving and thinking (in a foreshadowing of 1960s psychedelic happenings). This was predominantly exercised through impromptu street theatre and gruesome and bloody performances, wherein animal sacrifice and nudity were not uncommon.⁷

Panic also allowed Jodorowsky to branch out into cinema for the first time, but in comparison to the gruesome and irruptive artistic happenings, his first short film appears decidedly tame. This can partially be accounted for if we consider that around the same time,

Jodorowsky was concomitantly working with the mime artist Marcel Marceau, for whom he devised the famous *Cage* routine (Jodorowsky 1971: 136). His first film, *La Cravate* (1957), accordingly emerges as a cinematic ‘fable done in mime’, loosely based on Thomas Mann’s *Severed Heads* (Jodorowsky 1971: 138). The actor-director’s expressive utilization of mime (and silent-cinema modes) here marks the larval emergence of his auteurial ‘cinema of the body’ style, wherein pantomime movements, gesture and kinetic energy are privileged over dialogue and script for communicating and developing narrative and spiritual themes. ‘The’ main protagonist of *La Cravate* (initially played by Jodorowsky) hopes to gain the affections of a female character, whose attentions he competes for with another butch male. In this strange universe the two suitors try to outdo each other by purchasing new heads (or identities, as these are played by different actors) which they hope will help them win her love. Both therefore go to a ‘head shop’ wherein camera framings and movements combine with editing to create the illusion of the two men unscrewing their heads and replacing them with newer models. This first Jodorowskian ‘head film’ (in an altered sense of the term) thus introduces proto-themes surrounding shifting notions of personal and embodied identity and performative affect, which simultaneously anticipate and talk back to (in an untimely manner) his later eventual body of work.

Around this period Arrabal cemented himself as one of Jodorowsky’s closest friends and confidants. Podol reminds us that for Arrabal, the notion of *Panic* was based on the union of opposites, converting drama into ‘parties or ceremonies combining tragedy and *guignol*, poetry and vulgarity, comedy and melodrama, love and eroticism, the “happening” and mathematical set theory, bad taste and aesthetic refinement, sacrilege and the sacred, putting to death and the exaltation of life, the sordid and sublime’ (Podol 1978: 59–60). Arrabal’s radical theatrical outlook and influence was also to leave an indelible imprint on Jodorowsky’s directorial personae, and which would emerge full blown in the form and content of his next film, which was a feature-length re-working of Arrabal’s play *Fando y Lis* (albeit from memory). However, in-between the completion of his first film and the production of *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky was to leave France to tour the world with Marceau.

Circa 1966 the nomadic artist decided to drop out of Marceau’s world tour whilst in Mexico, with the express desire of actualizing an *alchemical* theatre that he hoped could change audiences directly. In an interview Jodorowsky describes how Antonin Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958) became his ‘bible’ during this episode, inspiring and empowering him to experiment with staging Nietzsche, Arrabal, and Beckett in the streets and theatres of Mexico (Hertz 1978). Artaud – who was touched with schizophrenia, and whose concept of the body without organs (BwO) was to become a major influence upon Deleuze and Guattari’s later work – railed against the Occidental theatre’s literary heritage, and its (then) preference for ‘realism’, which he felt offered very little to the art form. Artaud lamented that the western theatre had adopted monotonous calcinated conventions which had utterly divested it of all magic, allowing it to ossify into an inert and servile replica of quotidian everyday life. In its spiritually divested form, the western theatre had

thus 'broken away from the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the route of all poetry', and lost its originary function (Artaud 1958: 42). The popular theatre of Artaud's day was therefore described as being dead, utterly rank, or reeking of 'decadence and pus' (42). As already indicated, Artaud was also a political writer, and so did not spare the sick forms of society that produced such symptomatic art forms, or their correspondingly shattered audiences, with their exhausted modern brains, and worn-out neurotic bodies. With regard to the latter, Artaud felt that the insipid contemporary theatre was simply ill equipped to stimulate or reinvigorate these ground down souls. Indeed, in his blazing manifesto the self-proclaimed mad man (in)famously railed that 'our present social state is iniquitous and should be destroyed', adding that if this is 'a fact for the theatre to be preoccupied with, it is even more a matter for machine guns' (Artaud 1958: 42).

Following Artaud's blazing lead, Jodorowsky strove to break down subject-object binaries by harnessing the plastic, physical, nonverbal and truly in-human powers of art and affective artifice to spiritually and physically reinvigorate and reawaken his audiences. This was ideally to be an immanent encounter 'that wakes us up: nerves and heart', and confronts the viewer as the equal of life, as opposed to some insipid replica or reflection upon the real (Artaud 1958: 84). Inspired, Jodorowsky began engineering intensely *cruel* forms of ethico-political art that fundamentally rejected making their primary appeal to a detached and contemplative bourgeois spectator's mind. Instead, these would directly assault the viewers' senses and nerves with unstructured bundles of vibrational affect and violent perception images. It is in this sense that Jodorowsky's theatre and film began striving to surpass ineffective representational modalities and rise to the sensational level of a BwO. On which point, Artaud famously wrote:

If music affects snakes, it is not on account of the spiritual notions it offers them, but because snakes are long and coil their length upon the earth, because their bodies touch the earth at almost every point; and because the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth affect them like a very subtle, very long massage; and I propose to treat the spectators like the snake charmer's subjects and conduct them *by means of their organisms* to an apprehension of the subtlest notions.

(Artaud 1958: 81)

While Artaud called for a new spellbinding theatre of delirium, madness, hallucination and fear – with an ability to communicate metaphysically with viewers through their bodies – Jodorowsky equally desired to create a new provocative theatre and cinema that would be the equal of modern life, and could intervene and reconcile viewers 'philosophically with Becoming': that is, an art that suggests 'through all sorts of objective situations the furtive idea of the passage and transmutation of ideas into things, much more than the transformation and stumbling of feelings into words' (Artaud 1958: 109). To draw some more parallels across time and space, we can discover affinities between Artaud's disenchanted views of the modern theatre and film and Jodorowsky's with the state of Mexican theatre and film after

he dropped out of Marceau's world tour. Unquestionably, his stage and screen works produced around this time redoubled Artaud's violent and passionate calls for raw and affective forces of light, staging, music, costume, sensual and stylized movements to be unbridled, in combination with a supersensual *intellectual mise-en-scène* that could break apart and unsettle the comfortable subject-object positions.

If Artaud saw the western theatre appealing only to bourgeois elites and the fluttering men in black suits who quarrelled over receipts 'at the threshold of a white-hot box office' (Artaud 1958: 45), Jodorowsky felt similarly about Mexican film during these 'dark years' for the National Cinema, which found audiences become accustomed to low-quality family melodramas, cheap genre pictures (churros), cabarellos, singing cowboy films and its Northern neighbour's classical products. Historically speaking, from Jodorowsky's perspective, these forms of cinema were trifling commercial works of distraction, which had lost all connection with older alchemical forms of dramatic language in space. The Mexican theatre and cinema thus had to be radically rethought, and brought back into contact with the cosmic and the universal (see Keeseey 2003: 16). It was precisely around this time that Jodorowsky began making his first feature-length film, which he recorded over a series of weekends spanning a protracted two-year period.

The final cut of *Fando y Lis* (1968) unequivocally reveals the crystallization of Jodorowsky's iconoclastic genre-blurring art, and became the first ethico-aesthetic film to reify his Nietzschean-Artaudian ethos. The black-and-white film, which entirely hijacks and detours Arrabal's work, also displays interesting parallels with the autistic balade film *Le Moindre Geste* (1971) previously considered in chapter two, particularly by adopting a drifting episodic trajectory that is loosely connected to a line of flight made by two characters across a landscape, in this case towards the mythical city of Tar. Here, the loose cause-and-effect story follows and piles up a series of adventures and misadventures undergone by the adult-children Fando (Sergio Kleiner) and his disabled partner Lis (Diana Mariscalto) as they drift across a dislocated apocalyptic landscape populated by a litany of grotesques. Although on first flush the film may appear to differ from *La Cravate* by granting its characters voices, Jodorowsky's second film remains first and foremost a 'cinema of the body', with articulatory dialogue often becoming deterritorialized into glossolalia; or sounds that are employed to affectively express internal feelings, or relay the frenzied psychic states of the characters. Accordingly, speech no longer becomes a carrier for narrative content or serves to develop or advance character psychology. Instead verbal acts atrophy into spasmodic aural-tricks and fulminous psychobabble, which simply augment intensive bodily movements. Throughout, the disabled body of Lis is also laid horizontal on a cart and framed alongside a collection of human 'monsters' and 'freaks' that begin to unleash a transfigured or trans-figuring non-normative notion of bodies and identities, at the same time as they uncomfortably expose the implicit normalizing function of traditional cinema's body politics.

As a philosophical film-maker, Jodorowsky here emerges with an overt nihilistic disdain for any and all doctrinal modes of political, cultural and religious thought and/or action.

As a result, the ‘corrosive and corrupting’ film was destined to cause outrage during its 1968 premiere at the Resena de Acapulco (Acapulco Film Festival) (see Siegel 1973: 20–29). By providing us with a cartographical overview of Mexican spectatorship habits and tastes during this period, the works of Carl J. Mora (1982), Charles Ramírez Berg (1992) and Andrea Noble (2005) help us to understand why. For one thing, they all demonstrate that other politically dissident films made by *Cinema Novo* directors were better received than Jodorowsky’s work at this time. This was no doubt because Jodorowsky opted to shed more familiar genre cloaks while making his sociopolitical critiques, and chose to wield the chainsaw rather than the scalpel for making his critical insertions. In one scene we find a bourgeois vampire helping himself to a syringe-full of Lis’s blood, for example, while another shows mindless zombie-like creatures egressing out of a muddy landscape. While such darkly poetic scenes mark the emergence of Jodorowsky’s infamous auteurial obsessions (with abjection, blurred somatic borderlines, the inter-relations and individuations that take place between inside and outside, self and other, body and space), they also betray his specific distrust and disgust with Mexico’s class system and its people’s sense of national identity. Indeed, throughout the film rubbed and wastes spaces are rendered homogenous. Different forms of acculturated behaviour and bodily technique are thus made to look ridiculous, or are rendered utterly insane after becoming deterritorialized from all ‘normalizing’ matrices. Consequently, his film was met with mixed feelings regarding the contemporary audiences’ own unsettled sense of national ‘identity’ (or their concept of *Mexicanidad* or Mexicanness).

Recall here that in 1968 Mexico had not only overseen a successful Olympic preparation, but also a brutal student massacre in Tlatelolco (the aftermath of which Jodorowsky had witnessed first-hand) where up to three hundred lives were taken by army troops. This unease no doubt factored in to the unsettling reception of this foreigner’s shocking film. As did the director’s relentless and ostentatious pushing of every unsettling button at his disposal. Berg and Noble note that Mexican audiences were particularly protective of certain national stereotypes, such as the ‘long suffering mother’, who was implicitly woven into the idealized notion of a Mexican familial identity (Berg 1992: 24). For the relatively conservative audiences, such staples could be clung on to while other notions of Mexicanness ostensibly eroded or dissipated. Somewhat problematically, *Fando y Lis* contains scenes depicting silver-haired matriarchs gambling and sexually groping a younger sexualized male. In the film’s recorded DVD soundtrack Jodorowsky recalls these images upsetting the conservative Mexican audiences the most, even though they were in-mixed with shocking and graphic realizations of paedophilia, symbolic and simulated vaginal penetration, on-screen rape and vampirism (real blood-letting and drinking). Adding insult to injury, perhaps, Jodorowsky’s premiere booklet accompanying the film’s debut announced: ‘Every cinematic trick was avoided. The actors, enduring a veritable “Via Crucis”, were stripped naked, tortured, and beaten. Artificial blood was never used!’ (Jodorowsky 2003). By now, we can understand all of this as Jodorowsky attempt to add a touch of Artaudian ‘cruelty’ and raw theatrical affect into and around his screening event, but the perennial outsider ultimately misread

his Mexican audiences, who fled the cinema in their droves. After the screening Jodorowsky reports being greeted outside by a violent baying mob, and having to flee when it threatened to lynch him. The festival was subsequently closed down and the film banned in Mexico. Jodorowsky thereafter vowed never to screen to Mexican audiences again.

The director later fortuitously learned that young American audiences had taken kindlier to a print of his film, embracing it as an exotic head-film, optimally viewed when stoned or high. Believing Mexican audiences were simply not ready for him, Jodorowsky accordingly decided to aim his next film at this more liberal counterculture demographic. However, although he now coveted US audiences, he would remain a guerrilla Mexican film-maker at heart, opting to film what would later become *El Topo* on location in Mexico (where his money would go further) with a predominantly Mexican cast and crew. As always, the director found himself working outside any official system, and was opportunistically self-funding and contingently fortuitous in finding benefactors. Jodorowsky thereafter wrote the script, produced the sets and costumes, performed in the main role (along with his son Brontis), directed (purportedly from within a deep trance), edited, post-dubbed, recorded and scored his film. As such, he actualizes a perfect picture of an artist who is both completely immersed in his work, and actively attuned with the wider events happening around him. He thus also provides a sound case through which to explore underground models of third or minor cinematic auteurship.

El Topo

As a surrealistic spaghetti western, *El Topo* was to become a landmark US cult film that obliquely reflected the director's feelings and views regarding, amongst other things, the Mexican student massacre and the wider global happenings of 1968. Certainly, the spaghetti western framework offered the cine literate director the ideal form to develop his peculiar form of philosophical expression: typically being a world cinema about the United States made outwith the national borders by outsiders. As such, it is already a 'travel genre' artwork that offers an unsettling plication of insider/outsider, national/transnational perspectives (see Eleftheriotis 2001: 126–127). We might recall that as a typically low-budget genre, the spaghetti western was more often than not defined by a series of ongoing adventures that would span several films, typically attached to a laconic drifting (anti-)hero who was inevitably framed within a violent and threatening world. Somewhat reflecting Jodorowsky's own nomadic Nietzschean outlooks, Dimitris Eleftheriotis points to how spaghetti westerns were also fundamentally films 'about men with no name, no place and no nation' (2001: 127), whose stories typically worked through a reimagining of identity that takes place 'beyond the boundaries of the nation' (2001: 126–127).

David Martin-Jones argues that the spaghetti western was also a genre that actively interfered with and countered the teleological myth of the classical Hollywood Western, not least by replacing the active hero with a reactive one, and foregrounding the plight

of subordinated and subaltern peoples, who were inevitably left suffering as a result of Expansive global capitalism. The very form of the spaghetti western therefore offers Jodorowsky's philosophical work more than just an empty container for his subversive and iconoclastic ideas, and can be read as a deterritorializing force that actively unsettles and disorders the foundational national/political mythos of his new audience (by introducing an outsider alterity into it as if a foreign spirit possessed and detoured the familiar historical form). Characteristically, Jodorowsky's content would further defamiliarize the spaghetti western form, not least by amplifying the genre's questioning of the so-called civilizing nature of American expansionism, while collapsing the political binaries between wilderness and civilization, and inverting the ethical division of people into barbarian and civilized categories (Martin-Jones 2011: 55–57).

After completing *El Topo* – which maps the spaghetti western's serialized form onto an episodic quest for enlightenment – Jodorowsky reportedly carried a print in its can across the northern border, making his way to New York City, where he initially managed to get the film screened in a gallery at the Museum of Modern Art. J Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum note that after seeing it, the Elgin Theatre manager Ben Barenholtz immediately sensed the film 'would attract hipsters, encourage a sense of personal discovery, and stimulate word of mouth' (1983: 93). It did. At the Elgin, the film fortuitously encountered unique and fashionable modes of counterculture spectatorship that blended art cinema modes with liberal attitudes towards marijuana smoking and drug-taking.⁸ Accordingly, when asked in 1970 if he thought *El Topo*'s audiences would be on drugs when they watched his film, Jodorowsky tellingly replied: 'Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'd demand them to be. To arrive stoned and to get high on the movie' (Jodorowsky 1971: 136).⁹

El Topo's episodic structure and surrealist *mise-en-scène* undoubtedly appealed to the head-audience tastes for films that were 'confusing but mentally stimulating' (Peary 1981), and no doubt contingently connected with counterculture audiences thanks to its exploration of non-western spiritual-paradigms that still offered valuable (counter)cultural capital. Jodorowsky makes such ideas overt when he aptly describes his film as a 'Western that ends up as an Eastern' (see Keeseey 2003: 17). The film's third-cinema aesthetics, erotic content, perverse sexual imagery and unconventional/exploitative focus upon 'freak' and 'monster' bodies also helped generate a sense of taboo-transgression that appealed to non-mainstream taste cultures, and also likely served to amplify the sensational film's illicit and disturbing status. In combination, such features also helped differentiate the film's form from other underground and art cinema products, as did the auratic choice of screening *the* film at midnight at the Elgin (finishing between two a.m. and three a.m. most nights) in a room laced with marijuana smoke and the electricity of an evental happening. All these features and factors alchemically synthesized to ensure that *El Topo* became the most popular US head-film event since *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). Indeed, sell-out crowds were recorded attending Elgin screenings seven nights a week from its initial screening in December 1970 through to the end of June 1971. Word of mouth further ensured that celebrities and counterculture personalities such as John Lennon flocked to

see the film. In combination, the novel film, unique environment, late night screening slots, head audiences and drug effects all contributed diegetic and extra-diegetic qualities to the film as machinic event or BwO.

On-screen, Jodorowsky's strange surrealist (and Reichian) evental reimagining of Marxist revolutionary themes and Freudian symbolism began with the underground director announcing in voice-over that '[t]he mole (El topo) is an animal that digs tunnels underground searching for the Sun. Sometimes his journey leads him to the surface. When he looks at the Sun, he is blinded.'¹⁰ Jodorowsky seems to assert here that the mole, like the revolutionary spirit of an event, may pop up anywhere; and after undermining the overground topology, is ultimately destined to disappear back underground again, in order to regain its powers. Thereafter, a sclerotic western gunslinger dressed in all black spirals around a living-landscape that conspires to transform his identity and mode of acting. The strange bodies populating the plane always appear part of it, and cannot be easily extricated from the bizarre expressive world that El Topo constantly individuates with. Similar to the Byzantine plane Deleuze discusses in relation to the paintings of Francis Bacon, the cinematic spaces are here granted a degree of activity and agency that prevent viewers from knowing exactly where the space itself ends and the figures themselves begin (Deleuze 2005c: 88–89). Therein, characters are caught in a form of moving cinematic *bas relief* with their panpsychic surroundings, never fully detaching themselves from the engulfing landscape or immanent psychogeography that is endowed with its own active powers and desires.

In the film's first half, the characters most responsible for igniting El Topo's becomings are the four Masters of the Revolver: each of which El Topo must defeat in a series of duels set upon the four corners of a rotating Jungian mandala world. The four masters constitute a blind seer, a geometric wizard, a Meso American pan being and an old ascetic hermit-cum-mystic. These Kung Fu-like characters further serve to defamiliarize and unsettle the film's (already estranged and surrealist) spaghetti western framework, albeit whilst remaining in expressive harmony with the liminal desert space they inhabit. After murdering the final master, El Topo appears wrought with grief and guilt and attempts to commit suicide by jumping off of a bridge. The horizontally framed bridge functioning here as a metonymically load-bearing symbol that operates on a variety of different levels, and Jodorowsky discusses in terms of communicating Nietzschean undertones that (recalling and recasting our discussions in chapter one) invoke 'the symbolism of the passage between man and that beyond him' (1971: 132). Shortly thereafter the western hero dies and transmutes into an enlightened altruistic mystic, who individuates with a collective body of persecuted 'freaks'¹¹ and 'monsters' that are found imprisoned within an adjacent mountain. Cobb reads this as El Topo being reborn as a Zarathustra-like being, dwelling in a cave and preaching 'for man to master himself and harness his own power' in order to become something else (Cobb 2007: 97).

When the unified freaks – played by disabled and deformed actors that at once poetically represent the self-proclaimed counterculture 'freaks' and the aforementioned Thompson-esque 'permanent cripples' – finally march forth into the world, they meet a

hostile archetypally western population that is not ready to accept their different modes of being. Instead, the perverted townsfolk mercilessly massacre the freaks as they advance towards them. Spiralling into a rage that allows for a superhuman vengeance, El Topo in turn guns down every last man, woman and child in the town. He then finally assumes a lotus position amongst all the massacred corpses and immolates himself in an act that Philip Strick convincingly argues recalls the Buddhist gesture of 'shared guilt, protest, and despair' (Strick 1973: 51). With life-affirming options being few and far between, the experiential film provides a visceral example of a bad trip cinema that cathartically faces up to the bleak spirit of its times, dragging the viewers' thought and feelings across what Hoberman and Rosenbaum outline as the desolate spiritual wasteland of the US counterculture (1983).

The only enlightenment El Topo finds is the (gr)immanent transubstantiation of the material body into fire and light. As such, *El Topo* can best be understood as a cruel and deflating event film that savagely critiques egotistical 'western' modes of thought and action in its first half, and then ineffective 'eastern' modes in its second, which appear useless in the face of violent repression. If these archetypal identity poles are ultimately found to be hopeless, what does remain liberating and full of latent potentials is the freedom to become in and of itself; or the ability to experimentally reimagine and reinvent one's modes of thought and action. All things considered, then, *El Topo's* philosophy infects viewers with distressing Nietzschean suffering, or perhaps we might argue from the untimely vantage of his future works, a Spinozism at its darkest and most grim.

Thinking-Feeling with Spinoza and Jodorowsky: Atheist Anarchists, Mystical Materialists and Panpsychic Philosophers

Arguably united by their shared love of Artuad (and Spinoza), both Jodorowsky and Deleuze believed that films can be thought of as 'spiritual automaton' that have 'thought as their higher purpose', in that they immanently provide the biological brain with the material conditions for thinking (Deleuze 2005b: 151–163). As Daniel Frampton clarifies, there are always two distinct yet 'overlapping areas to Deleuze's thought-cinema' model, wherein not only is the movement of film 'a kind of thought itself', but the 'imagistic thinking' of cinema also appears capable of provoking the viewer into thought (2006: 166). In recapitulating Deleuze's thought-cinema concepts, Frampton explains how (what he calls) 'filmthinking' is ultimately expressed by formal and aesthetic decisions – such as framing, editing, sound – which collectively comprise the film's thinking and feeling of its subject matter (117ff). During the screening encounter, then, and in a manner that echoes and recalls our opening consideration of the spectator giving themselves in an act of love to Klen's art-machine, as viewers imingle the screened film within their own thoughts, Frampton describes a 'unique mix' of 'filmgoer-thinking with the film-thinking', wherein the 'the filmgoer and film affect each other, are correlated with each other' in a manner that results in the

surfacing of a 'third-thought', which is our own personal, yet distributed, thinking of the film (163).

In somewhat foreshadowing Deleuze's models of the 'brain as screen' (Deleuze and Narboni 2000), Jodorowsky (theatrically) announced in 1971 that he asked of cinema 'what most North Americans ask of psychedelic drugs. The difference being that when one creates a psychedelic film, he need not create a film that shows the vision of a person who has taken a pill; rather, he needs to manufacture the pill' (Jodorowsky 1971: 97). Jodorowsky's alchemical or pharminochemical view of film here also finds strong overlaps with Anna Powell and Patricia Pisters's explorations into *Altered States* cinema and Guattarian 'viral aesthetics', wherein the perception-altering material force of film directly impacts and merges with the viewer during the screening encounter (Powell 2005, 2007; Pisters 2003, 2012). Filmgoing and film thinking in such accounts again surface as an immanently experiential 'event', wherein inhuman aesthetic or inaesthetic forces intensively provoke and stimulate the viewers' brains and bodies prior to any cerebral search for meaning.

For Powell, in extreme cases of drug cinema such as *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967) and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1967), certain aesthetic modes of viewing illuminate cinema operating as a kind of perception altering 'drug', that allows viewers to attain a form of 'contact high' (in Deleuze and Guattari's pharmacoanalytical sense of the term). By extension we can imagine how the pill films' 'narcotic properties' offer viewers a chance to experience defamiliarizing new perspectives, which ideally provoke experiences of mental and physical alterity. Elsewhere, Pisters similarly turns to neuroscientific research to better understand the embodied and material aspects of the 'brain as screen', using the relatively recent discovery of the mirror-neuron to help destabilize the platitudinous distinctions typically erected between self and other, perceiver and perceived, inside and outside, brain/body and screen/environment (2003, 2006, 2012). Throughout, Pisters demonstrates how the perception of bodies moving and acting (whether in reality on reproduced on-screen) leads to the firing of corresponding neurons and mirror neurons within the observer's embodied neural net (2006, 2012). Thus, during films screenings, at sub-microscopic levels, the visual (and auditory) perception of body movements external to the viewer is observed to trigger or catalyse corresponding or correlating movements of molecules inside the spectator body. It is in these ways, we maintain, that Jodorowsky's febrile head films invite viewers to go on a witches ride, and feel-think in a Spinozist manner.

No doubt, there are certain inductive comparisons a sophist could use to begin erecting parallels between Spinoza and Jodorowsky, and link the two thinkers together across gaping tracts of time and space. Both were lapsed Jews, for example, driven to live far from their parents' original religious communities (in Portugal and Russia respectively). Both also worked intimately with lenses during their lives, and were each accused of being dangerous and immoral 'atheist' thinkers. Both were therefore also destined to inspire hatred and violent reactions in certain conservatives who found their work to be perfidious or

threatening, offensive or intolerable. Hence, both also had to flee attacks upon their physical bodies. Each could also be discussed as quasi-chemists, no doubt, for Spinoza studied how substances and poisons made enriching or decomposing assemblages with human bodies – empowering or disempowering their affective relations – while Jodorowsky explored how Artaudian artworks and drugs moved into composition with human bodies and minds, increasing their will to power. The work of both also became renown for simulating novel ways of seeing, thinking, and acting.

Beyond these superficial similarities, there also remain certain philosophical parallels that we might also begin to tease out. As a starting point, we could note how in their respective works, Spinoza and Jodorowsky each outlay their own unique mystical-material model of ‘Expressionism’, which in turn reveal certain overlapping ethical outlooks upon the nature of life, reality, spirituality and ‘God’. What is more, both likewise trouble the traditionally perceived divisions erected between spirit and matter. Recall that as a philosophical persona Spinoza is ‘neither materialistic nor spiritualist,’ for as A.N. White puts it, ‘he is both’ (White in Spinoza [1987] 2001 : LXV). Consider then in this light a letter that Jodorowsky writes to Ben Cobb, wherein he explains that the main concept underpinning all his creations can be understood in terms of ‘materializing spirit’ and ‘spiritualizing material’ (Jodorowsky in Cobb 2007: 125). Linked to this, the philosophies of Spinoza and Jodorowsky arguably find their most overt parallels in what we could refer to as their embodied ‘social’ outlooks, and by extension the ethical powers they believed were bound up in the immanent encounter with their works. In his own time and place Spinoza diagnosed the dominant ways of living and acting as constituting a betrayal of the universe and mankind (Spinoza [1987] 2001), to which his *Ethics* offered itself as an affective antidote: not least by delineating an alternative ethical way of living and acting. Thus, in a manner that recalls Jodorowsky’s discussion of his enlightening head cinema above, Deleuze describes how Spinoza primarily desired ‘to inspire, to waken, to reveal’, by projecting a positive image of an affirmative life, which stood in defiance or opposition to the ‘semblances that men are content with’ (Deleuze 1988: 14). In this sense, both Jodorowsky and Spinoza believed that their works held the affective and ethical potential to empower and enlighten those that they encountered or came into contact with.

As Deleuze poetically renders it, what Spinoza found most contemptuous in his time was that not only were social actors usually content with their lot, but through their thoughts, feelings, actions and desires they somehow came to internalize a ‘hatred of life’, ultimately becoming ‘ashamed of it’, and content to suffer or reproduce these inadequate models of a

humanity bent on self destruction, multiplying the cults of death, bringing about the union of the tyrant and the slave, the priest, the judge, and the soldier, [who were] always busy running life into the ground, mutilating it, killing it outright or by degrees, overlaying it or suffocating it with laws, properties, duties, empires.

(Deleuze 1988: 12–13)

Sadly, we encounter updated versions of these self-same life-betraying actors and desires within Jodorowsky's pill films, whose city and town spaces bustle with (perverted and distorted) tyrants, priests, judges, soldiers, slaves, and villains who are all too happy to partake in the smothering, deforming, or outright destruction of life. As in Spinoza's work, Jodorowsky's oeuvre advocates shedding or casting off the sad passions that are divested by negative encounters with such bodies and forces, and to liberate action and thought from the invisible restraints that always-already territorialize, delimit, and disempower it. In both, thoughts can only become adequate, or even be achieved, *through* the liberation of the body. Indeed, in the *Ethics* ([1987] 2001), while Spinoza recognized that thought and extension were distinguishable, he maintained nonetheless that they were merely different attributes of the same substance. By putting thought and extension back into the same plane (of the real), Spinoza illustrated how the very idea constituting the human mind is little more than the corresponding extensive body. It thus follows that for Spinoza, 'the more capable the body is of being affected in many ways, and affecting external bodies in many ways, the more capable of thinking is the mind' (Spinoza [1987] 2001: 222).

If Spinoza's philosophy here demonstrates that the mind's ability for thought is directly correlated to the body's capacity to (sense and) interact with its environment, Jodorowsky's pill films emerge as practical inaeesthetic expression of a comparable thought-model, that are themselves designed to immanently increase the viewer's powers by stimulating their embodied brains, while provoking them to search for more adequate ideas. Appropriately, in both Jodorowsky and Spinoza's work, then, an individual's power to act and live, or their will to power, is directly related to the number of affections and affects their body becomes capable of.

Elsewhere William Brown and I explore how recent scientific research conducted by neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio (1994; 1999) and philosopher-linguists like George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) bear out these Spinozian (and Deleuzian) models of a mind-body parallelism (Brown and Fleming 2011, 2015). Damasio's studies, for instance, first dissipate the concept of a 'homunculus' directing human thought and action, and demand instead we view the brain as a truly 'embodied' organ in the Spinozian sense. From such a vantage, 'basic' sub-cortical processes are shown to be essential to the formation of emotions and feelings, which in turn are influential of thought and higher levels of cognition (see Damasio 2004: 206). More recent contemporary research into what is called gustatory-thinking and skin-thinking likewise highlight the key role played by the gut and skin in higher-level emotional and cognitive processes. As we will specifically address in-the-gut thinking in the next chapter, we might pick up the latter here as an illustrative case in point. Indeed, recent research into embodied 'peripheral neural mechanisms' located within and on the fingertips has demonstrated how the skin, the human body's largest organ, literally becomes the site of complex geometric calculations while touching (see Pruszynski and Johansson 2014; Umeå 2014). In such findings the human mind no longer appears as an easily disentangled rational tool that can be divorced from 'irrational' phenomena like

touch, or even certain external stimuli. Instead, and in recalling the alternative and autistic forms of in-formational perception-thought explored in the previous chapter, we might here concede that it is what happens to the body, or what the body senses, or the very fact that we have bodies and sensible surfaces in the first place, that allows for thinking at all (rational or otherwise). Or, to render this in Damasio's playful Spinozian terms: 'The brain's body-furnished, body-minded mind is a servant of the whole body' (2004: 206).

These models of body-mind parallelism and distributed embodied thinking unquestionably gain artistic expression in the corporeal pill films we are exploring here. Not only by diegetically expressing these relationships between bodies, brain and material plane within the supersaturated and panpsychic fantasy spaces, but also through the Artaudian ways in which the actual pill films themselves communicate with the viewers' embodied sensorium and trace circuits in their brain. Accordingly, as the heroes of the pill films struggle to free themselves from the disempowering sad passions and negative forces they inevitably encounter, the films themselves simultaneously get to work affecting the viewers' bodies and brains. Deleuze describes similar potentials harboured by films within *Cinema 2* when he discusses the modern 'cinema of the body' through a parallel Spinozian lens. For there, Deleuze outlines how our 'obstinate and stubborn' viewing body 'forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life' (2005b: 182).¹²

If Jodorowsky's pill films appear to proclaim 'give me a body then' in a Artaudian-Spinozian manner, by so doing they simultaneously demonstrate how the body is 'no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking' but rather 'that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life' (Deleuze 2005b: 182). Concretizing such idea(l)s, we can recognize how *The Holy Mountain* is ostensibly a spiritual film that is almost entirely about bodies and flesh, and as we will soon discover, employs corporeal bodies, affective performance, intensive movements, dynamic rhythms and abject bodily forces to make felt what it is a body is capable of thinking and doing under ever-changing material conditions. This of course telescopes in two directions at once, with the diegetic bodies of the actors highlighting how the categories of life appear as the attitudes and postures of the body, while the imminent pill film structures its violence of sensations to influence the embodied viewer's sensorium, and impact their attitudes and postures. In both encounters, we might say that to think is shown to be 'to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity, its postures. [For it] is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that the cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought' (Deleuze 2005b: 182).

Scaling Up *The Holy Mountain*

Seeking to support Jodorowsky after becoming a fan of *El Topo*, John Lennon and Allen Klein (of Abkco Films) awarded the maverick director \$750,000, his largest budget to date, to fund his next pill film, *The Holy Mountain*: 'El Topo was normal' said Jodorowsky 'The

Holy Mountain was abnormal. My ambition was enormous. I wanted to make a picture like you would make a holy book, like the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Tao Te Ching*. I went very far' (Rose 2002: n.p.). Reflecting his grander scaled-up agendas, Jodorowsky opportunistically embraced 'mainstream' cinematic technologies, and in an attempt to push his affective art ever further, upgraded from his usual 16mm format to 35mm Techniscope instead. Forces of (counter-)acculturation or reterritorialization also witnessed Jodorowsky become another 'turned-on' artist, who began experimenting with LSD as a creative artistic technology (which apparently increased his artistic will to power at a time when the drug was increasingly becoming perceived as less fashionable and radical). We can accordingly understand Jodorowsky's next film as a reworking and expansion of *El Topo*'s immanent-spiritual themes upon new terrain, and as a piece of minor political cinema that takes its place in the tail end of the psychedelic comet that Harry Benshoff dubs the 'LSD-film' movement (2001: 29ff).

Jodorowsky (arguably theatrically) discusses directing the entire film project from within a trance. Although such claims were not unusual for the director, he here talks of uniquely incorporating organic and pharmaceutical drugs into his production process in order to aid and abet the film-making process. By subsequently making a series of artistic decisions whilst taking and experimenting with psychedelics, Jodorowsky's chemically *altered* thoughts and perceptions pervade the final thinking and feeling film assemblage. Reflecting these ideas, Jodorowsky has his main protagonist emerge onto a vastly expanded animist or panpsychic poly-plane which is this time also 'expanded' into a range of other parallel worlds or dimensions that each have their own style or aesthetic. In this way, an enlarged range of cognitive and perceptual experiences and effects common to LSD (and LSD-films) are rendered sensible, albeit remaining channelled through Jodorowsky's unique freak-show horror style and his auteurial obsessions with the meaty biological body and its 'spiritual' modes of thinking and acting. Again reflecting the times, somewhat, the Alchemist (Jodorowsky) who opens and guides this cinematic 'trip' finds strong parallels with Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan character (from another singular-plural artwork emblematic of the evental times), as he selects an apprentice, the thief (Horacio Salinas), and opens him up to an expanded pluriverse of disjunctive dimensions, and a wider confederation of forces and affects that the main characters must individuate with and/or deterritorialize from.

The beginning of the story witnesses the thief being roused from an abject unconsciousness, then pissing himself from beneath a swarming blanket of flies. Within the following few minutes he is beaten, crucified, and harangued by a swirling crowd of naked children that hurl rocks at him. After sharing a marijuana joint with a man that has no arms or legs, and who hitches a ride on his back,¹³ both protagonists enter into an overwhelmingly bustling metropolis chocked full of melding timelines and heterogeneous cultures: a disorienting crowd of Romans, conquistadors, circus performers, cowardly bourgeoisie, US tourists, archetypal students and insect-like proto-fascists. We are here arguably situated inside a gaseous event time-space, wherein the past, present and future

co-mingle and coexist together. In a clear Spinozian manner, these help the head film think a world that ultimately betrays and mutilates life, and appears chock-a-block full of sad passions, negative encounters and inadequate thoughts. In this churning heterochronic chaos of poetic bodies, the thief and his companion appear little more than helpless seers, consigned to wander around and react to a series of overwhelming manipulative forces and encounters. In a distorted and perverted reflection of the brutal 'meat hook realities' of life in Mexico and United States circa 1968–69, viewers witness the ongoing massacre of students dressed in contemporary costume: who appear piled dead in the streets, or else stacked on army trucks being shipped away. Presently, the bodies of other student protesters are executed and opened up by the gas-mask wearing fascists, so that their gaping wounds poetically spill birds, fruit and strings of sausages and offal onto the streets. The now familiar Jodorowskian 'freaks' and 'monsters' also populate the large-screen, albeit framed amidst and alongside a bewildering array of living or dead animals, including a marching forest of crucified sinewy sheep carcasses carried aloft by an army of army faceless fascists.

The Alchemist ultimately rescues the thief from this chaotic world and sets him on a mythical quest towards the summit of a Holy Mountain, in order to usurp the immortals that reign there. During their first encounter within his tower (that appears to function as a metonymic stand-in for the cinema itself), the thief is rendered cataleptic after having his chakra-points stimulated by the numinous Kung Fu figure. There, during their theatrical dance-like fight routine, the Alchemist, tellingly played by Jodorowsky, is depicted stimulating key points on the thief's corporeal body in a way that impacts his brain directly, sending him into a sudden trance. Echoes here of Artaud's assertion that great directors must know 'in advance what points of the body to touch' in order to throw 'the spectator into magical trances' (Artaud 1958: 140). Thereafter, both within and beyond the frame, Jodorowsky explores the corporeal body of the thief (and by extension the viewer) as a site of resistance, revolt, escape, and spiritual potentialities that must be reorganized and reinvigorated in a process of becoming (and unbecoming).

During his subsequent line of flight away from the sick and oppressive any-culture-whatever, the voiceless thief's body is utilized on a variety of levels to communicate feelings and thoughts to the embodied viewer. In one notoriously dense scene full of multivalent layers of affect, meaning and poetic symbolism, all of these different aspects and facets of the body come together, and allow us to grasp (intellectually) how it is that this head film works as an intensive and affective Artaudian BwO. The sequence in question begins with three obese Pretorian guards tending to a stall that sells Christ icons and crucifixes. Jodorowsky's camera here lingers upon the generous plump folds of their flesh as 'a fair haired man dressed as a nun in the Virgin Mary's blue-and-white robes, carves at a large cow in a visceral representation of Holy Communion' (Cobb 2007: 133). In the ensuing mime sequence, the stall owners begin plying the thief with alcohol, before unceremoniously tossing his unconscious drunken body onto the floor of a warehouse. There, as the thief's sensory-motor-schema (and the film's action-image drives) grinds to a veritable halt, viewers suddenly find the narrative anchored to a comatose un-perceiving non-agential body, which

is moved and manipulated by the desires and actions of others. The guards here use his lean and lifeless body to create an indexical cast for a life-sized Christ figure (itself a symbolic body through which one can pass to the spiritual).

Although the thief's unconscious naked body appears divorced of intellect, consciousness, desire or agency during these moments, Jodorowsky retains a motific fascination with embodied sensations, generating a litany of tactile and haptic close-ups that move outwards towards the spectator, rather than inwards towards the subjective form of the (non-perceiving) thief. Or again, by having direct access to the image of the thief's body and flesh, viewers become more aware of its feelings and sensations than he does. Intrusive breathing tubes are thrust into his vulnerable nostrils in unsettling close-ups, for instance, in a manner that literally *feels* uncomfortable to watch. The camera thereafter foregrounds a viscous plaster gloop being sensually poured onto his skin and flesh via several 'proprio-centric' close-ups (see Marks 2000: 162). The film also employs vibrating string instruments and a bass rumbling sound effect to score the experiential sequences, which help establish an aural meniscus or acoustomatic skin that affectively trembles and vibrates upon the viewers' eardrums as the body's surface is touched and stimulated on-screen.

Thereafter, depicting the production of the hollow Christ bodies on-screen helps poetically signal the film's awareness of viewers building themselves a sensational BwO around the protagonist's sensory-motor body (which will organize the perceptions, feelings, movements and action throughout the movement-image narrative space and time), in a manner that again recalls the part human part art-installation machines we began our chapter with. On awakening from his drunken stupor the thief's face is momentarily held in a dislocated close-up beneath the feet of two body casts. His alarmed expression and tensing inner body movements affectively signal his being disturbed by something off-screen. In a manner reminiscent of the appearance of the monolith in Kubrick's *2001*, Jodorowsky opts to score the withheld reverse-shot or perception-image with the intensifying sounds of choral voices that are gradually rising in pitch and intensity. This layering in of spiritual voices immediately endows the 'virtual' or off-screen image (or what is being perceived by the thief) with a preponderant force or power. A loud and discomfiting primal scream then suddenly erupts from the thief's diaphragm and guts, immediately causing the camera to track backwards; rapidly expanding the frame to reveal hundreds upon hundreds of thief-like Christ figures stacked and arranged in repeating Escher-like geometric patterns around the warehouse space. The importance of all these hollow bodies is then aesthetically underscored by a vortexing and vertiginous backtrack and concomitant pull of focus, making the dense clutter of limbs and torsos isomorphically bend in and around the frame. The distended moving image – designed to be projected onto a huge Techniscope format – thus works to momentarily dilate cinematic space and time by creating a warping torsion between the thief's body and the moving-plane of hollow simulacra around him.

The sequence then suddenly morphs into a musically assisted dialectical montage, composed of a series of space-time blocks that isolate groupings and arrangements of the hollow bodies gathered together into various shapes and clustered patterns. The montage

editing here works to animate the different still figures in a way that recalls and intensifies the scenes of the dancing Christ statues in Kubrick's earlier cult classic *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). As such, Jodorowsky's intellectual 'camera-consciousness' expressively carves up the *mise-en-scène* into a series of false-movements, which must be recognized in terms of a dance of the symbolic spectator surrogates, for the material spectators (because this dance is not visible to any characters within the film and is an expression of the thinking film).

As the thief wanders around, his mounting inner tension moves into composition with an extra-diegetic sound wave that rapidly builds in intensity and pitch – like a vibrating tuning fork. The affective sound and image here synthesize to impart an audio expectation or anticipation, as it intensifies towards an audible climax or peak. Intercepting this, the film immediately translates the mounting sound energy into a maniacal and frenzied visual explosion of kinetic movement and physical rage, simultaneously directed 'inwards' by the thief towards the hollow-bodies and 'outwards' towards the viewers' embodied sensorium. That is, while the thief violently attacks these symbolic bodies on-screen, the film as immanent BwO similarly and simultaneously flexes its own raw inaeesthetic muscles, by mounting an aggressive assault upon the viewers. The film here lays into the viewer symbolically and sensorially, via both form and content, in a *parallel* mind-body attack. At a level of firstness, loud and audibly intensive sounds exert a direct and painful impact upon the eardrums and nerves. Concomitantly the film's editing rhythms synergistically intensify into a frenzied imagistic flickering of close-ups capturing fists, arms and legs lashing out while wildly punching, pulverising and kicking the hollow-bodies. Throughout the uncomfortable audio-visual assault, chaotic disharmonizing sounds of drums and percussion are also layered into the sequence so that the representational images of violent impacts become aligned with intensive drum beats and jangling tambourines, simulating and stimulating a physical blow and the subsequent dance upon the nerves. The chaotic and frenzied sequence full of raw sounds, fury and violence then comes to an abrupt end, casting viewers into a now jarring silence. In this dilated long take, the thief is framed utterly exhausted on the floor amidst the scattered debris, clutching onto the last hollow body.

The narrative thereafter follows the thief outside the warehouse, transporting viewers to a quieter space where a swarm of prostitutes dressed in matching kit circle around a crowd of voyeurs (spectators). Jodorowsky here foregrounds and objectifies the bodies and flesh of the women, offering opulent Meyer-esque close-ups of their large breasts stretched into tactile fishnet fabrics. These images introduce another form of haptic and tactile quality into the image that recalls an illicit soft-porn mode. The sexual position of the female bodies and the association of the gaze with the male-perspective also introduces troubling gender and ethical issues that we unfortunately have no time or space to engage with here, other than to note that in amongst all these overtly sexualized bodies, somewhat unsettlingly, the film singles out a prepubescent child in a matching whore uniform. Immediately viewers are uncomfortably aligned with a John's POV as he makes a deal for/with this child. Hunching

down beside her, he then removes his left eye from its socket, before placing it in the palm of her small hand. After this weird transaction, he then begins erotically fondling and touching her little body. In this manner the on-screen spectator with the doubly embodied eyes (albeit aggregated across different bodies) has transformed from being an objective observer separated by distancing and objectifying gaze, to experiencing direct physical contact with the body of his perverted object of desire. Building on the previous section then, this sequence works to both physically and mentally unsettle and assault the viewer in the auditorium, while hijacking and perverting the erotic gaze, and making its otherwise invisible, violent, gendered modes of looking (objectively and tactilely) uncomfortably palpable.

In these sequences we can locate yet more material expressions of Jodorowsky's Artaudian cinema demonstrating its *cruel* ability to stimulate unsettling feelings, and provoke political movements of mind. Similar forces are thereafter bound onto the film's drifting and discontinuous action-image structure, wherein enlightenment becomes associated first with a violent reclaiming of the body, then the active deterritorialization of sad passions and negative affects, followed by a creative reinvention of living and the concomitant opening up the parallel body-mind to other enriching bodies and forces (including animals, plants and chemical forces that gradually increase its powers and ability to act and become affected). Indeed, after being first placed in a trance by the Alchemist, the thief is re-animated in a Caligari-esque moment freed of his earlier rage and psychological-disorientation (much like the spectator in these calmer moments after the film's mind-fuck opening). The thief's somnambulistic body is thereafter foregrounded and treated to a series of cleansing rituals. The closing of the prologue tellingly ends with a focus upon his anus, which directly faces the camera/audience as it is lathered and washed by the naked 'Written Woman' in a fountain temenos.¹⁴ The next cut takes us to another chamber where the thief is found defecating into a glass pot. The Alchemist here removes his stool and places it inside a still, while the thief's naked body is isolated inside a glass philosopher's egg, wherein the blurred borderlines between inside and outside come under ever greater scrutiny as his body is heated above a furnace. The feeling of the pressurized environment (full of invisible forces) is communicated via a series of steaming claustrophobic close-ups and the intensive sounds of boiling and bubbling. In this sweltering crucible the thief's flesh and body are literally wrung-out of all their inner fluids and abject substances, with sweat, saliva, vomit, mucus and tears involuntarily ejaculating and spasming forth from his semi-permeable body-plexus. Before being distilled by the Alchemist.

This relentless focus upon abject substances undoubtedly serves to introduce an uncomfortable zone of indiscernibility into the image, not only between good taste and bad taste, or the inside and outside of the body, but also between the character and spectator, who becomes affectively entangled in a shared sensational encounter of intense artistic discomfort and abjection.¹⁵ Within this sequence the base abject substances are transformed into gold, signalling the material and abject body itself as a form of philosopher's stone. The journey towards this alchemical enlightenment thereafter emerges via a radical

breaking open of the body-mind onto an expanded plane of included disjunctions: which begin to reflect an axiomatic re-mapping of the body beyond the traditional biological boundaries.

From Body to BwO

After being released from the philosopher's egg, the thief tellingly rejects his old concept of body by shattering a large looking glass that reflects his traditional body image. He then enters a crystalline mirror-chamber where his body becomes increasingly fragmented and distributed across a wider web of virtual duplicates. Moments later, these reflections are replaced by a series of effigies, hung within a spinning mandala-room. The Alchemist explains: 'To accomplish the alchemical work you will have these companions. They are thieves like you but on another level.' These so-called 'industrialists', who we might think of as the exploded machinic-components making up the thief's psychomechanical being (and blocking his becomings), live on a range of different 'planets' that the film takes us into one-by-one. The archetypal characters populating these worlds appear to embody the pre-personal swarming affective forces that collectively help compose and constitute (or operate as conduits of desire) the modern human being. Recall here that for Deleuze and Guattari, individuals and groups are understood as being composed by different bundles of 'lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics and zones', which 'vary in nature' and march 'to different beats' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 223). The quasi-agential bodies or personified forces within the parallel planet dimensions of *The Holy Mountain* become distilled representatives of similar 'external' territorializing forces of the implied assemblage, embodying some of the 'little selves' that Deleuze argues co-compose the 'self': 'We speak of our "self" only in virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us: it is always a third party who says "me"' (2004c: 96).

The industrialists clearly embody these schizophrenic 'little selves' (or technologies of the self), which become organized around habit and repetition, being external powers that eventually become 'folded' in upon consciousness, and serve to organize and anchor identity (thought and action). Or as Deleuze elsewhere puts it: 'Isn't this the answer to the question "what are we?" We are habits, nothing but habits – the habit of saying "I." Perhaps, there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self' (Deleuze 1993: x). Tellingly, within Jodorowsky's film, these 'thieves' from a different level, who diminish the thief's 'will to power' become the personifications of hyper-masculine castrating despots, Oedipalized archetypes, capitalist war-mongers, weapons manufacturers, ideology manipulating state officials and perverted bourgeois cretins: all of which might be thought of as a distilled force associated with the vertical territorializing line of the assemblage, which form articulations with, and steal power from the protagonist's own abilities to freely and creatively live, desire, think, act and become.

A series of sequences then side step into the various surrealist and expressionistic worlds that embed these weird schizoid figures. By so doing, Jodorowsky serves to introduce complex LSD-film time-relations into the narrative that begin to destabilize and deterritorialize the loose action-image form linked to the thief's quest for immortality and enlightenment at the top of the Holy Mountain (arguably a McGuffin standing in for the care of the self). After eventually being introduced to all these poetic figures, the disparate bodies are finally gathered together in a mandala-shaped room within the rib-vault trunk of the Alchemist's tower. There, in another symbolic cleansing ritual, the Alchemist commands all of the industrialists to place their effigies into an eye-shaped furnace, announcing that: 'We will destroy the self-image; unsteady, wavering, bewildered, full of desire, distracted, confused. When the self-concept thinks, this is I, and that is mine he binds himself and he forgets the great self.' Shortly after, the narrative is again mapped onto a journey towards the mountain top. En route the film's thinking of enlightenment increasingly becomes equated with the reinvention of living, as the collective bodies open themselves up to immanent agents of change and becoming: such as plants, prayer, meditation and drugs. However, demonstrating a change in the syntactic value and meaning of drugs within what we might call post-Leary acid cinema (and upon American screens more generally), the narrative takes time to highlight the spiritual limitations of LSD-like drugs with regard to spiritual enlightenment. Thus, in the Pantheon Bar at the foot of the mountain viewers discover a band of failed counterculture seekers who can venture no higher. These include drug apostles and a tripper that can manipulate and travel through space-time. He can teleport himself around, or travel anywhere he desires in a horizontal direction. He claims therefore to have 'conquered' the mountain by travelling 'through' it. The limitations of his ability are here highlighted by the Alchemist, who argues that one must conquer the summit to reach true enlightenment.

As the thief and his attendants attempt this, Jodorowsky's self-reflexive cinematic moments reach their apogee. As the story moves closer to the mountain's summit, the bodies of the seekers and spectators thus increasingly become exposed to invisible and inaesthetic pressures. What is more, in paralleling the characters, as the film approaches the narrative's (temporal) pinnacle or summit, its own form and body begins to decompose and breakdown. This is achieved by a variety of aesthetical and formal means. In the first place, a gradual switch towards a documentary style travelogue takes over during the mountain climbing sections, which hints at the film taking a step closer to the 'real' or the 'outside' of the fictitious story. Counteracting this and demonstrating that Jodorowsky does not betray his Artaudian ideals, these documentary sequences are in turn in-mixed with paroxysmal Expressionistic hallucinations (associated with different apprentices as they mentally de-stratify) which invade the film from the inside, exploding forth like violent unstructured inaesthetics, which, in a different historical context, Tom Gunning referred to as a 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 1986).

After arriving at the mountaintop where the immortals dwell, the Alchemist approaches the thief and unties him with two peripheral characters (arguably a Jungian anima and ape

archetype that followed the seekers at a distance), and tells them to descend the mountain once more and change the world. Returning to the summit, the Alchemist then reveals that the immortals are dummies, yet more hollow bodies. He therefore pokes fun at the remaining seekers, while inviting them to sit around a table. Transforming his screen into a disjunctive temporal portal, the Alchemist (or Jodorowsky) then directly addresses the film audience through the now broken fourth-wall:

I promised you the great secret and I will not disappoint you. This is the end of our adventure, nothing has an end, we came in search of the secret of immortality, to be like gods, and here we are, mortals. More human than ever. If we have not obtained immortality at least we have obtained reality. We began in a fairy-tale and we came to life, but is this life reality? No. It is a film. Zoom back camera [...]. We are images, dreams, photographs, prisoners! We shall break the illusion. This is mana. Goodbye to the Holy Mountain, real life awaits us.

As his camera zooms backwards (in a trope that reflects the scene of the thief in the warehouse), the industrial bones of Jodorowsky's film-making and production assemblage are finally exposed in an 'excessive' (see Sconce 1995) Fellini-esque gesture, wherein the film moves from the fictional story to a 'real' space full of sound-platforms, scaffolds, lights and behind-the-scenes crew members making the film. This deictic sequence erects a final bridge from the diegetic space back into the dialethical brain-screen space of the auditorium, where viewers are deposited in a state of bewilderment as the film credits roll.

In an interview about his unusual ending, Jodorowsky reveals it ultimately shows that illumination in the Leary sense of the term does not exist. Instead, the film's perplexing ending is used to challenge viewers to recognize their immanent nature, and see how, in a Spinozian sense, we are 'illuminated; we just don't realise it. The great mystery is to be alive, here and now. Nothing else is as important as that. It's an incredible mystery. What more are we looking for?' (Cobb 2007: 171). Or to say similar in Spinoza's terms, we might state that enlightenment, or approaching the real via adequate ideas, is to shed our illusions and recognize that we are always-already one with God: 'By reality and perfection I understand the same thing' (Spinoza [1987] 2001: 46). Of course, the unorthodox ending is also utter nonsense, in the sense that Bogue means when he says that 'is not orthodox but paradoxical, and hence its sense seems nonsense, not good sense' (Bogue 2004: 333). And here Jodorowsky can be understood engineering a final shock to thought, that demands active thinking, and sense-making. For while the Alchemist helps the film's nameless and voiceless protagonist finally denounce the 'phantoms of the negative' and to stop fighting for his enslavement as if it were his freedom, he ultimately stops short of telling him how he should live. Similarly, the head film itself refrains from providing any utopian roadmaps for what audiences should now do or think. Instead, the pill film arguably forwards an 'ethics of a faith' that is capable of making 'fools laugh': which as Deleuze describes it, must not be

driven by ‘a need to believe in something else’, but rather ‘a need to believe in this world, of which fools are a part’ (Deleuze 2005b: 167).

Notes

- 1 Filming in sequence initially serves to inject a tangible before and after into each on-screen body, so that the actors function as physical conduits of time and change. During the production of *The Holy Mountain*, for instance, the performers and crew were subjected to sleep-deprivation, mystical rituals, and the administration of LSD and psychedelic mushrooms as part of their (the group subject), or the thinking film’s, quest for illumination. The effect on their corporeal bodies and performances becomes discernable on-screen, in a manner reminiscent of the hypnotized performances found in Werner Herzog’s crystalline *Heart of Glass* (1976), where performing ‘under the influence’ is similarly deployed to make palpable the physical properties of mind control, swayed perception, and the notions of enlightenment as becoming ‘more’ conscious. Beyond actors and characters, in Jodorowsky’s pill films, these heterogeneous forces also begin to materially affect the form and content of what we might call after Vivian Sobchack (2004) and Daniel Frampton (2006) ‘the film’s body’ and its embodied ‘filmmind’.
- 2 The notion of the event having a *site* comes from Alain Badiou’s work. For Badiou, evental happenings flash in and out of existence within the event site, and can become manifest in multiple different forms and works (for a clear summary of how the event operates within a site for Badiou, see Ling 2011: 17–20).
- 3 If we watch across borders, these local US movements and events can also be joined up to a far wider more dissolute movement, whose dynamism and gaseous spirit appears expressed similarly elsewhere. A consideration of Vera Chytilov’s psychedelic film *Sedmikrásky/Daisies* (1966), for example, which was produced in the LSD manufacturing hot spot in Czechoslovakia (see for example Lee 1994), demonstrates clear parallels and affinities with the US films Renan links to expressions of the US counterculture’s ‘new man’.
- 4 See, for example, Heffernan (2004: 225).
- 5 See, for example, *O Ritual dos Sádicos/Awakening of the Beast* (1970). The similarity between Marins and Jodorowsky’s work is highlighted by Christen, Lebbing and Weevers (1998).
- 6 Steven Shaviro and Richard Porton pick up on these Spinozian features of Cronenberg’s films. See Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body* (1993: 127–157), and Richard Porton’s ‘The film director as philosopher: An interview with David Cronenberg’.
- 7 In recent years a filmed recording of Roland Topor’s *Melodrama Sacramental* (1965) has surfaced and can be viewed online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM3RtHxOCKs>. Jodorowsky appears and performs in this bloody and violent happening that serves to aesthetically foreshadow and anticipate his 1968 feature film *Fando y Lis*.
- 8 Vogue spectatorial practices can be extrapolated from reports from other New York venues at the time, which indicate disembodied art cinema models were being ‘expanded’ to cater to the sensational realms of bodily affect. For example, Jonas Mekas famously worked to

actualize an ideal spectatorial experience in the Anthology Film Archive's *Invisible Cinema* that opened on Lafayette Street in 1970. Hoberman and Rosenbaum note how spectatorship had become particularly fetishistic, with Peter Kubelka designing an auditorium and chairs that emphasized a ritualistic aspect of viewing geared towards mobilizing a different response from that of film as entertainment. (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 1983).

- 9 For a detailed discussion of audience demographics and spectatorship habits common to the Elgin Theatre during this period, see Davis (2000).
- 10 For more on the figure of the mole in Shakespeare, Marx, Hegel et al see John Milfull (2005) 'Notes from underground: Of moles, metros and messiahs' and John Cussan (2011) 'Marx and the old mole: (or the drudging fiend)'. These remind us that Marx turns to the figure of the mole on several occasions, using it as an animalistic metaphor for the revolution. Marx engages Hegel's reading of Hamlet in *The Philosophy of History*, for instance, where the Danish Prince addresses his father who speaks from beneath the soil/stage as 'old mole'. 'We recognize our old friend, our old mole, who knows so well how to work underground, suddenly to appear: the revolution.' On another occasion in 1856, Marx refers to Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow: 'the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer – the Revolution'. Furthermore, in the seventh chapter of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx writes:

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still traveling through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed half of its preparatory work; now it is completing the other half. It first completed the parliamentary power in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has achieved this, it completes the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has accomplished this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed, old mole!

(Marx 1852)

- 11 In books such as *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002) Laura Marks foregrounds how certain minor cinemas harness alternative scopic regimes that seem to promote embodied and tactile modes of film viewing, and radically dissolve the distinctions between the subject and object, or the immanent ethico-aesthetics, the feeling body and the thinking brain (Marks 2000, 2002).
- 12 This term at once finds parallels with the work of Tod Browning, but Hoberman and Rosenbaum also note how the term 'freak' had enjoyed universal currency as a self-descriptive term for the counterculture since around 1967.
- 13 The character's perpetual seated position, shuffling movements, smoking of weed and physical assemblage with the thief suggest that on a symbolic level, he also functions as an on-screen surrogate for the auditorium bound head-spectator, who is then taken along for a ride by this character.
- 14 This image tellingly anticipates and recalls the aforementioned sequence of Klen in his gallery as he formulates an assemblage with an art-body-machines through its anus. Also

of interest here, Deleuze and Guattari inform us that the anus was the 'first organ to suffer privatization' under capitalism, and to be effectively removed from the social field (2004a: 157). Tellingly it is this part of the body that Jodorowsky chooses to focus upon as the thief's body is reclaimed and freed from the surrounding territorializing plane. The anus is also explored as a symbol for the open and permeable body, while the notion of turning excrement to gold becomes another loaded metaphor for achieving enlightenment.

- 15 Deleuzian scholars such as Powell and Pisters show how the use of abject bodily substances such as blood, sweat, tears and vomit often invoke 'the border between the inside and the outside of the body. The concept of the boundary, in all kinds of variations' (Pisters 2003: 48, see also Powell 2005: 64–65).

Chapter Four

That's 'Really' Sick: Pervert Horror, Torture Porn(ology), Bad-Taste and Emetic Affect in Lucifer Valentine's *Unbecoming* 'Cinema of Repulsions'

Vomit tempts; it solicits.

Eugenie Brinkema (2011: 52)

With society a circus of sensations, anything truly terrifying (by definition, truly surprising) is saliva for a jaded palate.

Lawrence O'Toole (2008: 260)

The artist is not only the patient and doctor of civilisation, but is also its pervert.

Gilles Deleuze (2004a: 274)

Feelings of nausea, revulsion, revolt and disgust are increasingly understood to play an important role in higher level cognitive processes and moral psychology, and expose a complex enfolding of nature and culture, physiology and politics. For example, adopting a gene-culture co-evolutionary perspective allows Daniel Kelly to show that the body's so-called disgust system works 'in conjunction with a norm psychology that evolved to help coordinate social interactions' (Kelly 2011: 6–8)¹. It is precisely because disgust is so often thought a natural and spontaneous feeling, though, that we must remain hyper aware of the ways in which it can be channelled and mobilized 'as an instrument of oppression and discrimination' (Kelly 2011: 6–8).² For indeed, reconsider in this light the political implications of Paul Rozin's observation that: 'To find something disgusting is to desire no commerce with it, it is beyond temptation. Disgust is a moral amplifier and an indication of moral feelings' (Rozin 1999: 218).

Bearing such notions in mind, we might retroactively identify how feelings of disgust have always-already been germane vectors undergirding and intersecting many of the chapters running throughout *Unbecoming Cinema*: the moral opprobrium felt by certain critics about Eric Steel's 'immoral' decision to record and project actual suicide event-acts for instance, or the visceral feelings of spiritual revolt that were inculcated through an encounter with Jodorowsky's twisted pill films. Linked to these ideas, a pertinent question that we must pose within this chapter relates to whether or not disgust can ever be mobilized for truly ethical ends? (see e.g. Kelly 2011: 138). In setting out to answer this, we necessarily close *Unbecoming Cinema* with a provocative chapter that critically and clinically engrosses itself in, and ruminates over, the odious outré work of an eccentric³ twilight economy showman: Lucifer Valentine, the (oc)cult inventor of the rank and distasteful 'Vomit Gore genre', a bilious horror evolution in the extreme torture-porn yoke that infects viewers' viscera

and aggressively agitates their guts with viral *bio-aesthetics* (see Kennedy 2002: 28). As the anarchic inventor, director, writer, designer, camera operator, editor, scorer, and samizdat paroxysmal distributor of the debased gag-inducing ‘Vomit Gore Trilogy’ (*Slaughtered Vomit Dolls* 2006; *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice* 2008; *Slow Torture Puke Chamber* 2010), Valentine surfaces – like the cult interloper Alejandro Jodorowsky explored in chapter three – as an ostentatious auteur entirely immersed in his distorting lollapalooza work.⁴ What is more, his diabolical (from the Greek *diabolein* meaning ‘actively breaking up, dispersing’ (see Flusser 2014: 58)) films invite us to explore a quite different form of unbecoming emetic cinema that, like the pill-films of the previous chapter, constitute ‘event cinemas’ in two diverging and yet overlapping senses of the term. That is, the Vomit gore films are simultaneously a visceral and embodied Artaudian cinema of *cruelty* that communicate directly with the viewers’ nerves and viscera (in an ethico-political manner), and an unbecoming cinema that flashes and resonates with the movements of a wider ‘pure event’.

To understand this latter threshold, we can turn to a line of thought offered by Jacqui Miller’s in *Film and Ethics* (2013), where she notes that although most films can be understood reflecting their wider social context, a scarce few should be viewed as singular products ‘of a particular moment [that] could not have been made earlier, and probably not later’ (Miller 2013: 7). Valentine’s Vomit Gore films fall precisely into this category, we maintain, being unique symptomatic sociotechnical products of their time, as well as low-brow, low-budget projects that pathogenically mobilize and deploy disgust in an interesting ethical and political way.

The Vomit Gore trilogy explored here coagulates around three dissolute DVD packages, whose mashed-up main features kinetically mingle extreme and offensive representational images of horror, madness, cannibalism and gore, with a shocking and repulsive concoction of authentic abject images of violent gonzo fetish porn, bulimia, paraphilic vomiting and spew (qua principles of anti-consumption). On first gush, then, Valentine’s mawkishly symbolic and excessively stylistic participatory triptych may appear to reject mainstream tastes and sensibilities, not least by apparently refusing contemporary capitalism’s injunction to enjoy consumption, and affirm that you are what you eat. Contra such received views, however, and in drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari’s writing on ‘pervert’ artists such as the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, we maintain that Valentine’s elevation of digestion and vomit to a noematic level (qua food for thought), in combination with his *symptomatic* embrace of torture, terror, niche paraphilic pornography and viewer/user interaction, expose the emergence of an ‘evental’ body of minor horror that politically distorts and perverts the libidinal economies and sociotechnical logic of their age. Or stated differently, Valentine’s unbecoming horror-porn can be thrown up as an ethically *revolting* and revolutionary emblem of our post 9/11 era of terror, torture and modulating digital control; and thus represents an intensification of, rather than exception to, a network of *dispositif* rules surrounding what has variously been called ‘Capitalist Realism’ (Fisher 2012), ‘Evil Media’ (Fuller and Goffey 2012) and ‘perception 2.0’ (Pisters 2012, 2010).

It is worth recalling here that the word 'revolution' originally derives from the Latin *revolver*, which means 'to turn', while the term 'revulsion' relates to a notion of 'shrinking away' (see Tsivian 2010: 32). Nevertheless, in Valentine's eventual work, we necessarily encounter a revolting and revolutionary form of unbecoming cinema, which deploys 'revulsion' 'to turn' its viewers' stomachs in an ethico-political way. To further explain why, we must variously explore how Valentine's ill-egitimate 'pornological' work creatively melds a sick form of content, sick form of expression and sick *format* of expression that in combination serves to ignite an 'event of thought', that provokes a critical and clinical diagnosis of our sick times. What is more, this chapter argues that by employing his shocking art to render the invisible forces around us, if not visible, at least palpable (even if not palatable) to the tactile senses, the violent emetophile Satanist can be recognized as *the* pervert artist par excellence of our current civilization.

Vomit Gore a GoGo

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2000) observed how the abstract logic of millennial capitalism – mutually entangled with and enabled by networked computer systems – fostered devious new 'occult' and 'twilight' economies.⁵ By such a token, Valentine's work can be understood surfacing during the occult era that they christen the 'second coming of capitalism'. Certainly, in common with the outlandish products of many other borderland economies they survey, Valentine's ferocious work channels and expresses equivalent forms of monstrosity, energy and creativity' (308–309). At the same time, his work also becomes recognizable as what William Brown refers to as a 'barbarian' non-cinema, which emerges from the 'periphery within' the centre of the film-making world (2016: 109). Arguably expressing 'the spectre, the distinctive spirit, of neoliberal capitalism in its triumphal hour' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 314), the inaugural Vomit Gore film first appeared in 2006, available for direct purchase from Valentine's Kingdom of Hell webpage at a cost of \$60.

As a marginal low-budget extreme horror-porn film, which blurs amateur/professional categories, *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls* became the first esoteric instalment in a dissolute trilogy that serially focuses upon the descent into hell of Angela Aberdeen (Ameara LaVey, Hope Likens, et al); an individual, or rather *dividual* (the decomposed and deforming-reforming parameter-being that Deleuze discusses as a symptom of modern control societies [1997])⁶ iterated and embodied by multiple different actors within and throughout the modulating series. Collectively, the hallucinatory barbarian films unfold a succession of episodic sequences that experientially depict the ongoing humiliation, torture, rape and 'murder' of Aberdeen's destratifying 'archetypal' personalities, at the hands of various tormenting demons and sick torturers: invariably with a penchant for 'erotic' vomiting and vomit. The farrago films accordingly mingle hallucinatory expressionistic images of a schizoid mental breakdown with raw participatory inaeesthetic images, deployed to populate the inside of the viewers' body with violent peristaltic sensations and aggressive auto-affects, which induce

qualified feelings of revulsion, nausea and sickness. As such, Valentine's Vomit Gore work operates at the very limits of communication, harnessing a shocking and perverted form of bio-aesthetic film-making, which, in a different historical context, Tom Gunning referred to as a 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 1986).

Indeed, if the cinema of attractions periodically and disruptively spurts forth from beneath cinema's sedimentalized (narrative) conventions, as Gunning so convincingly argues, then we can recognize Valentine's digital project(ile) as a particularly irruptive and grotesque 'return' of this affective artistic substratum. That is to say, what we might playfully call a *cinema of repulsions*. Valentine's sick and sadistic director identity certainly recalls the theatrical showman persona bound up with the early cinema of attractions mode *à la* Gunning. This auteur structure also ensures that an Artaudian form of 'corporeal experience' (Murray 2014: 1) is sadistically personified as it is made manifest, with the Valentine director-persona certifying that an asymmetric deluge of visceral vomit-themed kinky-kinetic energy will propel 'outward' from the frame towards the acknowledged viewer, as well as inward towards a character-based narrative situation. Valentine here harnesses and projects forth series after series of crude unstructured viral affects designed to infect, unsettle and assault viewers, making their bodies physically react with queasy touches and contorting spasms. Accordingly, viewing Valentine's Vomit Gore films entails what Steve Jones refers to as the 'fragmented surfing' of episodic hard-core torture 'events', which eschew narrative to unleash 'sensorially provocative' moments of 'visceral stimulation' (Jones 2013: 177, 184).

Related to this notion of invoking a form of sickness in the viewer is Valentine's favourite form of viral bio-aesthetic affect: images of vomit and vomiting, which he deploys to get underneath the viewer's skin, to agitate their nerves, and materially inter-mingle with their gut, where the pathogenic film images instil qualified feelings of nausea and disgust. Of course, it is not unusual for horror and gore films to become diegetically or extra-diegetically associated with nausea and disgust. Critics such as Mikita Brottman even suggest horror films harbour a tactical fascination with all things nauseating exactly because they desire to induce feelings of revulsion in their audiences (Brottman 2005: 3). Janet Staiger and Lawrence O'Toole furnish us with rich historical evidence of this when they discuss the original audiences of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) being so disgusted by what they saw that many viewers bolted to the bathrooms to throw up during the screening (Staiger 2008: 246; O'Toole 2008: 258).

On account of such visceral forces, O'Toole historically argued that horror must be recognized as *the* most subversive of all genres. From today's vantage, one must concede that Internet pornography and terrorist snuff have edged in front of horror with their subversive capacity to overthrow scruples and catalyse moral panics. Interestingly, Valentine's horror films can be subversively mapped alongside these particular 'post-cinematic' or 'non-cinematic' vectors too; on the one hand molecularly indexing, or channelling, the fusion of terrorist 'black magic' and the 'white light of the image' alchemized in the post 9/11 crucible (Baudrillard 2002: 29–30), and on the other, vividly recalling shorter gape- and gag-inducing view-and-forward viral porn sensations such as *2 Girls 1 Cup* (Marco Antônio Fiorito,

2007). The abject anti-abstract sequences of Aberdeen's never-ending torture, humiliation, rape and 'murder' within modulating echo chambers make both these vectors clear. This is not to mention the millions of 'disgust junkies' who subscribe to YouTube channels streaming gross 'cyst bursting' and 'boil squeezing' videos (see e.g. Gallacher 2016), or reams of other ghastly online phenomenon and non-cinematic vectors that are peculiar to our times.

In difference to many of these other image economies, however, Valentine's extreme and extremely disgusting violence of sensations can be understood endeavouring to solicit primal forms of bodily reaction that appear to provoke a subsequent ethical 'event of thought', by first getting inside the embodied viewer's guts and exciting what is variously referred to as their 'enteric nervous system' (Hadhazy 2010) or 'gustatory cortex' (Kelly 2011: 142). That is, the complex neural network of over one hundred million nerve cells located within and across the human gut and digestive system (Greshorn 1999: viii; Hadhazy 2010; Enders 2015: 131–134), that boasts more neurons and nerve cells than either 'the spinal cord or the peripheral nervous system' (Hadhazy 2010). On account of this, many scientist recognize the gut's enteric system, in assemblage with its inhuman biome population, to be 'another independent centre of integrative neural activity' (Gershon in Hurley 2011; see also Enders 2015: 131–134). Because this neural network is also understood to communicate bilaterally with the central nervous system via the gut-brain axis, and can 'think' and act independently of the brain, it is often provocatively referred to as the human body's *second brain*. This second brain becomes the 'neural seat of disgust [in] the insular cortex', Kelly observes, and 'has been linked to gastrointestinal functions' (Kelly 2011: 142).

For the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who adopts a Spinozian mind-body parallelism perspective, the human stomach and gut formulates an integral part of the body-minded thinking process already discussed in the previous chapter. The mind's idea of hunger, for instance, is related to the brain receiving 'basic' or 'sub-cortical' signals from the stomach and gustatory cortex, and sensing changes in the blood's composition as well as the body's dwindling energy levels. These 'lower level' processes thus become essential in composing feelings and emotion, which in turn become influential on the mind's functioning, cognition and decision making (see e.g. Damasio 2004: 206). In *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ* (2015) Giulia Enders' research into the role of the human gut similarly leads her to promote a comparable Spinozian 'philosophical reversal' or recalibration of Descartes' mind/body dualism 'error' (to channel the title of Damasio's earlier 1994 work): 'It may be time to expand René Descartes' proposition' she explains, to say instead 'I feel, then I think, therefore I am' (Enders 2015: 141).

Through his relentless unleashing of transductive emetic auto-affectations upon the viewer's sensorium, and specifically the second brain, during the screening encounter (which often induces gagging and retching), Valentine can be understood unbridling a range of viral bio-aesthetics designed to criss-cross the gut-brain axis in a manner that recalls the work of Antonin Artaud, another abject artist of 'regurgitated formless matter' who thought

and worked ‘through the digestive system’ (Murray 2014: 48). The Vomit Gore work in particular appears designed to agitate and execute the body’s automatic ‘disgust execution system’ (Kelly 2011: 116), while instilling a lingering unease in the pit of the infected viewer’s stomach, which thereafter agitates feeling-thoughts and instils qualified feelings and emotions at ‘higher’ levels of conscious processing, which in turn become responsible for soliciting or igniting a subsequent ‘event of thought’. The Vomit Gore films here emerge as powerful and affective artistic force fields, or what Artaud referred to as bodies without organs (BwO), designed to directly impact the viewers’ sensorium and nerves during the embodied screening encounter: to infect and contaminate, invade and transfigure, like an illness or plague.

Like Jodorowsky’s work explored in the previous chapter, Valentine’s inimitable corporeal cinema never performs courtesy of a complete hypertrophy of symbolic or representational regimes, with ‘poetic’ meanings simultaneously becoming directed at the more distanced eye/I of the viewer as their sensorium is violently stormed. Here, Valentine’s raw inaeesthetic or bio-aesthetic affects always-already converge with the films’ hallucinatory and febrile expressionistic style, which concomitantly assaults the eyes and ears. This is an asymmetrical and self-annihilating coupling though, with unstructured kinetic affects and representational meaning variously working for and against each other as disorganizing and re-organizing forces.

We find the essence of this complex relationship diagrammatically expressed in the very first horror sequence in *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls*, which exposes the attraction-repulsion between Valentine’s use of raw bio-aesthetic affect and symbolic abstraction. The sequence in question features an early iteration of an Aberdeen archetype named ‘Pig’ (embodied here by a heavier set female actor listed as ‘Pig Lizzy’) whom viewers watch being tortured and murdered by Valentine’s satanic camera consciousness. There, the abominable articulation of gonzo-porn authenticity and sick symbolic-laden fantasy result in a dis-organ-izing and reorganizing of meanings and feelings, as Pig’s eyeballs are shown being brutally gorged out of their sockets by a long screwdriver, leaving the blinded naked victim to stumble around a generic hotel ‘non place’⁷ (which itself appears, like Aberdeen, in different iterations within and across all the DVD packages). Pig’s dismembered and disembodied eyes are thereafter laid upon a glass coffee table, framed from below by Valentine’s digital-camera, as the eyeless victim edges falteringly towards them. Presently, she begins thrusting her straightened fingers, then knuckles, and hand, deep into her mouth and throat cavity, causing her inner body to heave, spasm, convulse and finally projectile puke all over these disembodied eyeballs and the glass-top table.

Seeing Pig’s gag reflexes and kinetic deluge of vomit here often serves to activate the body’s disgust system, setting into motion a sympathetic ‘gape face’, and then auto-affective heaving and gagging sensations. As such, the visceral image immediately touches us deep in the thinking-feeling guts, directly making our faces change shape and expression.⁸ At the same time, the ‘metaphoric’ meanings derived from the horror-torture sequence confirm that, in a visually expressive Bataillean manoeuvre that also recalls the slashed

eyeball marking the opening of Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the Vomit Gore film announces an abject and poetic harnessing of powerful material forces that necessarily *exceed seeing*.⁹

Through its mutually destructive articulation of material and metaphorical forces, then, the above sequence announces that there may be more to this new genre's perverse and obsessive fascination with vomit and vomiting than first meets, or exceeds, the eye. This is to say, Valentine's novel films appear to serve up vomit as actual food for thought, and dislodge, or force viewers to confront, a sickening 'poetics' of vomit. No doubt, if the act of vomiting can be linked to a corporeal regime of raw transductive bio-aesthetic forces, deployed to make the viewer's body contort and spasm, the films' coinciding preoccupation with the icky substance of vomit itself betrays a further obsession that provokes thought to confront the immanent materiality of vomit face-on. A brief mind experiment should help to make the implication of such obsessions clearer, especially if we momentarily contrast Valentine's recurrent fascination with characters having to witness and consume their torturer's vomit with other extreme and excessive cinematic moments where comparable victims are compelled to consume vile and abject bio-waste for the erotic enjoyment of others (both within or beyond the frame).

To begin, we can here compare Valentine's vomit-eating scenes with various shit-eating sequences peppered throughout *Sweet Movie* (Dušan Makavejev, 1974), *Salò* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), *The Cook The Thief His Wife and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1989), *The Human Centipede* trilogy (Tom Six, 2009, 2011, 2015) and the aforementioned post-cinematic viral 'shock-video' *2 Girls 1 Cup* (2007). On arriving at these scatological considerations, we might concede that if at the level of bio-aesthetic affect these disgusting and shocking coprophagic sequences elicit comparable embodied auto-affective reactions as Valentine's images of vomit chugging, my gut feeling remains that a clear schism opens up when we consider the divergent symbolic or representational meanings associated with the appearance and consumption of faeces and vomit. For one thing, shit literally and metaphorically represents the end of the human consumption-digestion or nutrition-extraction process (and the fertile beginning for another inhuman cycle), while vomit more precisely represents the interception or interruption of this teleological digestive flow (by disease, bacteria, poison, emetics, bulimic intervention, etc.). The symbolism of vomit betrays a liminal status, then, being neither exactly food nor waste, but rather an arrested processual in-between substance.

Accordingly, the act of vomiting is always-already a disruptive and untimely event that is associated with intersecting the teleological consumption-digestion-waste process. We might also recall here that for Deleuze and Guattari, the anorexic transforms their mouth into a perverse form of 'anal machine', supplanting its molar role as an 'eating-machine' by reversing and re-directing the naturalized flows of consumption (Deleuze and Guattari 2004a: 1). Brinkema similarly notes how 'against the telos of proper digestion, ending in defecation and a voiding of material through the coursing hollow at the centre of the body', vomiting witnesses the face return 'as the site of entry and

exit', so that the mouth become a schematic anus that serves to circle 'back intake in a citational recall' (2011: 55). Countless images of women purging over toilet bowls within Valentine's films make this bulimic re-organ-ization of the mouth as anal-machine all too clear, and below, we investigate how this reorganized mouth-anus schematic can also be linked to strange processes of becoming-animal, or else index animal lines of flight opened up by Valentine's decidedly inhuman art. Furthermore, images of vomit and abjection also often serve to invoke a radical blurring of boundaries between the inside and outside, self and other, in all forms of variations, and which stretch out to include the viewer and their embodied experience of the film (see Pisters 2003: 48; Powell 2005: 64–65). At a higher level of register, and in a formal act of *mise en abyme*, the films' own mashed-up postmodern citations of countless other horror films (such as *Hannibal* [Ridley Scott, 2001] and *Poltergeist* [Tobe Hooper, 1982]) similarly appear to reflect the same sick abstract diagram, as does the ongoing embedding of a 1980s home movie that diegetically and extra-diegetically announces the return of traumatic childhood events (the video being of Valentine's own sister, we are told, but used in situ to represent the mediated memories of Aberdeen as a child).

In the following sections, we necessarily move on to explore how Valentine's intensely disgusting auto-affective 'viral' images, flagrant transgression of sociopolitical taboos, mashed-up and broken apart non-narrative style, dissolute digital form(at) of expression and embrace of interactive prosumer technologies actualizes the complete transubstantiation, or unbecoming, of the traditional film object into an 'informe' nebulous objectile, which neatly reflects the Vomit Gore project's thematic obsession with thinking through and with the digestive system. Of particular interest to this chapter, is how in combination the films' wretched violence of sensations, twilight economy of disgust and interactive viewer/user dimensions collectively prompt thought to grope beyond the sick films in particular towards the in-forming sociotechnical and political background subsuming the entire oeuvre itself. Or put differently, Valentine's 'symptomatic' films provoke viewers' thoughts and associations to zigzag from the particular to the general, and by so doing help unconceal and diagnose the form and function of the embedding culture's abstract 'desiring machines'. In attempting to map out these movements below, it becomes useful to begin by schizoanalytically detouring a long legacy of symptomatic horror film criticism that aims to expose how a distasteful and nightmarish genre might make certain cultural concerns and libidinal economies palpable to their viewers' senses.

Contextual and Contingent Meanings

In his landmark 'psychological history' of German horror cinema *From Caligari to Hitler* (1966), Siegfried Kracauer famously argued that a nation's films offered attentive critics a direct and 'royal road' into the wider cultural unconscious. Kracauer there put

skewed silent-era horror movies such as *Der Golem* (Carl Boese and Paul Wegener, 1915), *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang 1927) onto the proverbial (textual) analyst's couch, in order to decode and decipher the symbolic meanings he saw undergirding their nightmarish dream-screens. Seeing their stylized form and *mise-en-scène* *expressionistically* reflecting their content, Kracauer maintained that the silent movement was best understood resonating with the German nation's deep-seated anxieties: linked to the impending rise of dangerous ideologues, hypnotic proto-fascist cults of the idol and an inexorable manipulation of the distracted masses. Performing as both a cultural psychiatrist and critical clinician, Kracauer there interpreted the films' penumbral semiotics betraying a neurotic entanglement with the unsettled historical context. Far from being inter-war historical curios, then, these Weimar horrors were more precisely perceived as *zeitgeist* texts that were clearly informed by, and expressive of, wider sociopolitical apprehensions.

Although not accepted by all, Kracauer's far-reaching contextual and historical interpretation of horror unquestionably influenced subsequent waves of film critic, who increasingly read horror films as meaningful cultural products that expressed something *essential* about their particular spatio-temporal juncture. In his seminal 'Introduction to the American horror film', for example, Robin Wood approaches US horror as a collective cultural nightmare that obsessively played out the dramatic 'struggle for recognition of all that [US] civilisation represses or oppresses' (1984: 171). Thus, while Kracauer saw a preoccupation with anti-Semitism and the rise of fascism as the nightmarish (sub)text underpinning pre-war German cinema, Wood felt American horror expressed quite different forms of trepidation and unease, which were allegorically linked to different repressed/oppressed 'others' and non-normative sexual identities (such as female sexuality, homosexuality and other marginalized or minor groups). If such approaches still remain of value and importance today, to the extent that it may even appear that 'it has become routine to read horror as an allegorical response to political anxieties' (Frost 2011: 16), we must concede that the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches informing these particular interpretations have gradually dropped out of fashion.

Amongst a multitude of other voices that highlight problems of comparing films to dreams, and cultural products to psychological phenomena, Deleuze and Guattari famously warned against approaching any artist or work (solely) through a psychoanalytic lens. For amongst other things, these models restricted critics to perceiving the author as a form of neurotic, who could do little more than mechanistically or pathologically produce neurotic artworks. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari fashioned an alternative *clinical-critical* approach to the study of perverting/pervert art, employing an expanded and immanent 'schizoanalytic' or 'rhizomatic' method that appears better suited for exposing the complex arrangements of institutions, technologies, languages, forces and affects that are always-already in operation within a given cultural milieu or territory, and are relevant to our understanding of the minor or perverting artists' works. Amongst other mad

and perverted artists, Deleuze and Guattari delve into the symptomatic corpuses of the Marquis de Sade, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Antonin Artaud, to better illuminate how their 'perverted' and/or 'minor' bodies of work help cast the libidinal economies and diagrammatic organizational logic of their particular cultures and civilizations (or desiring assemblages) into fresh light, by engineering an artistic *encounter* that allowed readers/viewers to sense or perceive the form and function of these abstract machines afresh. Thus, in his survey of literature in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze strives to contrast the neurotic artist and minor author, by arguing:

The neurotic can only actualize the terms and the story of his [sic] novel: the symptoms are this actualisation, and the novel has no other meaning. On the contrary, to extract the non-actualisable part of the pure event from symptoms (or, as Blanchot says, to raise the visible to the invisible), to raise everyday actions and passions (like eating, shitting, loving, speaking, or dying) to their noematic attribute and their corresponding pure Event, to go from the physical surface on which symptoms are played out and actualisations decided on the metaphysical surface on which the pure event stands and is played out, to go from the cause of the symptoms to the quasi-cause of the oeuvre – this is the object of the novel as a work of art, and what distinguishes it from the familial novel.

(Deleuze 2004a: 273)

By provoking thought to move from the particular to the general, or towards the quasi-causes of the oeuvre, the mad, perverted or minor artwork nurtures an encounter with the as yet unthought, or that which precedes thought, by nudging readers/viewers both towards prehending something that was previously invisible or hidden (the pure event) whilst making the visible emit the invisible (the virtual or abstract) that always-already informed our reception or mediation of it.

Accordingly, although folk wisdom may maintain that artists like Sade or Masoch must be recognized as pathological perverts, Deleuze and Guattari show how critics do themselves a disservice by solely understanding their art as the product of neuroses. For by following their transgressive lines of flight as far as they could go, both Sade and Masoch used their novels to disarticulate and disassociate certain 'syndromes previously grouped together', and productively engineer new articulations that demanded fresh forms of thought and understanding. On this point Deleuze is clear, contending that there:

is always a great deal of art involved in the groupings of symptoms, in the organisation of a *table* where a particular symptom is disassociated from another, juxtaposed to a third, and forms the figure of a disorder or illness. Clinicians who are able to renew a symptomatological table produce a work of art; conversely, artists are clinicians, not with respect to their own case, nor even with respect to a case in general; rather, they are clinicians of civilisation.

(Deleuze 2004a: 273, emphasis in original)

Erika Gaudlitz illuminates how Deleuze's understanding of Masoch's work sees the erotic bodily techniques revealing 'a blend of ethnographic and historical engagement' that make the 'schizoanalytic crossover of social and personal desire' detectable for the reader (Gaudlitz 2015: 8). To clarify upon this isomorphic and schizoanalytic inter-relationship between the perverted oeuvre and the civilization it emerges from – and in turn helps to clinically/critically to diagnose – it becomes fruitful to turn briefly to Sade's 'anthropological' corpus as a demonstrative case in point.

We might remember here that for Bataille, Sade's uniqueness lay in the way his stories affectively recombined sex and death, the 'two primary taboos' operating within his culture. By so doing, Sade ultimately forced his readers to perceive that 'the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge towards death' (Bataille 2001: 42). Bataille further felt that in Sade's writing the intense peak experiences of sex and death each pointed towards a highly eroticized obliteration of the self, or towards a novel politico-religious co-mingling of subject and object. Not too dissimilarly, Giorgio Agamben earmarks Sade's work as the 'first and perhaps most radical biopolitical manifesto of modernity', which erected a new erotic 'theatre of bare life' that meticulously and unsparingly regulates and publicizes every aspect of physiological life, including sexual and digestive functions (Agamben 1995: 134–135). By stripping political life of *bios* and reducing it to pure *zoe*, Agamben also acknowledges a philosophical manoeuvre in Sade's work that announced 'the absolutely political (that is, "biopolitical") meaning of sexuality and physiological life itself' (135). In both these readings we can detect a clear crossover between the private and the public, between the personal and the pathological or the biological and the political, which is made tangible to the reader so that they might sense or perceive a complex ethnographic entanglement at play throughout Sade's stories.

The schizoanalytic dimensions of these become even clearer if we briefly work to triangulate Sade's corpus with two other telling tutor passages, the first of which constitutes the remarkable opening of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1991), wherein the philosophical historian depicts, in excruciating visceral detail, the profane public spectacle unfolding before the Church of Paris on the 2nd of March 1757. Foucault torturously confronts his readers with the litany of pains exacted upon the condemned body of Damians the Regicide during his drawn-out corporeal ordeal with fire, hot pincers, molten lead, sulphur, horses and Parisian hecklers. A familiarity with this protracted passage, in turn, helps cast a second intersecting pedagogical entry from the memoirs of Giacomo Casanova into fresh light, where the carnal Venetian writes of accompanying certain aristocratic ladies to spectate Damians' *amende honorable* that day. Upon his arrival at the horrible spectacle, however, Casanova became alarmed at seeing his elegant French consociates leaning excitedly out of their carriage window and straining eagerly on their toes in order to secure themselves a better view of the gory horror show from their place amidst the crowd. What is perhaps most shocking by today's standards, though, is that Casanova not only describes the ladies maintaining an unflinching gaze upon Damians' agonies, but also becoming sexually aroused (algolagnia) by the cruel Sovereign-era torture-porn spectacle, with one lady

ostensibly being vigorously and intimately stimulated beneath her rustling dress as the shocking events unfolded (see Casanova 2013: 397–398; Ellis 2012: n.p.).

These tutor passages help expose why Sade's erotic articulation of sex and death, bare life and politics were decidedly more symptomatic than neurotic, or operated upon an ethological and historical level rather than a purely pathological one. Which is to say, Sade's art can be recognized distilling the essence of his historical moment into a *novel* form, whilst employing sensational 'pornological' (more on which below) affects and percepts to better reveal the perverse libidinal economies at work (desiring) everywhere around him: even if intensifying them and turning them on their head.

From these critical and historical perspectives, it thus becomes clearer why Deleuze and others evade reducing Sade to a mere pathological pervert, or maintain that the brutal erotic-affective fantasies and shocking institutional inversion of virtue and vice found within his art appear to be tactically deployed in order to encourage readers toprehend or perceive the general at work behind the particular. Like Bataille and Agamben then, Deleuze also sees Sade as a revolutionary artist, and fingers the pervert author as an original creative whose work exposes and intensifies the form and function of his particular civilization's abstract social mechanisms. If in such cases the artwork and artist remain symptomatically in-formed by certain forces at play within their particular historical milieu, the artist is simultaneously lauded as a creative and ethnographic poet, responsible for generating unique forms of 'fundamental encounter' (see Deleuze 2004c: 176; O'Sullivan 2005: 1) that coax new forms of thought into being.

For these reasons, and of relevance to this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari thus compel us – to momentarily purloin a line of thought from Guattari's patient Jacques Besse – to seek out 'the poet, not the patient', behind the mad and perverted artistic expression (see Dosse 2010: 48), especially those which challenge their reader, listener or viewer to think with the pure event of the singular-plural artwork, or else experience themselves becoming swept up in wider evental happenings (along with the artist and artwork). The minor or pervert artist here emerges as both the 'patient' and 'doctor' of their particular civilization, then, but as with clinicians, as opposed to their patients, become more likely to lend their proper names to the 'new constellations of symptoms and signs' that their *sensational* and diagnostic art makes perceptible (hence sadism and masochism) (Deleuze 1991: 16). It is in this sense that we can follow Deleuze in recognizing Masoch and Sade's oeuvres as a special type of ethnographic and anthropological territory, whereupon the clinical artist gathers together and re-arranges various signs and symptoms (and affects) in a sensual configuration, so as to make them detectible (even if not delectable) to a wider audience.

If the signs and symptoms featuring within Sade's smarting corporeal works point beyond themselves to certain in-forming quasi-causes, can the same also be claimed of Valentine's disgusting 'perverted' artworks here today? In venturing to answer this question, we might first concede that Valentine is not (yet) a 'great artist' in the traditional 'aristocratic' sense that Deleuze ascribes to Sade or Masoch. And we must also accept that Deleuze himself would not likely have valued or relished Valentine's work. However, in taking inspiration

from Deleuze's attempt to liberate Sade and Masoch's corpus 'from the stigma of perversion' (Gaudlitz 2015: 6), whilst at the same time also liberating ourselves from the Master's own aristocratic tastes, we can set out in search of the perverted poet behind Valentine's Vomit Gore films. But as we depart from Sade and his Sovereign era, we must concede that the twenty-first century has itself increasingly become an era where (erotic) 'public' spectacles of torture and execution have returned and become somewhat commonplace, and that Valentine's occult pornographic works also schizoanalytically resonate with the products and organizational logic of their own era, appearing rife with the affective economies of religious snuff, extremist torture porn and participatory slash and mash-up prosumer culture.

Valentine as Pervert S/M Poet

As historically was the case with many readers of Sade and Masoch's work, it often appears difficult for modern viewers and critics to move past heaving dismissive pathological pervert pejoratives upon Valentine's seemingly neurotic artworks (see for example the online review by The JillKill, or the Facebook group 'Lucifer Valentine Should be Raped With A Pole Wrapped In Barbed Wire'). Beyond the content of the film images themselves, there can be little doubt that such opinions are also invited by the director's public(ized) persona – particularly when he plays up to his own transgressive psychosexual personality. In one of *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice's* sundry DVD features, for instance, Valentine deploys intertitles and a deep digitally distorted satanic voice-over to introduce himself as the paraphilic creator and artist:

The 'vomit' in Vomit Gore arises from my sexuality; I am an emetophile, meaning I am sexually attracted to vomit and vomiting, specifically, I am attracted to female human beings vomiting. The first time I ever saw females vomiting in a sexual content was in Max Hardcore porn movies, which triggered in me an innate and very strong fetish for emetophilia. I am also very attracted to extreme violence and Satanic themes, as I am a Satanist, so, stylistically and thematically, those elements have greatly influenced the Vomit Gore movies I have made.

If Valentine can be understood toying with his outlandish showman-auteur persona here, the perverted artist personality becomes further amplified amidst a slew of semi-detached films and texts within and beyond *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice's* DVD upchuck. In various shock-jock interviews, for instance, he describes having incestuous sexual relations with his younger (now dead) autistic sister (and muse), whose suicide by drowning he informs us is obsessively returned to, and symbolically re-presented throughout the triptych's violent sexual torture and murder sequences. However, we might note here that beyond his own pathological distortions and traumatic (actual or virtual) childhood memories, the

erotically stylized and theatrical nature of the films' torture sequences, with their unending elevation of banal bodily passions to unsettling objects of thought, gradually serve to occult a wider economy of 'signs' and 'symptoms' that are at play. And it is these features of the Vomit Gore films that ultimately begin to trouble any overly simplistic understanding of the perverted trilogy as a purely neurotic familial art, and expose a thoughtful elevation of the post-cinematic (Shaviro 2010) or non-cinematic (see Brown 2016) audio-visual artwork to a higher degree of expression. Indeed, through creating new symptomatic articulations, novel sociotechnical patterns, and defamiliarizing modes of sensation and 'thought', Valentine's sick artworks increasingly prompt viewers to pay heed to new associations and connections.

To best illuminate the extent to which external and essential forces must be taken into account, we can briefly return to one of the key critiques levelled at Kracauer's earlier reading of the Weimar horror movies. The work of Thomas Elsaesser (2000, 2008) makes for an insightful case in point here, as it exposes how Kracauer's psychoanalytic approaches constituted a wholly inadequate 'historical imaginary', which in its 'splendid isolation' failed to account for a wider complex web of international and domestic forces – including culture and leisure industry dynamisms and a whole host of other artistic, economic and technological dimensions – that dramatically impacted the form and content of the so-called Expressionist horror films (2000: 4, 11). This political manoeuvre also helps Elsaesser expose an expanded galaxy of forces that always-already border the cinema industry and exert disorganizing and reorganizing affects/effects upon its aesthetics and apparatuses.

Elsewhere Elsaesser embraces a media archaeology method reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytic models to expose an alternative 'perverted' history of the cinema. This demands we treat film as a 'philosophical *perpetuum mobile*' (2008: 239), which must be endlessly rethought and reimagined as it becomes renewed, recomposed, resculpted and reshaped within a dynamic plane of ever-transforming forces: that ceaselessly and contingently inspire new forms and patterns of expression. Of applicability to our arguments here, Elsaesser aptly labels these distorting powers the 'S/M' forces.

These are, to list them briefly, the *scientific and medical* cinematic apparatus (on which there are some excellent books, noticeably by Lisa Cartwright (1995)); the *surveillance and military* apparatus (theorised, among others, by Paul Virillio (1989) and Friedrich Kittler (1999)); the *sensory-motor-schema* apparatus (of Gilles Deleuze's (1986; 1989) philosophy); and the sensing and monitoring apparatus (celebrated by Kevin Kelly (1999)), which speak of feedback loops, pull technologies, searchability and augmented reality.

(Elsaesser 2008: 232)

Of particular relevance to our understanding of Valentine's work is the imagistic perversions mobilized by the 'digital rupture', which, as Elsaesser observes, ignite a

movement from the perceptible towards the imperceptible, or from a world organized around ocular perception and conquest towards the invisible world of forces and fields (Elsaesser 2008: 239; see also Thomsen 2012). Such movements not only recall the opening torture sequence outlined above wherein Pig's eyeballs are gorged out, but also recollect Deleuze's notion of the modern cinema pitching its stake *behind* the eyes, in the brain. Patricia Pisters picks up on comparable movements in *The Neuro-Image*, especially in her discussions of a wider shift from a scopic or optical regime to new forms of digital imaging that increasingly operate directly on the brain and nerves. There, while striving to recalibrate Deleuze's models to better approach our contemporary digital world, Pisters argues that vision, which is always-already an embodied mental operation, appears materially articulated to a plethora of extra-somatic digital-brain-screens, which literally perform as pre-personal transductive neural conduits, to which viewers/users connect and nerve. In our present era of 'perception 2.0', then, human subjectivity evermore inhabits a 'dialethic' position (at once inside and outside) with regard to the interactive prosthetic brain-screens that everywhere surround us.

When images and screens become material-aspects of subjectivity in this way, our understanding of the interactive relationship we have with media forces us to reconsider and redraw the old comfortable distinctions between subject and object, inside and outside, human and technology, perception-conception. With respect to this, Andrew Murphy notes that although the world has always been a medium *à la* Whitehead, it has 'only recently become a technology-imposed world as medium, something it was not before. The result is a "contaminated" world, over-run with media and communications, with media technologies, networks, techniques of spin and media cycles taking over politics, and so on' (Murphy n.d.: 14). The Vomit Gore films again appear to pick up and make these ideas symptomatically palpable, particularly with regard to how they spread through networked systems. It therefore also becomes important to keep one eye on the surrounding assemblage of sociotechnical practices and economic, industrial and political machines that patently flow into and in-form the singular-plural works of this minor poetic artist. Below, I thus attempt to sketch out how modern Social Media becomes another particularly pertinent perverting 'S/M' force that factors into and pathogenically intensifies Valentine's Vomit Gore project(ile). Before this, however, we must first turn to the decidedly less modern DVD form Valentine most often employs, and pay heed to how this format too plays into and resonates with his digestive abstract diagram.

From the Digital Versatile Disc to the Digi-ested Vomit Disco

Valentine's work unequivocally exudes a 'splat pack' horror DVD ethos (see Bernard 2014), with each disk appearing chocked full of 'intra-textual' (Brown 2007) and 'cinema of interactions' (Grusin 2006: 71) features. We can recall here that the DVD – which the

director uses to enclose all three Vomit Gore packages – was, (media) archaeologically speaking, *the* digital technology that cradled and inculcated the most ‘fundamental change in the aesthetic status of the cinematic artefact’ (Grusin 2006: 76). Indeed, as expanded artistic environments, all three of Valentine’s mash-up vomit gore features arrive surrounded by a heteroclitic slew of excessive expectorate ‘splatter-texts’; the multimodal intranet upchuck of bonus features and inter-active and (inter-reactive) adjunct sputum that always-already surround the Vomit Gore films. *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls*, for instance, constitutes a nebulous DVD package that, amongst other things, contains: original Valentine cover art, a making of documentary, bonus behind the scenes footage, scanned production notes, a picture gallery, actor biographies, a ‘history of vomit gore’ package, a short bonus feature called *Self Inflicted*, multiple actor interviews, and several modulating audio tracks including commentaries by Valentine and the actress Ameara LaVey, and his producer ‘No one body’.

This format of expression at once reveals and revels in a Bataillean *informel* formlessness, which rather than being opposed or contrasted to form itself, undermines the very notion that art requires solid form (Bataille 1998: 25).¹⁰ Such dissolute collections also clearly celebrate an unbecoming of the classical film form, and as we will discover below, serve to solicit and spread ever more further flung and digitally disturbed Vomit Gore splatter-texts. By the standards of the times, of course, the DVD format already appears somewhat anachronistic. But there appears to be a message bound up in this outdated choice of medium too, which tellingly divulges a backwards and forwards looking impulse. That is, beyond commerce, Valentine’s peculiar preference for the increasingly obsolete DVD objects arguably reveal an expressive synthesis of form(at) and content, which reifies a liminal sense of technological in-betweenness, perfectly befitting the projects’ wider themes and diagrammatic obsessions. From one aspect, the digitally recorded DVD images appears quite distinct to the earlier iterations of 1980s VHS home video that appear catabolically and citationally embedded within all three Vomit Gore films. From the other perspective, we must recall how the DVD format historically inculcated interactive environmental formats that opened up ‘digital theme parks’ for their ‘users’ (as opposed to mere viewers), and which are now recognized as the technological precursors to (post-cinematic) Internet ecosystems (see Grusin 2006: 76, 78, 90; Brown 2007: 170ff).

Interestingly enough, the interactive distributed dimensions of Valentine’s DVD works likewise appear to serve one of two seemingly opposed, yet thematically and diagrammatically consistent, objectives: by either working to re-organize or re-assemble the atrophied narrative constituents tenuously linked to the situational non-narrative films,¹¹ or else to dis-organize, dis-assemble or entirely deliquesce the Vomit Gore fantasies by exposing excessive dimensions of the real that insist behind or beyond the recorded diegetic scenes. Indeed, in order to make any intellectual sense of the participatory films beyond their suspended ongoing affective torture-porn situation,

viewers/users have to actively and inter-actively gather and re-assemble disjointed morsels of Aberdeen's discombobulated biographical 'narrative' from fragments distributed across the heteroclit DVD packages, so that establishing how images and themes inter-relate with each other involves jumping around in-between the masticated films and adjunct splatter-texts, in an act that becomes comparable to trying to establish what someone ate and drank for dinner by forensically examining the contents of their sick.

From flash-backs and glossolalic dialogue caught within the films, for instance, viewers absorb that the 'lost girl' Aberdeen was sexually abused by her father as a child, that she ran away from home as a bulimic teenager, became a stripper, turned to prostitution, began using drugs and eventually committed suicide. Other free-floating biographical details are only partially dislodged or intimated, with their relevance to the story, or tone of the films, left deliberately obscured, partial or indistinct. Some of these only ever become fleshed out in the bonus features, or else via online interviews and fan videos. One important example, to which we will return to in more detail below, informs viewers/users that Aberdeen's suicide occurred on the very same day as Kurt Cobain's, which within the filmic universe results in the 'quantum entanglement' of their two tortured souls.

Other self-annihilating 'excessive' adjunct features contained in the DVD packages appear to dissolve or break apart any sense of fictional verisimilitude, by introducing concomitant and competing planes of reality, such as the actors watching the films they performed in whilst inhabiting similar hotel room non-spaces. In such sequences although the actors appear out of character, they remain the recorded subject-objects of Valentine's first-person digital camera, albeit this time answering questions about their memories and experiences of filming the docu-horror scenes rather than puking or being puked on. At a formal level, then, we can recognize how the wider dissolute DVD and interactive package is (de)composed of distributed expectorate bonus features and detached intramedia productions, which become attached, in turn, via viscous virtual strands to ever further flung online 'splatter-texts'.

If these latter drives ultimately draw out attention to a deliberate S/M dig(i)estion of the cinematic product under Valentine's direction, we must not forget that these artworks operate upon two distinct yet interleaving levels of unbecoming-ness simultaneously. Which is to say, while the form, format and distribution methods of Valentine's diabolical films react to and reify cutting edge S/M forms, at the same time the content of the Vomit Gore films remains provocatively and politically 'unbecoming' in a more vernacular sense of the term, appearing unseemly, inappropriate, unflattering or unattractive to most viewing publics and taste cultures. To best grasp why the pervert poet might combine these two different forms of material and metaphorical unbecoming, we must now move on to consider how the offensive nature of these films themselves operate as agential forces that provoke viewers to see and think differently.

Unbecoming Cinema as a Transgressive and Offensive Event

Valentine's Vomit Gore is indeed a contemporary art of the unbecoming – a disgusting cinema that triggers horrible embodied encounters, which, in turn, provoke an unbecoming (event) of thought. On account of this latter effect, the films arguably also become an ethical informe art worthy of our attention, not least by granting us the opportunity to test out Daniel Kelly's notion of 'the yuck factor', which forces us to ask 'whether or not being disgusted by something provides good reason to think it immoral or morally problematic' (Kelly 2011: 7, 137).

If, as Freud had it, beauty is intoxicating in its proximity to us, might we not in turn say that disgust is more precisely *toxicating*. Worth mentioning here is an insightful philosophical exploration into disgust by Eugenie Brinkema, wherein we are reminded that for Jacques Derrida, 'the logocentric system can accommodate, consume, and represent everything except vomit, which, nevertheless, is not the negative of the system' (Brinkema 2011: 59). Echoes here of our earlier consideration of Rozin's work, wherein finding something like vomit to be disgusting 'is to desire no commerce with it', and to place it 'beyond temptation' (Rozin 1999: 218). Even if we know as per the chapter's opening quotation that vomit blatantly does 'temp' and 'solicit' (see Brinkema 2011: 52). In this respect, while Kelly's considerations of the role of disgust on moral judgments forces him to concede that 'one group's delicacy is another group's revulsion' (Kelly 2011: 2), one instinctively feels with Valentine's Vomit Gore fans that the opposite appears to be a more fitting appraisal, in that it becomes the majority of people's revulsion that is detoured to become another group's delicacy. Certainly, by making vomit(ing) the centripetal core of his artistic universe and occult economy, Valentine appears to push his viewers' thought ethically towards the borderlands of the logocentric system. To account for comparable forms of disagreeableness in other films, Brinkema opts to introduce the notion of '*Ekel*', which can refer to a 'particular form of ugliness' that marks the very limit and borderline 'for the possibilities of the aesthetic' (Brinkema 2011: 57).

Through producing monstrous amateur films that show, and demand viewers immerse themselves in horrendous images of vomit and vomiting, Valentine becomes a *monstrator* (shower) whose outrageous works ethico-politically embrace a bio-aesthetics of Ekel toxication, pushing sick images and raw unstructured affects into viewers faces and deep into their bodies, in a manner that forces vomit upwards from the enteric nervous system towards the brain: where it is served up with disgust as a noematic food for thought. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, we might here say that the at once symptomatic-pathogenic Vomit Gore project(ile) appears to pervert, distort, but also diagnose the contemporary capitalist mega-machine: which is to say, the cultural assemblage it erects a deterritorializing line of flight away from. Deterritorialisation becomes an apt term here precisely because notions of being 'outside', 'beyond' or 'against' capitalism are highly problematic. For when inaesthetic and ethico-politics are aligned with occult economics,

the system has, as Deleuze and Guattari might say, already schizophrenically recorded its own anti-production, or reterritorialized its own deterritorializing flows. Thus, the naïve notion of being 'outside' or 'against' is immediately brought into crisis (see Deleuze and Guattari 2004a, 2004b).

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) similarly observes that in today's hyper-consumable media ecologies, any notion of being outside or 'alternative' is rendered utterly banal; always-already dished up as eroded from within, and primarily consumable qua profitable. What is more, because the rapacious mainstream media endlessly re-packages, re-brands and re-circulates the trappings and suits of previous rebellious movements (such as rock, punk, rap), the notion of being 'alternative' increasingly performs as *the* dominant style (in a fascistic recoding and reterritorialization of micropolitical revolt and failed searches for alternatives). That is, as an atrophied symbolic form of 'rebellion' that is ultimately bought and worn as a 'meaningless' affective signifier.

Valentine's disgusting pervert art offers an interesting case study with which to test Fisher's notion, especially as the form and content of his films appear to knowingly (read critically) reify an image of a civilization caught endlessly regurgitating and re-consuming its own broken-down and degraded cultural forms. Fisher's consideration of Kurt Cobain becomes particularly pertinent to this consideration of Valentine's work, especially because the Grunge singer is identified as *the* cultural icon whose life and death marched in perfect lockstep with the wider cultural move towards 'capitalist realism' (2009): an insidious system under which there is no longer any real possibility of individuals positioning themselves outside or against the dominant ideology. There, Cobain's objectless rage is rendered as a snare trap, wherein the more the singer seemingly rebelled and railed against the neoliberal system, the more popular his revolting image and videos became on MTV. In a reflection of Deleuze's control society, Cobain ultimately came to recognize that every rebellious move or rejection he made was always-already anticipated in advance, becoming pre-formed into a marketable cliché: including his problems with drugs, depression and his eventual suicide (which all served to increase the Sony corporation's profits). Cobain's sad passions and self-murder thus help expose the vile logic of contemporary capitalism, wherein even success becomes failure, 'since to succeed would only mean that you were the new meat on which the system could feed' (Fisher 2009: 9).¹²

As indicated, the Vomit Gore project(ile) reveals the spiritual entanglement of Cobain and Aberdeen (whose name is a homage to the singer's home town), or at least, it does to those who poke around in *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls's* expectorate splatter-texts, and interact with the adjunct bonus feature *Kurt Cobain forever by Lucifer Valentine*. This DVD feature characteristically opens with Valentine addressing his viewers via intertitle and his digitally distorted voice-over: 'I wrote this to help answer questions about my movies in general and also shed some light on the theme of the death of Kurt Cobain in my first two movies'. Thereafter, a multitude of metabolized images and references

(hidden in plain sight) associated with Cobain's suicide are shown to be in-mixed into the trilogy's febrile narrative broth and *mise-en-scène*. As part of their niche-sickness, the Vomit Gore films expressively and knowingly channel the 'spirit' of Cobain into the narrative's phantasmagoria, albeit catabolically breaking down and distributing his essence into the body of the oeuvre as a quasi-signaletic symptom, rather than simply re-cycling and trading in on his image as does the dominant system.¹³ In an online fan interview that reflects on Cobain's role within his films, Valentine hints at these very notions:

I do feel that the commodification of his image was something that Cobain truly dreaded and did in part contribute to his demise. To me Kurt Cobain represents a beautifully talented and fragile genius who was unable to cope with an overwhelming inner conflict of wanting to create his art, but having a crippling inability to cope with the world's consumption of that art and how that made him reflect upon himself and begin to question his own motivations for continuing to make his music. Cobain was one of the most recent rock n' roll icons to die way before his time and his death leaves me with a sense of endless sadness, which influenced the character of Angela Aberdeen in my movies as I illustrated elements of Angela and Kurt's quantum entanglement of their simultaneous suicides on April 5th 1994.

Valentine's Ekel-economy of disgust appears to knowingly inhabit and dwell in the extreme liminal border zone of a consumable system, intensifying the Grunge impulse to a *revolting* nth dimension of almost unmarketable and un-consumable yuckyness. Thus, if Cobain's pain came from becoming a commercial success, Valentine's low-brow obsession with vomit, vomiting and unsettling horror-porn helps ensure that his works cannot suffer the same forms of undesired mainstream success (read failure). That said, being deliberately disgusting or offensive is not enough to shield art from the dangers of critical success.

Indeed, amongst others William Brown, Mikita Brottman and Jeffrey Sconce all highlight a certain value in low-brow and disgusting films that are typically eschewed by 'serious' mainstream critics. And to some extent, all explore offensive marginal works that serve 'as a kind of measuring rod to help us understand the nature of whatever is respected or revered'; while concomitantly exposing their historical borderings with other systems, including contingent moral taboos and transgressions (see Brottman 2005: 2). Although Brottman's book-length enquiry into the trash-strewn gutters of B-movie horror and offensive porn remains a convincing and edifying read, her attempt to rescue or recuperate the negative and anti-mainstream remains problematic if we bear Cobain's unwilling exploitation in mind. For such civilizing approaches begin to run the risk of critically transforming what ostensibly appears designed as a negative and offensive encounter into something affirmative or positive; or of reterritorializing what is otherwise an intentionally deterritorializing drive and impulse (qua Grunge and Vomit Gore).

Thus – pace Herbert Marcuse's notion of a 'repressive tolerance' – to remain ethical we must remain vigilant against positively reading or accepting that which is intended as offensive and negative.

To reiterate, Valentine's power as a sick scatological artist is intricately bound to the offensive and unrecoverable nature of his sensationally disgusting art. We must therefore block the flow of desire that demands we salvage the truly offensive dimensions of Valentine's project, for fear of taming, or domesticating (qua castrating or Oedipalizing) that which should remain objectionable and disgusting. Sconce's Bourdieuan exploration into bad 'taste publics' and Brown's work into the disturbing non-cinema of Giuseppe Andrews can help us chart an alternative path around such pitfalls, by signposting alternative ethical forms of taste recalibration that might allow us to garner a negative 'understanding' or 'appreciation' of Valentine's work. These necessarily demand we focus our attentions upon the 'counter-aesthetic' that crystallize around otherwise sacrilegiously indescribable 'art brutarian' works (Sconce 1995: 372). Looking at 'paracinema' films such as *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Ed Wood Jr, 1959) that, like Valentine's films, overtly trade in 'excess', Sconce shows how certain 'bad' films can entice or provoke viewers into alternative forms of spectatorial attitude and appreciation. Likewise, for Brown, certain forms of low-budget, low-brow non-cinema, such as Adams's trailer park films starring drug addicts and non-professional actors, begin to demand a reorientation of viewer expectations and tastes, reminiscent of how earlier cult audiences developed their own detoured appreciations of film (see inter alia Sontag 2008; Bourdieu 2008; Jancovich 2008; Eco 2008; Brown 2016, forthcoming). In the encounter with such works, Sconce and Brown foreground how certain forms of 'excess' (such as bad acting, poor props, disjunctive editing, ridiculous illogical stories) help erode any fictional verisimilitude, simultaneously dissolving 'the boundaries of the diegesis into profilmic and extratextual realms', while puncturing the 'fourth wall', so that '[t]he "surface" diegesis becomes precisely that, the thin and final veil that is the indexical mark of a more interesting drama, that of the film's construction and sociohistorical context' (Sconce 1995: 387, 391). In these sentiments we can also locate echoes of Deleuze and Guattari's ethical notion of the evental artist activating strange and unfamiliar patterns via an encounter with their works, which trouble existing or habitual attitudes, and provoke thought and attention to shift from text to context.

We might also here briefly re-consider another common criticism levelled at Valentine's work, which argues that his repetition *ad nauseam* of images of pornographic vomiting and torture become truly boring (see for example the Jill Kill). Although we will later work to align affective feelings of boredom with a sense of pure masochistic waiting, we can take pause here to throw up another critical aspect to boredom that sees it revolt against predominating marketing and technocratic discourses. Indeed, in his essay 'Boredom', Kracauer argues that far from being something to be avoided, boredom should be something that we embrace, particularly as it is a state that harbours real

political potentials. In point of fact, for Kracauer, boredom is a necessary precondition for the birth of anything truly novel. For one thing, desiring to be constantly entertained or distracted betrays having already having succumbed to, or become territorialized by, the dominant system of consumption and spectacle. Recognition of this leads Kracauer to champion boredom, and to elevate the feeling to a positive and productive form of ‘critical refusal’, or as a means of rejecting or diverting pleasure in order to awaken people ‘to a new life’ (2002: 301, 302). For Brown, similar forms of critical refusal can be linked to the notion of *satis* (of having had enough), which amongst other things, he sees surfacing in critical expressions of satire.¹⁴ For when a culture has had enough of something (*satis*), there is evidently an excess at play, which often leads to the satirical, scornful and derisive bringing forth of crappy images of puking, fucking and shitting. Valentine’s work here paradoxically becomes at once uncommon and kinetic, and yet static and boring.

Julian Hanich’s discussion of the integration of positive and negative affects within art offers us a useful touchstone here. Indeed, Hanich demonstrates how too much of a positive thing, over time, can in and of itself begin catalysing negative affects so that just like eating ‘too much candy’, too much of the purely pleasant will inevitably ‘end in satiation and, if no change occurs, eventually turn into disgust’ (Hanich 2011: 30). Valentine’s vomit-themed torture certainly articulates disgust with boredom, in a doubly jointed rejection of what is typically perceived as marketable entertainment. At the same time, the form and content of the unbecoming project expresses and erotic and symptomalogical exhaustion *with* the tastes and practices of mainstream media consumption.

If so, Valentine harnesses disgust and boredom both as an artistic impetus and a subversive political mode of critique, which brings to the surface a deep micro-political dissatisfaction, and an express desire to transgressively evade or invert the dominant coding system. In making such claims, however, it becomes important to bear in mind how an immanent notion of transgression differs from transcendence, and should not be mistaken for a moving ‘beyond’ any fixed and stable moral limit or threshold. Rather, we must recognize a reciprocal and interleaving relationship between any taboo and its transgression, or the law and its necessary violation. In his reading of Bataille’s philosophy, for example, Foucault makes comparable claims, and warns us against adopting dyadic models that systematize taboo and transgression by erecting false relationals or binaries such as ‘black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces’ (Foucault 1977: 35). Contra these, Bataille and Foucault see transgression amounting to a spiralling movement comparable to a Nietzschean *return*, ‘which no simple infraction can exhaust’ (Foucault 1977: 35). Transgression and taboo here become codetermining concepts, so that instead of denying the taboo, the transgression ultimately realizes and completes it. Accordingly, the primary act of banning or forbidding serves primarily to beautify that which it denies access to, and ensures that satisfaction can only be realized in the act of transgressing or violating

the taboo (see Bataille 1998: 51–56). For adequately describing the evental nature of a transgressive act, Foucault accordingly adopts a useful horror metaphor that we can intercept here:

Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes the dark the stark clarity of its manifestations, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity.

(Foucault 1977: 35)

Foucault thus asks, if lightning's zigzagging path and line of flight allow us to perceive everything around it differently or afresh, is the same not also true of the evental artwork? From this immanent vantage, any transgressive act whatever, including making/viewing a deliberately disgusting film, like the flash of lightning, could be conceived as a fleeting-flowing event, or a twisting becoming (or unbecoming) that reveals only 'that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin' (Foucault 1977: 33–34). For both Bataille and Foucault alike then, it becomes 'likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses' (33).

In Valentine's tarrying of pathogenic-symptom (vomit and vomiting) and critical-diagnosis, we must recognize how his sick sequences do not so much cross some rigid prohibited line, but rather serve to heighten and re-articulate similarly grotesque symptoms and scenarios always-already present in the surrounding culture. No doubt, occasional acts of vomit consumption will be quite familiar to fans of *Jackass* (the television and film franchise, 2000–2014) or the *Jim Rose Circus* (1993–) for example. Valentine's particular penchant for erotic emetophilic torture can also be understood as intensifying repulsive film sequences found in *Audition* (*Ôdison*, Takashi Miike, 1999) and *A Hole in My Heart* (*Ett hål i mitt hjärta*, Lukas Moodysson, 2004). The extreme pornographic elements of eroticized torture and abject sexual humiliation can also be mapped alongside the ubiquitous realms of BDSM and gonzo fetish pornography increasingly found online, and which Valentine says helped shape or in-form his own paraphilic sexuality.

Such schizoanalytic considerations highlight how the Vomit Gore films do not so much trespass over any well-policed moral boundaries, but rather immanently recast extant taboo-transgression axes and symptomatological vectors operating within the modern media culture. We might thus claim (à la Foucault and Deleuze) that Valentine's transgressive films simply light up and recast the dark cultural backcloth they criss-cross from within, at the same time as they poetically re-organize, re-arrange and re-articulate extant signs and symptoms in a new or novel fashion. Albeit while granting them new textures, shapes and

meanings within the confines of a marginal horror genre evolution that ignites febrile forms of metaphysical thinking.

Minor Horror: Experimental Evolution

For Deleuze, a minor artist is one that creates 'new forms of expression, ways of thinking and feeling and an entirely original language' whilst embracing and releasing 'a whole conception of man, culture and nature' (Deleuze 1991: 16). In arguing for Valentine's credentials as a minor artist, we must account for the form and content of his creative work and visions. In the first instance, Valentine is certainly an artist that many, including himself, recognize as having created a new form of horror. When asked about his Vomit Gore work in an online interview, for example, the director tellingly states that:

Vomit Gore is the name of a sub-genre of extreme underground gore movies that I invented and the name of the style of the first three movies in this genre within what is known as the Vomit Gore Trilogy. However, the term 'Vomit Gore', to me, represents my ability as an artist to literally do anything I want, in any extreme form, with total irreverence for any norms, conventions or pre-conceived notions of the structures of the so-called 'rules of filmmaking', no matter how absurd, grotesque, over the top, ludicrous, twisted, dark, abstract, surreal, perverted, nonsensical, random and cinematically destructive and annihilatory [sic] it may be, with absolutely no hesitation or self-doubt, in order to express an intrinsic child-like feeling of manic creative violence and personal darkness. (I rip through paper with crayons.)

(Valentine in Farmer 2014)

Approaching the novel sub-genre as an excessively disjunctive and dis-organizing body of work allows us to recognize several moments within the films where Valentine forces different forms of visual 'excess' to counteract each other in a decisively acrid act of dissolvent-dialectics. Here, the engineered encounter between excessive stylistics on the one hand and excessively realist impulses on the other combines to catalyse dis-organizing and deterritorializing chain-reactions that are self-annihilating or mutually destructive in nature. By further combining, or articulating these apparently self-destructive modes, Valentine emerges as a diabolical experimenter of forms who all the same remains consistent to his sick and digestive abstract diagram. Steve Jones sees similar aspects at work within Valentine's project(ile), recognizing form and content working in synthesis to communicate complex meaning and affect. Valentine's amateur hand-held camera indexes an excess of profilmic non-actors (porn performers and semi-professionals) in non-spaces (such as hotel rooms, toilets and bedrooms) in a way that grants the film a distinct 'realist' quality, for example, yet at the same time the overall filmic 'form is dominated by contrasting non-realist modes':

Blank white studio spaces are occasionally occupied. Unexpected imagery such as microscope-based sperm and ovum stock footage interrupts the action [...]. Slow motion, distortion, and coloured filters are employed, as are radical shifts between natural light, torchlight, and stark over-lighting. The sound is frequently detached from the images, and includes children laughing, low demonic growls, pitch-shifted voices, and reverse singing. The editing is rapid, intercutting between these modes. The result is an audio-visual onslaught.

(Jones 2013: 176–177)

The inventive digestive- or dissolvent-dialectical forms help expose the experimental expressions of an anti-mainstream minor artist, actively involved in perverting existing conventions and industry standards. Valentine's choppy and abrasive editing technique also excessively intensifies and surpasses the rapid forms familiar to MTV and advertising conventions. So much so, in fact, that one begins to sense that the extreme masticated style is itself related to the project's larger association with digestion. Germane to this, Brown recalls that the etymology of *edit* traces its roots back to the Latin for 'he eats',¹⁵ which, as the first step in the digestive process, appears fitting to Valentine's masticated piecemeal editing style and his mash-up ethico-politics.

Taking a Deleuzian approach to Valentine's films can also help explain how these formal and stylistic experimentations help actively defamiliarize and reorganize genre conventions at a different scalar level. From such a vantage, Amy Herzog shows how genres themselves can be re-imagined as emergent and contingent assemblages, within which any given film might exhibit 'productive functions' capable of detouring or de-stabilizing the extant category, ostensibly serving to remake and unmake what came before. Novel or experimental genre films in particular become eventful in nature, displaying an ability to launch new and unexpected patterns or forms which, if particularly world-shattering, popular or pleasing, will 'provide the foundation for counter rhythms and deviations' (Herzog 2012: 140). Film here emerges as a type of desiring-machine, which, as Simon O'Sullivan argues, displays 'a kind of schizophrenia' that actively promotes 'the scrambling of existing codes – or the setting up of autonomous codes that operate independently of any social coding' (O'Sullivan 2005: 25).

One of the ways in which Valentine's anti-mainstream films modify, or pervert, existing horror patterns can be located in their unmaking and remaking of contemporaneous 'torture-porn' themes and motifs. To explain how, though, we must now explicate, and complicate 'everyday' understandings of what both 'porn' and 'torture' mean within this postmodern portmanteau mode.

Symptomatological Torture-Porn

To begin with the first part of the 'torture-porn' conceptual convergence first, we can commence by noting how in relation to other commonly listed contemporaneous

torture-porn titles – such as *Saw* (2004) or *Hostel* (2005) – Valentine’s works *are* actually pornographic, in that they capture and render graphically on-screen authentic acts of consensual sexual behaviour – including BDSM scenarios, images of vaginal penetration, lesbian sex, Roman showers, Golden showers, menophilia, spit swapping and bestiality.¹⁶

With regard to pornographic modes, however, Jones observes that prior to the nineteenth century, pornography predominantly performed as a politically subversive and critical (art)form, or as a marginal mode of social critique that provided a rare space to work through ‘cultural anxieties over sexuality, gender, race, and class’ (Garlick in Jones 2013: 185). As we have already seen, Deleuze recognized Masoch and Sade as revolutionary ‘pornological’ writers, whose erotic novels sexualized history in order to ‘literally and imaginatively [...] turn the law upside down’ (Gaudlitz 2015: 15). If then, qua Kracauer and Wood (et al.), we can recognize horror being to the twentieth century what pornography was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, then we might argue that torture-porn reveals a converging and spiralling return of both these critical modes in the twenty-first century. Incontrovertibly, Valentine’s ‘taboo-flouting sex-violence combinations’ (Jones 2013: 185) make a distinctly masochistic form of pornographic viewing evident, which recalls and recasts Steven Shaviro’s notion of the participatory encounter with horror images: wherein it becomes clear that: ‘I do not have power over what I see, I do not even have, strictly speaking, the power to see; it is more that I am powerless not to see’ (Shaviro 1993: 48). When discussing similar vectors of Valentine’s horror, and recalling Agamben’s biopolitical writing above, Jones notes how the ‘acts of urination, vomiting, and bleeding’ to which viewers are subjected are *truly* pornographic, ‘inasmuch as they render the body’s inner secrets visible’, at the same time as their ‘sex-violence convergences’ act to open up the human body in an ‘unlimited fashion’ for a decisive ‘pornographic gaze’ that grips audiences in a state of simultaneous fascination and repulsion – the subjective experience of which means that although ‘we cannot bear to look’, we somehow ‘cannot stop looking’ (Jones 2013: 184).

By combining fetish pornography with extreme images of torture-horror in this way, Valentine’s films shock and affect viewers in unusual and unanticipated ways, creating unsettling sensual patterns and associations that solicit the body and brain to search for meaning, arguably located outside of the films and DVDs themselves. If the perverse and perverting powers of the pornographic are intensified or compounded in Valentine’s films in comparison to other mainstream torture-porn titles, what of their ‘thinking’ of torture? Paying attention to this theme again serves to reveal the sheer ubiquity of torture images appearing within and across different forms of contemporaneous media. As an inroad into these myriad discussions, we might pick up on the views of Slavoj Žižek regarding the now (in)famous leaked photos of American troops torturing and sexually humiliating Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. By approaching these through his renowned (Lacanian) inverted-perspective, Žižek ultimately argues that, far from being

shocking revelations of something exceptional, hidden and forbidden, these images of torture more precisely reveal the real gears of contemporary American culture (145–149). That is to say, violence, hazing and ritualized humiliation are dished out as an 'everyday' right of passage in manifold US institutions.¹⁷ By intensifying the more symbolic or mundane shaming practices found in colleges, universities and military organizations, the Abu Ghraib pictures cast a distorted reflection of the wider cultural matrix. Taking a schizoanalytic approach to the same images, Patricia Pisters arrives at similar conclusions, albeit seeing the Abu Ghraib images as reflecting the culture's bottom-up 'collective' unconscious: wherein the torture and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners emerges as an 'antidote' to the 'humiliating images' of the collapsing World Trade Centre (Pisters 2012: 295).

Both these ideas find strong connections with Alfred W. McCoy's comparative survey of torture images appearing in mainstream media before and after 9/11. In the first place, McCoy observes that real depictions and fictional representations of torture dramatically increased in the wake of the tragic Manhattan events. The abrupt upsurge in volume – from around 20 per annum in the pre 9/11 world to well over 150 in the decade after – helps pull into focus a disturbing interleaving of 'state practice and public displays of torture' upon American (and therefore global) screens (see McCoy 2012: 133). Alongside this striking increase in quantity, McCoy also observes a distressing transmutation in the qualitative nature and meanings of these images of torture. For increasingly, he argues,

[t]hrough the invisible tendrils that tie media to the modern state, US television networks broadcast hundreds of hours of popular television dramas [...] portraying torture as effective, even exciting, video games with elaborate torture scenarios proliferated, and major Hollywood films featured graphic torture scenes. Surveying the most popular of the displays indicates, moreover, that there was a progressive coarsening of representation, with ever more explicit violence paralleling the [Bush] administration's increasingly overt embrace of torture. By the time Bush left office in late 2008, screens large and small across America were saturated with torture simulations, conducting an ad hoc mass indoctrination of the public into a belief in the efficacy of torture – a sordid, even repulsive practice whose ugly reality was softened by its eroticised representation.

(McCoy 2012: 126)

Recognizing this same titillating eroticization of torture led David Edlestein to coin the neologism 'torture porn' in the first place, a label which, as Aston and Walliss point out, although a 'reductive term', became a 'useful synecdoche' that critics and scholars 'predictably latched onto and exploited' (Aston and Walliss 2013; see also Middleton 2010; Zimmer 2011).

If we bear in mind the historical role of both pornography and horror discussed above, we might take pause to reflect that an eroticization of torture is not necessarily a troubling or new phenomenon. What is more, we would also do well to distinguish between a sadistic and masochistic pole of the pornological eroticization and politicization of torture. To a similar end, Michael Flynn and Fabiola F. Salek expose how in a marked historical shift, the majority of post 9/11 media tended to employ narrative conventions to situate viewers evermore on the side of the torturer rather than the victim. As a result, unlike the majority of twentieth-century torture depictions where viewers were typically invited to identify with the victim, the majority of twenty-first-century representations abandoned a 'fear of torture' to instead drive home the 'necessity', and indeed 'joy', of these 'illegal' acts (Flynn and Salek 2012: 3). If audiences were increasingly becoming encouraged to politically, emotionally and ethically side with the 'messianic' torturer,¹⁸ Flynn and Salek expressed fears that these images signalled 'the gangrene of illegality' setting in, and a poisoning of the entire cultural system (Flynn and Salek 2012: 10–12). Valentine's sick pornological art certainly resonates with such an image, and can be imagined symptomatically spurting forth from a sick, poisoned and gangrenous body politic, being at once a symptom of the poisoning, and a pathogenic poisoner at the same time. In this way, at least, Valentine's torture porn finds itself in accordance with other famous titles in the genre.¹⁹

In both *Torture Porn: Popular Horror after Saw* (2013) and *Selling the Splat Pack: The DVD Revolution and the DVD Horror Film* (2015), Jones and Bernard respectively problematize the exclusively national reading of such arguments, by amongst other things, pointing to the trans-generic, transnational and international realities of many so-called torture-porn productions (which include titles drawn from pre-9/11 Japanese horror films, European art-house movies, DVD markets etc.). As indicated, Valentine's films are included in Jones's wider 'torture-porn' category (but not Bernard's splat pack group), albeit as marginal and extreme low-brow trans-national (Canadian-American) cross-sector DVD productions, quite different from *Saw* and *Hostel*. And yet, quite unlike these high-budget commercial theatrical releases, Valentine's amateur work appears decidedly less allegorical of their times, and are far better understood as resonating *with* and against their poisoned and sick cultural moment; or as being designed to infect or turn viewers' stomachs in order to turn the sick extant libidinal economies on their head. This is to say, the sick and darkly satirical body of work appears to make a political statement, while proving that those who are poisoned can also perform as the 'poisoners', and can create sick agential artworks that can themselves 'act as poisons and toxins' within the larger cultural body (Deleuze 1988: 340). To better understand these unique dimensions of the Vomit Gore films, however, we must now turn to the inter-subjective (trans-kingdom) forms of 'in the gut' thinking they provoke in viewers, and consider how these raw affective forces help *elevate* vomit and digestion to an abject food for thought.

Masochistic Bodies without Organs and Enteric Brain Screens

Although Valentine is a self-confessed sadist, we must stop short of uncritically forcing a Sadistic label onto the Vomit Gore films, or indeed the erotic viewing positions or pornological outlooks they extend to their viewers. For one thing, against exclusive intellectual identification with the active sadistic monster (and their mastering gaze over a victim), we can detect a characteristic modular dissonance at play within Valentine's work. This arrives courtesy of the viewer being allowed to 'sympathetically' inhabit both the torturer and victim positions during viewing. On first flush, the power and forcefulness of the film-maker and torturer on the one hand, and the compliance of the viewer and victim on the other highlight that this may be an asymmetrical power structure built into Valentine's films. This even appears to become poetically actualized on-screen during *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls*' most outlandish and protracted torture sequence, where we discover a (rare) male victim bound to a chair by his sadistic torturer (Hank Skinny). During this sick session, the cannibalistic tormentor saws his passive and immobile captive's skull open, before dining out on his living victim's brains. Somewhat predictably, Skinny thereafter begins inducing himself to vomit, throwing up the masticated semi-digested cerebral-meat back into his prey's empty skull; and all over the camera's lens for good measure. On a representational level, and in an act of artistic *mise en abyme*, the torturer might here be read as a surrogate for Valentine, and the seated captivated victim a more passive and subjugated spectator, who like the viewer beyond the screen has violence done to their brain and body. However, if such a reading might at first appear to align viewers with the victim, we might temper this uni-directional reading by noting how spectators also gag and convulse *sympathetically* with the spewing torturer as the theatrical post-mortem dismemberment continues. Recognition of this immediately contrasts the art of sadism, which demands the exclusive engagement with the victim position, and offers viewers (or readers) a limited or partial reflexive position upon torture and the torturer. Contra this, the Vomit Gore films reveal a heteroglossic (albeit asymmetrical) nature, wherein molecular sadistic affects work in tandem to amplify the raw affective powers of, what are in essence, over-the-top spectacles of torture and humiliation.

Here, it becomes clear that Valentine's overtly exaggerated and intellectual *mise-en-scène* exposes a more masochistic ethico-aesthetic vector. For as Deleuze reminds us, although sadism and masochism remain united in their binding together of *thanatos* and *eros*, masochism alone displays the phantasmagorical theatrical quality: 'for the art of masochism is the art of fantasy' (Deleuze 1991: 55, 66). In such senses, Valentine's Vomit Gore project(ile) clearly invites bi-lateral maso-sadistic forms of viewer participation and interaction, even if the sadistic auteur persona acts within the film as an amplifying molecular qualia and *cruelly* intensive force.

Furthermore, and above all else, Deleuze maintains that the primary difference between sadism and masochism is bound up in feelings of suspense, delay and waiting. For the ultimate masochistic desire, he contends, is to experience 'waiting in its pure form'

(Deleuze 1991: 71). In Masoch's literature, characters enter into a system of pure waiting by first signing a 'contract of submission' with their torturer, which ensures their future punishment. The nameless protagonist of *Venus im Pelz/Venus in Furs* (2000 [1870]) even enters into a doubly indentured form of 'waiting'; at once signing a contract that ensures he wait for something physical, and also a literal serving contract, through which he must wait upon his mistress (as is indicated by the notion of being a waiter, a lady in waiting, or simply waiting on someone hand and foot). With regard to the former, the suffering guaranteed by this contract, although acute, is essentially a cruelty the masochist inflicts upon himself or herself. Again, as intimated, and in contradistinction to sadism, masochism allows for the schizoid engagement with 'two rhetorical positions simultaneously: taking up, or pretending to take up, the position of victim and slipping into the position of torturer, however as the torturer of self' (Gaudlitz 2015: 10).

This model of the torturer of the self certainly fits with the willing viewer of sensational horror DVDs. The notion of waiting is compounded in both Masoch and Valentine by delineating the masochist fantasy as a series of static tableaux. In Valentine's work, this is echoed by Aberdeen's afterlife position in a kind of modulating spiritual purgatory, wherein she repeatedly returns to the same primal fantasy scene of torture and puking. Consider in this light Ronald Bogue's discussion of a masochistic art, wherein what we repeatedly encounter is 'a scene of perpetual movement, but one that goes nowhere, a staging of a situation rather than an unfolding of actions that result from decisions, consequences, counteractions, external events, and so on' (Bogue 2012: 110). Within and across all three of Valentine's films, the stilled staged tableau of the emetophilic masochist fantasy is subjected to an on-going exercise in repetition with difference.

The signing of the contract again plays a key role in stilling and staging the fantasized future, at the same moment as it serves to evacuate or sensationally suture the 'before' and 'after' of an now inexorable futural *event*. Or stated differently, the generation of suspense marked by the masochistic contract becomes tied to what Patricia MacCormack specifically calls a temporalized desire 'to be after', whereby a powerful affect already begins to work upon the lived present from the untimely vantage of the future: 'To be *after*, to seek something that comes after, after the wait, after the suspense, necessitates a temporal trajectory of a future imagined, and thus somewhat established in the present' (MacCormack 2008: 44). As Deleuze renders it, suspense is intensely experienced, elevated to physical and spiritual plenitude, in a subversive manner designed to interrupt the link between desire and pleasure, 'so that the constitution of desire as a process must ward off pleasure, [and] repress it to infinity' (Deleuze 1992: 53). Here, and as Gaudlitz points out, masochistic desire literally transforms the body 'into a network of suspended nerves halted in the position of expectation, being neither alive nor dead, but rather a body without organs' (Gaudlitz 2015: 12). Far from being a perverted 'syndrome of suffering', then, masochism more pointedly becomes associated with sensational 'bodily experimentation' articulated to eroticism, mysticism, and becomings (Gaudlitz 2015: 7).

Of specific consequence to Valentine's films, Brinkema outlines feelings of disgust operating in similar terms, with it too becoming a powerful sensation that is in and of itself '*ever about-to-arrive*' (Brinkema 2011: 60, emphasis added). Hanich, in turn, offers us two different temporal experiences of being disgusted that help draw out yet more shared vectors with the masochist fantasy and desires. The first type of disgust response can be understood as a 'sudden caesura', which we find plenty of in the Vomit Gore films, as when we see Hank Skinny vomiting into his victim's open mouth. Here, our hair-trigger disgust system is automatically activated. The other disgust response becomes 'anticipatory' in nature (Hanich 2011: 14), and parallels the feelings of masochistic suspension by serving to tinge 'the pre-outcome phase' (Hanich 2011: 14–16). That is, if we strongly anticipate being disgusted – as viewers of Vomit Gore must invariably do – 'we are *already* disgusted to a certain degree' (16). In such instances, and recalling the experiences of the indentured masochist, the foreknowledge of being disgusted by a Vomit Gore film catalyses 'a backward effect upon the present' (Hanich 2011: 16), leading viewers to feel a muted version of a futural qualified feeling or emotion. What becomes important to stress is that viewers of Vomit Gore, who anticipate with both of their brains (that is, the embodied brain-mind and the gustatory cortex) 'don't simply *think* about future possibilities' but rather they also '*feel* future possibilities' (Hurton in Hanich 2011: 16). The opening of *Slow Torture Puke Chamber* – whose title is itself indicative of waiting and suspense – makes these ideas palpable, and can help illuminate how Valentine's viewers become indentured to the Vomit Gore images through disgust anticipation and a quasi-contractual arrangement with the film.

The movie opens with a black frame, audibly scored with disturbing and distorted sound effects that assault the ears and nerves with discordance and loudness. Thereafter, text fades up under the heading: 'DISCLAIMER from Hope Likens'. The words are thereafter read aloud by Likens, the amateur-star of the film, whose disembodied voice becomes layered over the futzed soundtrack of a home-movie, already familiar to viewers of earlier instalments of the trilogy:

Hello, this is Hope Likens speaking, today's date is May 20th 2010. I am an actor and I play the lead role of Angela Aberdeen in the movie you are about to see. I would like to state that the following movie is a collaborative art project between myself and the director Lucifer Valentine that I willingly took part in for a period of two and a half years. During the production of this movie, I signed performer contracts at the beginning of each day of shooting, and was informed and agreed to the contents and subject matter of each shoot prior to filming [...].

The subsequent screen contains more text, which is gradually offset by frictional sounds that overwhelm Likens' voice. After several excruciating minutes of these uncomfortable sonic reverberations and legalistic ramblings, an unvoiced warning reads:

The following movie contains frequent graphic gory and violent scenes. Nudity and sexual themes. The material contained herein will definitely offend most viewers. Proceed at your own risk. Not suitable for anyone under the age of 18. All performers in the following movie are consenting adults and are 18 years of age or older. For more information please see the 'making of' documentary as part of the extra features.

By indulging in this prolonged formal reading of a legalistic 'document' and disclaimer as a prelude to offensive libertine debauchery, this opening arguably establishes a Sadean trope. By the same token, the excruciating details (the date, the proper names, the duration, the places we can check) appear designed to prolong, delay and heighten the anticipatory anxiety regarding the 'authentically' disgusting images viewers are about to bear witness to (the film as a document of real sexual events). Likens's reading of the contract also forces thought and associations to dart forward in a masochistic manner, to anxiously anticipate what is in store for both the actor and ourselves as participatory witnesses.²⁰ Why does this film, unlike the other two, need a disclaimer? How offensive can these images be (in comparison to what we have already seen)?

Beyond their obvious Faustian evocations of making a deal with the devil, the actress's discussion of signing contracts with the Satanic director also disclose masochism's exclusive semiotics of 'imperatives, contracts, fetishism and language games', which likewise ensure futural affections of (dark) 'humour, gaming and the suffocating splendour of masochist scenarios' (Gaudlitz 2015: 3). In contrast to Masoch's excessive fantasies, though, which were effectively voided of realistic details so that the fiction could 'erode' reality from within (see Gaudlitz 2015: 9), Valentine appears to actualize a diametrically opposed trope with this opening: diabolically employing legalistic measures to foreground an excess of the documentary real that dissolves the theatrical and mythical masochistic fantasies from the inside. On one level, this corrosive and self-annihilating dialectical effect serves to immediately separate out Likens and Aberdeen, 'before' the film-fantasy even gets under way. Which is to say, the reading of the contract immediately works to unbutton the actor and character (who is herself split up and divided into different archetypes, and played by different actors within and between the films) so that each arrive on-screen already divided. Pace Friedrich W.J. von Schelling's definition of the 'uncanny', this becomes specifically related to a bringing to light of that which ought to have remained hidden (see Brottman 2005: 12); the repressed or typically hidden reality that subsists 'beneath' the thin veil of the horror-fantasy sequences (and needs to be disavowed to 'enjoy' the masochistic fantasy). Likens's address to the viewer here destabilizes the potential for a successful masochistic fantasy (or theatricality), then, undermining the viewer's ability to comfort themselves during particularly disturbing or disgusting sequences by reminding themselves that 'it's not real; it's just pretend; or it's just a film'.

Of course, this irruptive notion of a pornographic 'real' or 'authentic' is always-already tempered by a certain degree of cognitive dissonance. For the viewer is easily able to distinguish between different planes of 'reality' and 'belief'. The prosthetic baby carved out

of the womb and put into a blender is not 'real', we know, but at the same moment, the bloody and meaty baby gore-shake that is chugged by the torturer is (for we can see the human actor struggling to choke it down), as is the actor's regurgitation of said meaty-puke-shake into his fictional victim's womb cavity, and then his actual co-star's tasting mouth. On one level, the fantasy is a sick and violent one, but also simultaneously, authentic emetophilic pornography, which unleashes really sick images of actual puking and erotic torture. And this point is worth teasing out. For alongside the sensational gut-wrenching feelings of suspense, shock and horror, Valentine's films also impress viewers with intimate erotic and sexual forms of corporeal experience. These forces, in particular, not only trouble existing sexual categories and identities at a representational level, but metacinematically point towards an unholy union of *bios*, *zoe* and *technics*.

In attempting to understand the erotic-sensational masochistic forms of feeling-looking experienced by viewers of Valentine's films, and the ethical forms of becoming-different they might trigger, it helps to briefly return to the Deleuze-inspired materialist work of Steven Shaviro, Anna Powell, Barbara M. Kennedy and Patricia MacCormack who, amongst others, help us to perceive the creative and affirmative aspects of such erotic encounters. In the first instance, viewing here becomes recognized as 'mental encounter made through the viscera', and a 'sensorial and mental experience' that is processed 'corporeally as well as conceptually' (Powell 2007: 4, 100). Such intimate, embodied and enfolded models highlight the raw participatory 'primacy of corporeal affect' (Powell 2005: 2), and expose how inaeesthetic or *bio-aesthetic* (Kennedy 2002: 28) forces impact the viewer's body, making it feel and do things. For Shaviro, the 'captivated' horror viewer, in particular, provides us with the epitomic fan base that desires to come into contact with 'masochistic, mimetic, tactile and corporeal' imagistic forces (1993: 56). These modes of looking expose an 'obsessive passivity' and betray a desire for an 'alien interest' to force itself into and upon them (Shaviro 1993: 50, 49). That is, through a kinetic and masochistic trans-kingdom tryst of human and technology (Shaviro 1993: 25, 49, 63).

Here, the assemblage of body, brain and presubjective forces (light, colour, sound, editing) demonstrates an erotics that escapes 'normal' framings, not least because it is the affect of inhuman images that become erotically desired (rather than what they represent). It was for similar reasons that masochism was recognized as an art of 'becoming-animal' for Deleuze, and revealed an escape from the normal molar framings of thought, action and perception. And it is to these processes that we must now turn our attention.

Valentine's Becoming-Animal: Becoming-Vampyreuthis?

Valentine's work, although clearly indexing a maso-sadistic (viewer-film) tryst, more precisely helps expose the abominable union of sex and death. In particular, it is through the Vomit Gore project's molecular affinities with animals, which feature heavily throughout the films, that this truth becomes most recognizable. We might recall here that for Spinoza,

because animals necessarily bring death to each other, they are useful for foregrounding the overtly external character of death. Or as Deleuze expounds it, unlike humans, animals do not carry death within, nor have they ‘invented that internal death, the universal sadomasochism of the tyrant slave’ (Deleuze 1988: 12). Prima facie, the most prominent beasts in Valentine’s work – insects, arachnids and molluscs (particularly cephalopods) – appear employed to amplify feelings of fear and disgust. The appearance of cephalopods in particular appear most germane to the wider corpus, though, appearing to operate as a totem animal for the project: becoming emblematic of the film’s violent inhuman politics and philosophy. *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice* makes this most overt, for beyond Valentine creating a crayon drawing of an amorphous octopus for the DVD cover art, the film’s most protracted and theatrical torture scene features an eight-limbed co-joined female twin-creature, and a sick male torturer named Octopuke (Hank Skinny): who wears a dead octopus on his head as a grotesque judge’s wig. On one level, the slimy octopus is obviously employed as an affective force, which contributes its alien gelatinous form to the film’s wider Ekel-economy. Certainly, as Vilém Flusser argues, because octopi are animals that appear to inhabit a superficially polarized position within human beings’ imagined biological hierarchy (wherein skeletal creatures are normalized and thought to hold the upper ground), these slimy boneless creatures basically instil feelings of disgust in us (Flusser 2012: 11). However, Valentine’s fascination with the octopus appears to transcend merely deploying it as a ‘disgusting’ prop, as one of the film’s alternative commentary streams makes clear. There, the director discusses becoming fascinated by these sea creatures, which he calls aquatic ‘chameleons’ or ‘changelings’, that fluidly change their shape, texture, colour and form at will. Demonstrating certain animalistic vectors connecting these creatures to the wider Vomit Gore project, Valentine here tellingly says to his producer (aptly named ‘No one body’) and viewers: ‘Our movies in general are like the octopus’.

Octopi here emerge as the perfect metonymic creature for Valentine’s films. On the one hand (although arguably unknown to the director), the physiognomy of aquatic mollusc reveals clear poetic resonances with Valentine’s obsessive bulimic re-organ-ization of the human body within his films. Specifically with regard to the erotic/schematic mouth-anus re-articulation discussed earlier. On the other hand, the creature’s inhuman modes of communication and transversal interaction also begin to reveal strange immanent resonances with the Vomit Gore project and its fans. However, in order to validate these outlandish claims somewhat, we can engineer a productive encounter between Valentine’s cruel Artaudian BwO, Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent models of becoming-animal, and the biophilosophical work of Flusser, the visionary technological philosopher. Together, this triangulation can help demonstrate how Valentine’s violent inhuman art makes palpable a shimmering molecular vibration passing across ‘the plane of consistency’, at once in-between our present sociotechnical universe of digital brain-screens, and the dark deep-sea world of squid and octopi.

First, recall that for Deleuze and Guattari, the human being is first and foremost understood in terms of an immanently embedded form of being, which they describe in

terms of shifting sedimentalized territories, or machinic assemblages, through which desire flows. Over time, the body and brain renew and reformulate themselves by making ongoing connections, articulations and disarticulations, with a surrounding rhizomatic web of surrounding forces, fields and flows of matter and energy. Replacing fixed notions of 'beings' and 'identity' with flowing models of becomings (and unbecoming) thus demands we shift our attention away from that which is stable and familiar, and focus instead upon the contingent borderings embedding the human at any given moment: or towards the various *fibres* that historically cross-over these thresholds, establishing 'lines of flight' or escape. Deleuze and Guattari adumbrate a quasi-hierarchy, or cascading range of enmeshed and interleaving thresholds through which all human becomings necessarily pass. These are arranged upon a 'plane of consistency', and outlined in terms of becoming-woman (the initial departure point from the historical 'man' standard), becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, becoming-particles, becoming-imperceptible. All these strata are ultimately entangled, however, and all becomings and unbecomings spiral through or zigzag across these various plateaus. As Cliff Stagoll clarifies, rather than pointing to notions of fixed or essential beings, final products, or even an interim stage, these processual models highlight 'the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state' (2010: 26).

In a provocative text that recalls these immanent models described by Deleuze and Guattari, Flusser works to expose certain animal practices that (re)surface within the modern mediated western habitus. In *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis: A Treatise* (2012), Flusser speculatively writes about the culture, aesthetics, philosophy and art of a unique and elusive cephalopod that dwells in the deepest darkest abysses of the Earth's ocean, and which is more commonly known as the Vampire Squid from Hell. There, Flusser blends a Heideggerian notion of 'being in the world' with a Spinozian-esque model of a mind-body parallelism, to first show how our human mode of being sedimentalizes (and sentimentalizes) around our upright bipedal skeletal frame, its vertical bilateral symmetry (which forces us to lateralize our environment), the arrangement of our forward-facing stereoscopic eyes (that are pointed to an enlightened terrestrial horizon) and our possession of opposable thumbs. In assemblage, the configuration of these various parts and attributes results in certain forms of extended and embodied spatio-temporal perception and gestalt thought. Flusser thereafter attempts to escape these all too human ways of thinking by speculatively inhabiting an alternative squid-like mode of being – configured around a boneless gelatinous creature's body-brain, which is defined by an aggregated nerve-net intelligence that organizes itself around a mollusc foot, which is also a 'cerebralized' mouth and anus (2012: 28–9).

Throughout his biophilosophical treatise, Flusser imagines the divergent forms of 'art', politics and philosophy that would necessarily result from this inhuman mode of being, and creatively speculates upon the inter-subjective relations the creature would have with its mates, rivals, predators and prey. Initially, Flusser paints *Vampyroteuthis* as a kind of perverted inverse mirror of the contemporary human, albeit a valuable opposite

that helps us to better understand ourselves. The Vampire Squid is finally shown not to be our opposite at all though, but in fact a forgotten distant ancestor, who still lurks deep within the recesses of our hominid psyche. What is more, the squid's immanent mode of being remains molecularly entangled with, and re-emerges from within our present mediated culture. Of primary importance here is Flusser's understanding of the squid's art of display and deception, which arrive courtesy of its various abilities to change its form, shape, texture and pattern at will, especially through secreting bioluminescent chromatophore pigments upon its body's surface, so that it can inter-subjectively attract, affect, hypnotize, deceive, distract, shock, startle and confuse other marine animals in the pitch blackness.

When originally writing in the 1980s, Flusser argued that video technologies and emerging digital imaging practices had begun to reveal a dark 'return' of the squid's art and politics within advanced cultures. In somewhat anticipating Lev Manovich's descriptions of the ontology of digital media (2001), Flusser describes the squid's animated bioluminescent skin art as a form of painting in time, which the animal uses to inter-subjectively communicate with others. In her updated parsing of Flusser's arguments, N Katherine Hayles (2014) similarly becomes fascinated by the immanent parallels emerging between Vampyroteuthis' transpiercing inter-subjective bio-aesthetics and our more modern sociotechnical use of digital imaging technologies and liquid crystal displays.

Of particular interest to Valentine's digital artworks, Flusser describes how the squid is constantly driven to create new artistic patterns and novel affects to help it inter-subjectively seduce mates, in a manner that distantly recalls Deleuze and Guattari's picture of the minor artist. For reasons we do not have time to critique or engage with here, Flusser imagines the squid as being biologically male. While for some this might be problematic, it here fortuitously compliments our forging parallels with the forms of affect Valentine's films reap upon his female fans, as we will discover in the following section. On this point, Flusser is worth quoting at length:

The strategy of Vampyroteuthian art – his skin painting, for example – can be depicted in the following manner. He experiences something new and tries to store this new information in his memory, which means allocating a place for it among the information already stored there. He discovers that the new information cannot be integrated, that it doesn't fit in. He must reorganize his memory to make place for it. His memory is jarred by the new information and he must process it (what we humans call 'creative activity'). This creative jolt surges through his organism, seizes him, and the chromatophores on his skin surface contract and secrete pigment. At the same time, he experiences an artistic orgasm in which the colour ejaculation on his skin is enciphered into the Vampyroteuthian colour code. The sexual partner is stimulated and made conscious about the new information being expressed.

(Flusser 2009: 3)

Vampyroteuthis' erotic 'art' is here original, creative, bio-aesthetic, performative, affective and evental in nature. What is more, his creatively mesmerizing and modulating bio-aesthetic performances are directly and affectively communicated into the body-brain of the other. If successful, after their sexual union (with his three penises), the hooded cephalopod may be killed and consumed by his mate, or else he may kill and consume her. Because the sexual politics of the squid exposes a dangerous world of violence and cannibalism, Flusser argues that the squid's art ultimately becomes a 'mode of rape and hatred – of deception, fiction, and lies; it is a delusive affectation, that is to say, it is "beauty"' (Flusser 2012: 65). In relating these squid practices back to his own sociotechnical world, Flusser argued that humans appeared to evermore 'create chromatophores (television, video, computer monitors transmitting synthetic images) with whose help the senders deceitfully seduce the receivers,' while propagating ever-new form of 'media through which we rape human brains and force them to store immaterial information' (Flusser 2009: 5).

If the squid's violent bio-aesthetic art of beautiful hatred here distantly recalls Valentine's inter-subjective sick and perverted torture-porn project,²¹ another of the aspects of the squid's art that Flusser explores is the creature's express ability to expel befuddling clouds of billowing bioluminescent ink into the surrounding waters to confuse, mask or stupefy. This informe art in particular, Flusser argues, draws into relief how alien and contrived a human geometry is, or acculturated notions of aesthetics and transcendent forms. While Flusser's consideration of such informe liquid arts make what is normalized and accepted to us appear alien, we can likewise recognize Valentine's informe bio-aesthetics pushing towards a similar end, diabolically defamiliarizing, disorganizing, disordering and deterritorializing the very forms and aesthetics that only contingently appear natural to us.

Bearing this in mind, we might now return to the cruel theatrical torture-porn sequence from *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice*, wherein we can locate the zenith of Valentine's dark Vampyroteuthian project. Therein, we find yet another embodiment of Aberdeen (whose shape-shifting nature likewise recalls the squid's changeling practices) suffering yet more modulating acts of excessive rape and torture. Aberdeen is here bound to a chair by the aforementioned eight-limbed inhuman creature (composed of two demonic twins that are co-joined at the head) summoned from the dark depths of Hell. After violently separating themselves, the demons begin attaching chains and weights to the actress's outer labia. As she endures this genital torture, Octopuke enters the fray, projectile vomiting colourful informe spew all over Aberdeen's tied naked body. Presently, a tarantula is coaxed to crawl into her stretched open genitals, which the demonic twins then stitch closed behind it, so that the hairy creature is entombed and enflashed inside the folds of her sewn-shut vagina. Thereafter Aberdeen's eyes are gorged from her skull with a screwdriver (in a violent motif familiar to viewers of the other films), before her head is scalped and then decapitated. The twins then reappear clutching a large octopus, which they ritualistically stretch over her severed head in a grotesque coronation ceremony: in a manner that visually rhymes with her earlier enclosing of the tarantula within her vagina. Octopuke here proceeds to chew

upon one of the organism's tentacles (or penises), which again causes him to throw up; this time all over Aberdeen's severed head.

If these sequences symbolically dislodge a Vampyroteuthian vector, we might recall how the participatory viewer also has their body and intimate senses populated with a litany of proprioceptive touches and impressions as they watch this scene, and that the raw and intense bio-aesthetic porn(ological) affects that transductively address themselves to their skin, viscera, guts and genitalia pass through the chromataphoric pigments of a Vampyroteuthian liquid crystal display screen. Accordingly, all around these rape sequences we can sense violent and erotic hypnotic practices of a Vampyroteuthian screen art. To furnish further evidence of this, we must now turn to real examples of Valentine's fans that appear to have been deeply touched and unsettled by their immanent encounter with the Vomit Gore films, and help reveal some of the many ways in which the machinic films surface as a life-transforming creative force.

Fucking Fans: Vampyroteuthian Violations and Conducer Contamination

In an online YouTube video review of the Vomit Gore project, horror fan JillKill discusses Valentine's violent films as literally doing violence to her. A visual assault that left her feeling physically violated. 'I get sick just thinking about it', she says, 'I mean, I found the film vomit inducing'. After a fleeting hesitation she ponders: 'Is that even an insult?'

A male fan's video highlights how Valentine's Vomit Gore films were corporeally transformative for him too, in that, by the last instalment of the trilogy, he had finally learned to override his body's auto-affective gag reflex. We can discover other enfleshed and embodied examples of, or testaments to, the liberating and transformative masochistic and animalistic powers of Valentine's Vomit Gore films in a range of other far-flung online S/M (social media) 'splatter-texts', which appear courtesy of Valentine's prosumer, or more aptly in this context 'conducer', fans. More often than not, though, it becomes Valentine's female fans – a group that one enthusiast playfully christens the 'gore whores' – that appear to be the most impacted or impressed, at times even *possessed*, by the encounter with his work.²² In these videos, a range of female Vomit Gore fans discuss, or reveal, having erotic and fetishistic relationships with Valentine (as star director construct) via his corporeal creations and artistic BwO. Which is to say they describe having intimate relationships with a parasocial stranger courtesy of his artistic creations.

These intimate sexual assemblages arguably serve to queer, or disturb our everyday understandings of sexual identity, by exposing examples of fans having masochistic desires for, and intimate embodied relationships with, moving Vomit Gore images. Certainly, many of the 'micro-celebrity' video stars describe intimate acts of individuating with Valentine's images, and speak of arousal and stimulation while watching his films, or else introduce the intense feelings of love and fascination they have for the director (construct).

Patricia MacCormack and Nick Davis's writing on film erotics becomes useful here, particularly as both explore comparable queering potentials bound up with the viewing and reception of film, and the liberating trans-kingdom relations and sexualized flows of desire they erect between humans and inhuman kingdoms. To paraphrase MacCormack, if we were to ask 'what is it you have sex with?' the answer 'male' or 'female' is imagined as a stable enough term to explain our human sexuality. However, if we were to answer a 'Vomit Gore film', questions necessarily proliferate beyond, rather than refer back to, any pre-established system of libidinal desire (MacCormack 2008: 2). MacCormack's *cinesexual* and *cinemasochistic* models anticipate and parallel Davis' discussions of a 'desiring-image', which similarly expose how pre-personal inhuman forces appear capable of modifying the bodies, subjectivities, identities and groups they move into composition with. What stimulates and moves viewers is often the more-than-human excesses offered by film as an intensive and signaletic body, and can include things like the intense colour of a shot, the vibrating kinetic energy of an edited sequence, the supersensual sounds and aesthetics, the distorting effect of a close-up. Which amounts to saying, the more than human affective aspects that cinema offers to our erotic enjoyment and experiences. Key here is recognizing that the entity with which viewers have an erotic and embodied relationship is primarily the film image itself, and not prima facie, that which it purports to represent (although this is of course one theatrical dimension of the overall masochistic and Vampyroteuthian encounter). MacCormack and Davis both also trace the extent to which having enfolded and intimate relationships with inhuman images constitute novel forms of bodily experimentation, which in turn display potentials for igniting new forms of becoming.

Valentine's 'gore whores' arguably surface as an online cinesexual community that openly celebrates having inorganic libidinal relationships with excessive film stylistics and supersensual bio-aesthetics. Before getting to these, however, it is worth mentioning that these types of online video are somewhat anticipated or solicited by Valentine's Vomit Gore project itself, and all seem to recall one of the bonus splatter-texts seeded within the *Slow Torture Puke Chamber* package. There, actor Hope Likens discusses her journey from fandom to 'stardom' (or from gore whore to gonzo porn performer). In brief, this involved soliciting Valentine online after having seen his films; becoming friends with the Satanist; informing the director of her desire to play Aberdeen alongside his ex-girlfriend (and star of the first two films) Ameara LaVey; and then agreeing to perform in the third instalment of the Vomit Gore Trilogy. One possible viral affect of Likens's fan/star testimony is to catalyse the spread of comparable fangirl desires and films, which indeed appear to have contagiously spread and crystallised on streaming platforms such as YouTube. In this manner, like in Likens's Vomit Gore splatter-text, a fantasy notion of Valentine's fans becoming a real part of his amateur torture-porn art, and by extension his sexual project/desires, is folded into the wider project itself, suggesting another potential way in which the occult Vomit Gore films might magically dissolve the boundaries between inside and outside, viewer and screen, fantasy and reality, viewer and participant.

One can find numerous Valentine fangirl videos online today.²³ These public videos more often than not contain frank discussions of the intense, erotic and transformative encounter these fans have with the participatory films (and their director construct by extension). One conductor who posts videos under a pseudonym, and claims to belong to a closet group known as ‘Lucifer Valentine’s Secret Friends Club’ can evidence this. She describes herself as a ‘hermit and a recluse’ who considers Valentine ‘a close friend, and someone I enjoy spending time with’. Wearing a satanic pentangle round her neck, and displaying what appear to be self-injury marks upon her arm, this fan frames herself kneeling upon her living room floor as she talks openly about having an ‘eating disorder’, of being an emetophile ‘but not bulimic’ and of her ongoing studies at mortuary school (where she reports studying to become an embalmer/funeral director).

In another YouTube vlog entitled ‘How Lucifer Valentine changed my life’, a teenage fan opens with a series of intertitles that inform viewers ‘we all know I’m obsessed with The Vomit Gore Trilogy [...]’, ‘but let’s see the effect they have on my life [...]’. This conductor video contains another candid ‘to camera’ discussion of how Valentine (or the Vomit Gore films more precisely) transformed this fan’s sexuality (in a manner that recalls the director’s own discussion of discovering his own emetophilic desires after coming into contact with Max Hardcore porn films): confessing ‘Lucifer Valentine ruined my sex life’.

Valentine’s films appear to have been so impactful or impressive that this fan informs her own channel viewers that she was inspired to change her name to ‘Cricket’, as a homage to Valentine’s original cover art from *Slow Torture Puke Chamber* (later videos such as ‘A day in the life of Cricket Valentine’ incorporate this new name, whilst more recent entries appear uploaded under a newer ‘Cricket Valentine’ account). Pasticheing Valentine’s own unbecoming cinema of interactions style of communicating with his fans through his DVD splatter-texts, Cricket here adopts the use of intertitles and voice-over to (seemingly) communicate back with the director. One video informs viewers that after watching the films every day (for how long we do not know), Cricket now has ‘fantasies about having sex and murdering people with you’ (the director), whilst additional screens assert: ‘You moulded me into this’, ‘Thank you Lucifer Valentine’. In yet another vlog entry entitled ‘Lucifer Valentine fan video’, Cricket shows off her bedroom and body to her followers (and presumably, she imagines, Valentine). She first shows us walls adorned in homemade Vomit Gore fan art. She then says: ‘Did I mention that your movies are on my body?’ Here, Cricket reveals two tattoos framing her midriff (on either side of her gustatory cortex or enteric system): on her left side the aforementioned cricket image, and on her right, Valentine’s crayoned octopus from *ReGOREgitated Sacrifice*.²⁴

Cricket’s video thus betrays a truly Vampyrotheuthian nature to Valentine’s work, which we might now recognise as having transversally ignited becomings in and through her mind-body via its powerfully transpiercing (chromatophoric) screen-signalling. Interestingly, in another echo of the project’s Vampyrotheuthian nature, Cricket layers *Nirvana*’s ‘Rape me’ over a photomontage of her tattoos. With this conductor mash-up technique at once nodding

towards the trilogy's own masticated entanglement with Cobain, whilst also allowing the song's lyrics to hint at certain aggressive – yet consensual (the oxymoronic request to be 'raped') – Vampyroteuthian vibrations shimmering across the plane of consistency.

The extremely intimate connection the fangirls appear to share with the director and films arguably becomes most intensified and personal in the videos of 'Fangirl Sarah', who talks with Valentine via her mobile phone in several of her YouTube uploads. She displays a very real and embodied connection to the director. Indeed, she appears visibly blushing and gushing in response to his various comments during their recorded interviews. In one conversation she coyly voices her desire – like Likens before her – to star in Valentine's next film, and speaks of her dream of having sex with his beautiful leading ladies. During this recorded conversation, viewers can hear Valentine on the other end of the phone saying 'You make my heart melt'. In another of her videos, which appears embedded within (what appears to be) the director's own YouTube page, Fangirl Sarah films herself reviewing Valentine's (then) latest film *Black Metal Veins* (2012) (which although featuring scenes of female vomiting, is not, strictly speaking, a Vomit Gore film). In accordance with the director's demands, we are informed, she conducts this review sitting on her bed wearing a skimpy bathing suit (recalling again the settings and costumes featuring in the three Vomit Gore films).

In other videos we find different forms of personal relationship between the director and his fans emerging. Indeed, in several videos featuring Valentine's 'fanboys' we find the video hosts opening envelopes that contain original artworks (usually drawings in Valentine's familiar violent child-like crayon style). These are often sent as a 'thank you' for positively reviewing his films online, and demonstrate another way in which the director ensures the creation of more far-flung vomit-themed splatter-texts. These YouTube videos reveal yet another tactic through which the larger Vomit Gore project becomes an unbecoming cinema, then, which increasingly appears molecularly broken down and virally spread around S/M systems. Recognizing the parallels between Valentine's amateur project and the online splatter-texts they inspire suggest that, like vomit itself, the sick art project(ile) temps, solicits and spreads wherever they make intimate contact. Interestingly, the viral nature of the M/S project(ile) in these S/M realms also cycles back to recall and reflect the sick organic image of disease and digestion we have come to recognize as Valentine's personal and perverse abstract diagram. The nature of the fangirl videos in particular make this tangible, especially as they allow us to perceive how, today, images and movies of all sorts are consumed, copied, slashed, edited, remixed, recomposed, re-projected, re-consumed, re-digested, re-mashed and re-projected in ongoing liquescent modulations and meme-etic concatenations. Many of Valentine's fans do this through creating their own trailers, fan art or online reviews, which mash-up and re-edit the already piecemeal Vomit Gore project (which are themselves always-already a cannibalized and regurgitated hyper-edited mash-up of other originals-without-originals) with others pulled from the 'communal' resource. Fittingly, the re-edited versions typically re-surface in decomposed, diminished and digitally degraded forms, before becoming further in-mixed with adverts, hyperlinks

and a masticated melange of other digital information, including the algorithmic splattering of similar suggestions on the YouTube applet bar.

Convulsions

This chapter attempted to extend to Valentine's *zeitgeist* works what Foucault, in his writing upon transgression in Bataille, called a form of 'nonpositive affirmation' (Foucault 1977: 36). For as ethico-political creations, Valentine's films *are* truly disgusting. And they are meant to be. Bodies that endure Valentine's films inevitably feel sick, exhausted from heaving, and ill or intoxicated for being plugged into too many masticated and endlessly modulating emetic flows of sick material. By design, bio-aesthetic affects from the screen turn the viewers' stomach, trigger sensations in their gut, which linger and communicate with the brain, and thereafter force thinking to zigzag between text and context, inside and outside, symptom and cause. And rather than feeling purged or satisfied by the encounter, we are afterwards left to grope around, like the eyeless Pig, for answers. What else then might we finally say about Valentine's minor pervert art, and its clinical and critical diagnosis of our times? Well, if Foucault argued that the panoptic prison concretized the abstract diagram of nineteenth century's disciplinary societies, and Deleuze thereafter saw the corporation offering the template for understanding the late twentieth century's control societies, then the sick poet-pervert Lucifer Valentine's Vomit Gore project(ile) brings forth a new schematic image to help us conceptualize our era. And it is that of dig(i)estion and vomit(ing), which together helps us to prehend the abstract logic and organizational principles substrating or era of Uber, Airbnb, zero hours contracts and their likes. That is, a world defined by ever more disintegrated, broken down and diabolical structure-less-structures. Where digital networked machines no longer appear so much like a 'big brain', as they are so often gnomically referred to, but rather more precisely a big gustatory cortex. A secondary brain or digestive system that intakes, stores, breaks down, redistributes and recirculates modulating material and information within the dark enclosed lumen of the digital flow spaces.

Notes

- 1 From this perspective, as humans adapt to different environments, disgust becomes co-opted into social structures and practice, which in turn drives gene cultural coevolution (see Kelly 2011: 6).
- 2 One thinks here of Nazi propaganda films that depicted Jews as less than human rat-like or insect-like beings. One might also think of more recent right-wing European media deploying terms like 'swarms' to describe the movement of large numbers of migrants and refugees.
- 3 Mikita Brottman points out that the notion of eccentricity 'refers to the violation of the usual and the generally accepted' (2005: 2). In this manner, Valentine and his films are truly eccentric.

- 4 Valentine here appears somewhat like the cult director Alejandro Jodorowsky explored in chapter three. However, if Jodorowsky appeared as a transnational film-maker working across and between the southern US-Mexico border, Valentine appears as a transnational auteur whose works straddles the northern US-Canadian border.
- 5 Comaroff and Comaroff list fortune-tellers, casino capitalism pyramid schemes, superstitious stories of black magic services, organ harvesting and modern slavery as examples of 'occult' and 'twilight' economies. Therein, they argue because 'the messianic' regularly encounters 'the magical,' 'the occult becomes an ever more appropriate, semantically saturated metaphor for our times' (315, 317). Most occult economies display two distinct dimensions: 'a material aspect founded on the effort to conjure wealth – or to account for its accumulation – by appeal to techniques that defy explanation in the conventional terms of practical reason; and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses and (re)actions sparked by the (real or imagined) production of value through such "magical" means' (2000: 310).
- 6 In his short article entitled 'Post-script to societies of control' Deleuze argues that the earlier forms of disciplinary society that were explored by Foucault had produced individuals and subjectivities within and through various enclosed or carceral institutions (such as the school, barracks, factory and gaol). These institutions moulded *individuals*, who were subjected to a pressurized disciplinary gaze. In contrast to this, the contemporary technological assemblage defining the modern (neoliberal) world – with its proliferation of surveillance, pharmaceutical, economic, digital and computer technologies – contribute to a new logic of control. In the wake of the crisis of older disciplinary institutions (such as the family, school, university) the corporation emerged as the new model (replacing and improving on the older panoptic prisons and factories). One emergent property of the transformation from a disciplinary logic to that of control was in the production of 'dividuals'. That is, fractured and parametric subjects that appear divided against others and themselves, and who experience self and identity as an ongoing 'modulation'. Under a system of control, dividuals are forced to endlessly change and adapt to ever-fluctuating and modifying rules and circumstances.
- 7 In *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) Marc Augé describes non-places as a familiar looking form of space emblematic of globalization and modernization. Examples include airports, highways, supermarkets and hotel rooms that could, in essence, be found almost anywhere in the (predominantly 'developed') world.
- 8 Kelly describes the 'gape face' as 'an expression and signal, derived from, and [involving] many of the muscle groups operative in, the act of retching and expelling substances from the mouth' (2011: 142).
- 9 In the original myth of St Valentine, the saint's miracle was to return sight to a blind girl.
- 10 If on one level these *informe* features contribute to Valentine's symptomatic aesthetics of digestion and vomit, it becomes possible to detect these dispositive rules operating at a 'lower' ontological and material level of organization too. Here, we might recall that early digital critics such as Anne-Marie Willis described processes of scanning and digitization as a procedure that revealed horrific and disgusting parallels to processes of 'cannibalizing and regurgitating' (1900: 199). Valentine's own scanning and dig(i)ested mash-ups of his home videos and 1980s visual culture more generally actualize these cannibalistic and

regurgitating procedures, as does their subsequent masticated and modulated exhibition online. Interestingly, the manner in which digital images are processed and ‘projected’ further reveal molecular associations with the wider abstract diagram of vomit. Indeed, Lev Manovich pointed out that unlike analogue cinema, the ontology of digital screening should be understood in terms of an algorithmic form of painting in time, wherein spatialized pixels modulate and transform during screening time. Accordingly, instead of being ontologically constituted by a series of static images that appear in motion due to the application of mechanical movement, digital images move due to liquescent bits of spatialized colour and information modulating in time upon the surface of the screen. Streaming glitches and scratched DVDs perhaps best reveal this new digi-ested ontology; as when a character’s moving body suddenly hurls itself across the frame in a disgorged and disorganizing smear of distended digitized pixel-pigment. Furthermore, Valentine’s DVDs are likely to be displayed on plasma televisions, desktop monitors and liquid crystal displays, which reveal yet more technological liquescent parallels with the abstract diagram of virtual vomit. Especially when we stick our fingers into them.

- 11 At the time of writing, a teaser trailer posted on Valentine’s YouTube channel promotes the forthcoming release of *Black Mass of the Nazi Sex Wizard (aka Vomit Gore 4)*, which is described as ‘the prequel to Lucifer Valentine’s vomit gore trilogy. In this demonic labyrinth we experience the satanic ritual which spawns endless incarnations of Angela Aberdeen, as she is doomed to live out her haunted existence of the eternal “lost girl”’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSa3f2gsPn4>
- 12 Charlie Brooker’s *Fifteen Million Merits* (*Black Mirror* series 1 episode 2) satirizes how far today’s mainstream culture, with its endless palabum of singing and talent television shows epitomizes this logic, forcing contestants to exploit and literally whore themselves for corporate ratings and profit. If Brooker’s satirical work can be understood allegorically or intellectually diagnosing the present through the future tense offered by sci-fi and fantasy, Valentine’s ‘Vomit Gore Trilogy’ is more akin to a symptom-pathogen of its time, or an emergent minor expression that helps us diagnose the psychology of the era (through our guts).
- 13 Valentine originally eschews professional and corporate interference by serving as the financier, creator and distributor of his shoestring vomit gore films (which, as indicated, he originally sold directly to fans through his Kingdom of Hell webpage).
- 14 Personal correspondence with author September 2015.
- 15 I thank William Brown for bringing up this point during a panel discussion at the 25th Annual *Screen Studies* conference at the University of Glasgow, Scotland June 2015 (see also Valpy 1828: 139).
- 16 It should be stated here that the films contain a melange of different fetishistic and psychosexual orientations and acts, which play out across different levels of fantasy and reality. Amongst images of sex and penetration with monsters, machines, animals and vomit, the torture-porn sequences contain real and simulated images of heterosexual and lesbian sex, as well as depictions of incest and child abuse. In interview when asked about his inspirations, it is interesting to note the amount of pornographic films Valentine offers. Consider for example this answer to a question about his influences:

I really liked the 70's porn movies *Taboo* and *Taboo 2*, I love Max Hardcore porn because I like seeing those girls' mascara run and the movie *Man Behind the Sun*; I also was quite influenced by lots of Brazilian scat movies, I don't know the names of the directors of those scat movies but one of my favourites is called *Shit Gang Monstrosity*. I also really like watching bestiality movies like when women double penetrate themselves with live eels, you know, they put one into their pussy and one into their ass and it squirms around, people used to always send me those like from Denmark and elsewhere and I always liked them and sadly they often aren't named or credit the directors but one was called *Pig Barn Fuck Sunset* and that was the first time I saw a pig's cock darting in and out of its body trying to go into the women's vagina; the woman had draped a potato sack over her back so the pigs hooves wouldn't hurt her as it kinda grabbed her and fucked her from behind and I saw a close up of the pig's cock and it was actually shaped like a pink, fleshy corkscrew.

(Valentine in Torres n.d)

- 17 In the wake of the real news reportage of the leaked Abu Ghraib images, the Pentagon held a closed-door slide show of the hundreds of photographs for members of Congress. McCoy notes how 'Legislators emerged grim and shaken', and 'Senator Richard J. Durbin (Democrat, Illinois) said, "It felt like you were descending into one of the rings of hell, and sadly it was our creation"' (McCoy 2012: 131). Here again, Valentine's work appears symptomatological.
- 18 Flynn and Salek note that in 'the films made prior to 2001 the torturer was usually a fascist, a depraved outlaw, a rogue cop or serviceman, or a madman. Over the last decade the torturers have been counterterrorism agents, CIA or former CIA agents, and even Batman is one – when superheroes and agents sworn to uphold the Constitution are torturers, the ethical and professional rot is profound' (2012: 12).
- 19 For Aston and Walliss, far from mindlessly reproducing the dominant logic, the form, content and iconographic detail of torture-porn films often subversively critique the society they emerge from. For them, in an era 'dominated by war and terrorism, torture and religious fundamentalism and ever increasing powers and controls of governments over its people, the horror film in general, and the *Saw* films in particular, offer audiences opportunities to confront, understand and possibly work through the traumatic nature of a post-9/11 America' (2013).
- 20 This notion appears to be signalled by her name too, with 'hope' likewise being a future-oriented feeling.
- 21 We might also note other co-incidental echoes emerging between the squid's consumption practices: for modern research demonstrates that Vampyroteuthis's primary diet is the masticated chum of other sea animals as it sinks to the ocean floor (Dickey 2012).
- 22 The majority of Valentine's 'fangirls' encountered online appear to be white women in their late teens and mid-twenties, who display a preference for a necrotic, Goth or Emo aesthetic. If 'prosumer' is understood as a neologistic portmanteau that folds together notions of digital era producer-consumers, the reversal or recalibration of the consumer-producer into a notion of a 'conducer' helps draw out pertinent notions of being led, but also of contributing in some way, and of adding to the project, and becoming a conduit of sorts.

- 23 Although Valentine boasts mixed gender fan groups, as we will discover, it is clear that a different form of relationship emerges between the director and his male and female fans.
- 24 Incidentally, we might recall here that tattoos are essentially pigmented scars deposited inside the body, or embodied images that result from the penetration of ink below the epidermis into the fleshy tissue. This in turn perversely recalls and permanently reminds us of the *cruel* films' mode of communicating through the skin and flesh. One might also sense here that the embodied pain associated with receiving a tattoo highlights a certain masochistic threshold bound up with this distributed trans-human erotic relationship with Valentine and the Vomit Gore project. Finally, we might also note that for Deleuze and Guattari, the use of tattoos in certain 'primitive' societies served to signal a re-organization of the body, or a hewing of the organs onto a collective *socius* or territorial BwO (2004a: 158–159).

Exits

A traveller, who has lost his way, should not ask, Where am I? What he really wants to know is, Where are the other places?

A.N. Whitehead (1978: 170)

We initially set out to explore, survey, map and reconnoitre a diverse range of ethico-political audio-visual projects, drawn from different times and places, destined to screen in different milieus, upon diverse technologies, to unconnected audiences, about seemingly unrelated topics (mental illness and suicide, sensory-brain disorders and alternative modes of being and becoming, distorted drug films that promote metaphysical revolt and revolting pervert torture porn that turned our stomachs and world upside down). And yet in the end, with the gift of hindsight, we can now identify many common vectors and refrains working to link them together. Indeed, over four chapters this *bricolage* collection can now be seen as a dissolute range of projects that share in an ethico-political desire to do and think film differently, to help break life and thought free from where they were trapped, and bring something new to life. Or else make thought swerve, veer sideways, or go off course, and by so doing allow the modulating medium itself to become and unbecome.

For good or for bad, *Unbecoming Cinema* embraced highly personal, political and experimental works that appear toprehend wider evental happenings, and viscerally communicate these movements (of world) to their viewers, to unsettle them and make them think and feel differently. Looking back, our path across these four plateaus is best thought of as being like one of Deligny's maps, for we not only traced out meandering lines of drift, but were also found repeatedly circling around similar issues, themes, affective forces and thoughts (albeit differently), that impulsively compelled us into repeating gestures and conceptual stereotypy. That is, if each chapter was topologically singular, we might now concede that we tropologically encountered consistent impulses and movements. Suicide and disgust, to take but two interleaving examples, appear prominently in chapters one, three and four. But they were also backgrounded (present but absent) issues within some of the narrative cinemas discussed *en passant* in chapter two. A far broader tangle of lines could also often be discovered zigzagging and criss-crossing boundaries as we moved. A swallowed or concealed theme intermingling disordered gastrointestinal 'thinking' and autisms, for example, subcortically and peristaltically surges beneath and between chapters two and four. In like manner, a range of other concepts, affects and percepts could be sensed silently assembling and intersecting here, bifurcating and growing undone again there, or

reappearing transformed in one space, only to disappear underground, and reappear again over yonder: like a proverbial rhizomatic taproot, a mole burrow, or the scribbled lines of a child-like drawing. Each restlessly communicating amongst themselves, while crossing boundaries, borders, lines, and threatening to run off elsewhere. Did Deligny not say that these lines ultimately ‘mean nothing’? That they are necessarily inscribed upon a body without organs (BwO), upon which everything is drawn and flees? Did El Topo not say the same about the revolutionary mole and his underground burrows?

At this stage we must doubt there can be any satisfactory metaphor for us to fall back into for further drawing together the tangled web of evental movements and escape routes that we now recognize spreading out from each and every chapter, in so many directions, all at once. Instead, and in lieu of any shared meanings, we might instead try to make our spiralling return to what it is these machinic and ethical films were aiming to ‘do’. That is, the movements of world and sense of difference they imparted. For in the beginning we said that this book was inspired by moving encounters with ethical event films, which were not cinema as we typically knew it, and which worked to instil an ‘unsettling’ or ‘unbecoming’ in an attempt to call forth a new people and a new world. Over four chapters we certainly encountered disturbing political documentaries that thought differently about troubling social taboos, shocking artworks that got under our skin, agitated our nerves and made our bodies do things. We also put ourselves face to face with artworks that lit up the ‘normal’ from within, and allowed us to see it disrobed (of cliché or normalization) and cast afresh. After all is said and done, if these films were for us, and didn’t pass us by, they might just have helped us to think otherwise, or to understand ourselves and our locations better, or even just nudged us and modified our momentum.

Beyond igniting events of thought (regarding viewers’ mind and body parallelism, their immanent enworldedness, the effect of sad passions and external actions upon their ability to live and act), the various films we have encountered throughout *Unbecoming Cinema* have undoubtedly helped us to perceive how human and art, art and world, can connect and conjugate us with the ethical movements of a wider evental assemblage. Hopefully, various chapters foregrounded how ethical film projects can be understood literally changing the minds, bodies and attitudes of those they encounter, whether by inspiring creativity and experimentation, forging the birth of new communities, sparking collective political actions, or instilling a desire to live differently or otherwise in those who become conscious with them. Which is to say, by allowing us to grasp adequate ideas that empower us to live and act, by increasing our knowledge of ourselves, our situation and of things. If so, we might also recognize the unsettling and unbecoming cinemas encountered here as event films, or immanent *difference-engines that were the equal of life, and which helped make the everyday take flight*. That is, ethical projects that should be understood *doing* cinema differently, in an attempt to leave us – and the world – slightly different in their wake.

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UNBECOMING CINEMA

UNSETTLING ENCOUNTERS WITH ETHICAL EVENT FILMS

Unbecoming Cinema explores the notion of cinema as a living, active agent, capable of unsettling and reconfiguring a person's thoughts, senses and ethics. Film, according to David H. Fleming, is a dynamic force, arming audiences with the ability to see and make a difference in the world. Drawing heavily on Deleuze's philosophical insights, as well as those of Guattari and Badiou, the book critically examines unsettling and taboo footage from suicide documentaries to art therapy films, from portrayals of mental health and autism to torture porn. In investigating the effect of film on the mind and body, Fleming's shrewd analysis unites transgressive cinema with metaphysical concepts of the body and mind.

David H. Fleming is assistant professor of film and media studies at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China.

Suicide. Autism. LSD. Vomit gore. You'd be forgiven for walking away from such a heady cocktail of potentially unbecoming topics, but you'd also be losing out. David H. Fleming may write – lucidly and intelligently – about films and film-makers whom many might find hard to stomach, but Unbecoming Cinema is nonetheless an essential enquiry into why such films get made, why some people do watch such films and – more importantly – what it is that such films do. For while many of the films that Fleming considers might be unbecoming of cinema in the eyes of various viewers, these films and film-makers are nonetheless pushing the boundaries of what it is that cinema can show and, by extension, what it is that cinema can make viewers think and feel – perhaps even changing how they think and feel. In this sense, unbecoming becomes a positive force, helping cinema to get over itself and become something exciting and new. At the forefront of film-philosophy and fizzing with ideas, Fleming guides us through this unbecoming cinema so that we might experience some (un)becomings of our own.

William Brown, University of Roehampton

In this exciting, intellectually intense and pleasantly mind-warping new book on cinematic ethics, David Fleming approaches films not as texts to be drily analysed, but as events to be encountered. What is at stake here is the shock which films are able to bring to our thought processes, their ability to shatter all that we may think we know is normal, so that we can look at the world afresh. This is an insightful work, philosophically informed but accessible and engaging, which rises up to meet key challenges of present times.

David Martin-Jones, University of Glasgow

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