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Cinematic Shocks: Recognition, Aesthetic Experience, and Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

In this article I suggest that we, as human beings, gain personal recognition not only through intersubjective encounters with others, but also through aesthetic experience. To support my claims about what I call 'aesthetic recognition,' I focus on a pervasive but rarely explored phenomenon: the cinematic shock. Not only a staple ingredient of thrillers, horror films, and disaster movies, it is also found in art-films. The cinematic shock will serve as the case in point of my argument because in its lived intensity, density, and conspicuousness we can describe it more easily with appropriate words than other aesthetic experiences that are equally able to foster aesthetic recognition but are less readily accessible via language. When experienced in the social environment of the movie theater, cinematic shocks enable two widespread types of aesthetic recognition: aesthetic experience as individual *self-recognition*, and aesthetic experience as a collective *recognition of accord*. Due to the strongly affective lived-body experience brought about by an encounter with the aesthetic object, the recipient not only feels self-aware of and self-affirmed in his or her own embodied existence, he or she also experiences confirmation as part of a group responding equally—in accordance—to an aesthetic object. This double recognition gained from the cinematic experience of shock derives from the individual film experience and the collective theatrical experience. An additional outcome of my methodological reliance on dense phenomenological descriptions may be an argument for the value of phenomenology in both the study of film and of aesthetics more generally.

Introduction

Can we gain recognition through aesthetic experience? Might reading a novel, attending a pop concert, or watching a movie provide what social theory has (re-) discovered as being an indispensable element of human existence? Judging from the most influential theories—those of Axel Honneth, Tzvetan Todorov, and Paul Ricoeur to name but a few—the answer must be: no.[1] In these accounts, the modes of recognition in modern societies are various and highly differentiated. Honneth, for instance, distinguishes between emotional recognition through love and friendship, legal recognition, and the social recognition of individual abilities and achievements. Aesthetic experience is not among them.

To be sure, one could educe from these and related theories ways of acquiring recognition, in a wider sense of the term, in the cultural realm. There is, for instance, the ersatz recognition of idolatry. Todorov points out that fans can partake in the fame and glory of the movie, rock, or TV star by way of identification (106).

[1] See Franck, for instance, and Düttmann.

The attention dedicated to the idol reflects off the star like sunrays from a mirror, illuminating the devotee as well. Moreover, in the wake of Pierre Bourdieu, one might argue that recognition can be gained through social distinction based on cultural capital. The spectator who has attended the latest Metropolitan opera performance of *Tannhäuser*, the reader who has struggled her way through the works of Gertrude Stein, and the listener who has followed a concert of the Kronos quartet can reap the profits of their actions by converting this cultural capital into recognition-through-distinction in the social realm (e.g., at a cocktail party). These modes of recognition might be connected to the aesthetic object in one way or another, but they occur always *after* the fact. However, what I am interested in is recognition gained through the aesthetic experience proper—what I will call 'aesthetic recognition.' Is such an unheard-of process imaginable? I believe that it is.

Note that this belief is not supposed to imply a normative argument. I do not claim an elevated, idealistic status for aesthetic recognition. At the same time, I will not belittle it by calling it an evanescent form of pseudo recognition, a mechanism unworthy of consideration. The question of which modes of recognition are considered most valuable is set aside in favor of *description*—the description of a distinct and rather peaceful way of 'fighting' what has, since the early writings of Hegel, been called the 'struggle for recognition.'

In the following I will focus on a pervasive but rarely explored phenomenon that might serve as an example of how we could conceive of aesthetic recognition: the cinematic shock, a staple ingredient of many thrillers, horror films, and disaster movies.[2] The cinematic shock—also known as the 'startle effect'—is a thrilling feature of contemporary genre cinema that can also be encountered in European arthouse films, for example in Catherine Breillat's *À ma soeur* (2001), Bruno Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* (2003), and Ruben Östlund's *Play* (2011). We might even trace its roots back to the very origins of cinema, and to what has become known as the 'train effect.'[3] Although the stories of early viewers panicking upon the arrival of an approaching train on the screen have by now largely been debunked as myth, commentators such as Stephen Bottomore have shown that for early cinema audiences it was not unusual to flinch, recoil, jump up, and even scream—responses also typical, as we shall see, for cinematic shock. In fact, Bottomore indicates that for many viewers "a little shock was a welcome thing" and hence involved pleasure; these spectators "probably went to see the new Biograph or cinematograph show because they wanted a shock. [...] If they were a little shocked by the Lumières' train, if indeed they initially flinched, that was probably all part of the fun" (199-200).

The cinematic shock will serve as a case in point for my argument on aesthetic recognition, because in its lived intensity, density, and conspicuousness we can get hold of it with appropriate words more easily than other aesthetic experiences that are equally able to foster aesthetic recognition but are less readily (if at all)

[2] Apart from Baird's groundbreaking but ultimately incomplete study and Diffrient's insightful but overly impressionistic essay, there is almost nothing written on this cinematic effect. For a slightly different concept of shock, see Morsch's excellent article, "Zur Ästhetik."

[3] Cf. Bottomore 177-216.

describable via language. I am thinking of the satisfaction we feel while attending a great concert, the joy we experience standing in a beautiful landscape, or the hilarity we sense during a good comedy. Since cinematic shock numbers among the most striking and surprising aesthetic effects we know, I consider it a particularly helpful example to illustrate my argument.

Focusing on the viewer's lived experience is a move that would have been considered dubious in film studies some years ago. Beginning in the 1990s, however, a remarkable shift from *reading* films as texts toward *experiencing* films as events took place, moving from a linguistic-semiotic model towards a non-hermeneutic, somatic one. This shift was initiated by seminal studies by Linda Williams, Tom Gunning, Steven Shaviro, and Vivian Sobchack (see *Address of the Eye*), and is now connected first and foremost with Deleuzian theory and film phenomenology.[4] The latter—the approach I subscribe to in this essay—particularly stresses the necessary connection between aesthetic experience and the 'lived body' (in German: *der Leib*) as the constitutive ground of perception and understanding. It is precisely this lived body that will play a crucial role in my account of aesthetic recognition. Hence, while this essay is primarily aimed at explaining aesthetic recognition vis-à-vis cinematic shocks, it can also be seen as an attempt to underscore the value of phenomenology for the study of film and aesthetics more generally.

Cinematic Shock: A Definition

What exactly do I mean by 'cinematic shock'? In my definition, this kind of startling '*Boo!*' effect describes the concurrence of an aesthetic strategy designed to create a shocking phenomenological experience with shocked viewers who experience precisely the phenomenological experience aimed at by the aesthetic strategy: Shock—just as with lust or pain—cannot exist, after all, without someone to experience it.[5] An extremely powerful example can be found at the end of the classic horror movie *Friday the 13th* (1980). The extended carnage of the preceding night is finally over. The psychopathic, knife-wielding slasher, Mrs. Voorhees, has been killed. The darkness has made way for daylight. And Alice, the only surviving teenager, awakes in a canoe in the middle of a beautiful lake in a tranquil, picturesque natural environment. The soundtrack offers relaxing, almost sentimental music. The police arrive at the lakeshore, promising the protection of official authority. Alice puts her hand into the water when, all of a sudden and wholly unexpectedly, a monstrous figure jumps out of the lake and grabs her from behind.

Experienced in the social environment of the movie theater, cinematic shocks like this example from *Friday the 13th* (which certainly cannot be evoked through a summarizing ekphrasis but must be experienced firsthand) enable two widespread types of aesthetic recognition. These two types can be separated analyti-

[4] For current Deleuzian and phenomenological studies focusing on the (lived) body, see, for instance, Del Río; Sobchack, *Carnal*; Barker.

[5] Some parts of this article are based on chapter five, "Startling Scares: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Shock" in my book *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*.

cally, but in reality they are almost seamlessly fused. The first is aesthetic experience as individual self-recognition. Due to the strong, affective, lived-body experience (*Leiberfahrung*) brought about by the encounter with the aesthetic object, the recipient feels both self-aware of and self-affirmed in his or her own embodied existence. The second type is aesthetic experience as a collective recognition of accord. The recipient experiences confirmation as part of a group responding equally—in accordance—to an aesthetic object. This double recognition gained from the cinematic experience of shock derives both from the individual film experience and from the collective theatrical experience. It moves from *intra*-subjectivity to *inter*-subjectivity.

While the former can also take place in a solitary setting (e.g., in front of a television screen), the latter is dependent on the presence of co-viewers. In order to keep the argument as straightforward as possible, I will presuppose a theatrical experience, one that can encompass both forms of aesthetic recognition. Taking the cinematic experience for granted, we have to bear in mind, however, that the cinemagoer is not a disembodied consciousness floating freely through a spatial vacuum. As an embodied being, the viewer is always part of the reception surroundings. Consequently, it is never the film alone that shapes the recipient's embodied consciousness, but also the viewer's surroundings. The heat I feel on a warm summer day in a movie theater without air-conditioning has an effect on my cinematic experience just as the backache that troubles me when I have to endure an eight-hour Andy Warhol movie on a wooden seat. Phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack notes on the cinematic experience that "although our interest may be dominantly and transcendently There, our bodies are also irreducibly and immanently Here" (*Address* 287). This also implies that the intertwinement of viewer and film is not a solitary engagement; the cinematic experience by definition involves other recipients. What we could broadly call the 'social atmosphere' always co-determines our encounter with the film. In negative terms, co-viewers imply distractions caused by incessant talking, ill-timed laughter, or unpleasant odors. In positive terms, the aesthetic object is perceived in common and in accordance, thus creating a bond.[6]

Hence, in the cinema three aspects merge into a single whole: the individual film experience of the 'transcendental' subject; the lived-body experience of the 'corporeal' subject affected by the viewing surroundings; and the social spectatorial experience of the 'collective' subject. However, not all aspects weigh in equally. The distribution of attention varies. Experiences fade into less overtly conscious phenomena: from core (or focal) to marginal (or peripheral) phenomena and phenomena at the fringe (or horizon) of awareness.[7] In most cases the film will claim focal awareness, while we are only marginally conscious of the lived body and of the cinema itself. Put differently, the film experience dominates, whereas the body and cinema have receded—or have been pushed—to the phenomenal background. However, this distribution of attention is not static; the order of the center and the periphery of consciousness is unstable. At various points throughout the film it comes into motion and shifts its emphasis. The body, as well as the rest of the audience, might become foregrounded and claim our attention, while the film loses its center-stage position. During cinematic shocks, both shifts in emphasis flash by successively at lightning speed, as it were, condensed into a highly charged experience. In moments of strong shock, the lived body stands out and briefly relegates the film to the periphery of consciousness. I thus gain self-awareness: an awareness-of-myself as an embodied viewer. In many cases, however, this is not the whole story. Immediately afterwards, in a rapid shift of awareness, the collectivity of the audience presses forward from its marginal status in the consciousness to a more focal position by way of the 'collective scream.'

By focusing on the lived body in aesthetic experience, I necessarily neglect the semiotic elements of the film and their *meaning* dimension in favor of the material, affective elements and their *experiential* dimension.[8] This is not to say that semiotic aspects do not play a role in experiences of cinematic shock. Aesthetic experience always involves both sides, if to varying degrees. Which method we use—an interpretive one or a method that is able to describe an affective experience—depends on what dimension we are interested in. As a way of describing lived-body experiences, phenomenology seems to be the appropriate method in our case. Yet phenomenology is not an across-the-board method that has an answer for every question. Its usefulness runs its course once the semiotic element dominates and a film begs to be interpreted in terms of its conspicuous discursive dimension. Furthermore, stressing the *typical* experience of the cinematic shock also implies setting aside specific films and our cognitive or unconscious involvements with them. This strategy has to be understood as a heuristic move that helps to flesh out my description. It is in no way meant to argue that we can experience the lived body as a pure presence or that cognition and unconscious desires can be discarded. However, since film studies has, for the longest time, focused its efforts on cognition (in cognitivism) or the unconscious (in psycho-semiotic film theory), it seems worthwhile to reclaim some hitherto neglected experiential aspects of movie-going, such as the cinematic shock itself.[9]

Self-recognition as Corporeal Self-awareness

Before moving on to a detailed phenomenological description of cinematic shock, I need to address the question of how we can reconcile the existing, predominantly intersubjective understandings of recognition with aesthetic experience. After all, a personal encounter with a novel, pop concert, or film knows no

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[6] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Hanich "Collective Viewing" and "Die Publikumserfahrung."

[7] See Ihde; Gurwitsch.

[8] In his forceful Philippic against the dominance of interpretation as well as the hermeneutical tradition responsible for it, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht notes that what we miss "in a world so saturated with meaning, and what therefore turns into a primary object of (not fully conscious) desire in our culture, are [...] phenomena and impressions of presence" (105).

[9] A more detailed argument for the value of phenomenological descriptions can be found in chapter one, "How to Describe Cinematic Fear, or Why Phenomenology?" in my *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*.

human counterpart that can grant such recognition. Arguing that the aesthetic object can somehow attain the qualities of a human subject would be a blatant case of anthropomorphism. We do not need to go that far. It will be sufficient to describe aesthetic experience as an encounter with a 'quasi subject' (Dufrenne) or 'subject-object' (Sobchack)—an encounter that enables us to recognize *ourselves*.

In his posthumously published study, *The Course of Recognition*, philosopher Paul Ricoeur highlights various semantic levels of the word 'recognition.' His analysis of the French signifier *reconnaissance* illuminates a variety of senses that blend almost seamlessly into one another. This polysemic stream of meanings ranges from recognition as 1) identifying/distinguishing, to 2) recognizing *oneself*, and 3) *mutual* recognition. I will draw on Ricoeur's second meaning—a move that will help me untangle the concept of recognition from its strong ties to a human Other prevalent in accounts from Hegel to Honneth. My understanding of recognition as self-recognition is therefore not *inter*-subjective but primarily *intra*-subjective. In other words, I am not recognized by an Other, but recognize myself as an embodied being. In his account, Axel Honneth ascribes every model of mutual recognition a specific form of positive relation-to-self. Love brings about self-confidence. Legal recognition through rights instigates self-respect. And the social recognition of individual abilities and achievements creates self-esteem. A similar claim can be made of the more basic form of self-recognition through aesthetic experience: It brings about a more basic form of pronounced self-awareness. This pronounced self-awareness is just as important to us as self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Every now and then we have to reassure ourselves and bring to mind our (often subdued) somatic existence, the fullness of our embodied being, the breadth of our corporeal aliveness, and our ability to feel ourselves feeling. Philosopher Jerrold Levinson makes a related argument when he speaks about the "self-respect," the "sense of dignity as a human being" and the "assurance" that can come with the emotional experience of music:

> Central to most people's ideal image of themselves is the capacity to feel deeply a range of emotions. We like to think of ourselves as able to be stirred profoundly, and in various ways, by appropriate occurrences. The individual whose emotional faculty is inactive, shallow, or one-dimensional seems to us less of a person. Because music has the power to put us into the feeling state of a negative emotion without its unwanted consequences, it allows us to partly reassure ourselves in a nondesctructive manner of the depth and breadth of our ability to feel. (233)

The pronounced self-awareness I am talking about is an elementary, dense form of being present in the world. Aesthetic experience is one possible way to achieve this.[10]

Now, in Paul Ricoeur's definition, self-recognition is primarily connected to agency: the self's capability to have an effect. Active individuals recognize

[10] Gumbrecht notes that "it makes sense to hope that aesthetic experience may give us back at least a feeling of our being-in-the-world, in the sense of being part of the physical world of things. But we should immediately add that this feeling, at least in our culture, will never have the status of a permanent conquest. Therefore, it may be more adequate to formulate, conversely, that aesthetic experience can prevent us from completely loosing a feeling or a remembrance of the physical dimension in our lives" (116).

themselves by what they are able to do, what ends they can achieve, and by the responsibilities acquired from the consequences of those acts. Yet Ricoeur not only talks about the acting but also about the suffering human being (69). Is it not plausible to argue that we also recognize ourselves in suffering? In the following I will extend Ricoeur's notion of self-recognition by taking into account the *pathic* side as well. In fact, I would even move one step further and replace Ricoeur's strong word 'suffering' with 'being affected'; it is not only in physical or psychological pain that we recognize ourselves, but in certain powerful emotions or other strong lived-body experiences as well. The difference between my definition and Ricoeur's concept of active agency is this: In passive pathos we recognize ourselves not through our *e*-ffects but *a*-ffects; not by what we are capable of, but what we are able to do—namely, to feel ourselves affected. This is the moment at which aesthetic experience makes its entrance; being affected by an aesthetic object is precisely one of the quintessential aspects of the aesthetic experience, particularly if we take the term 'aesthetics' from its ancient Greek roots—*aisthitikos* means 'perceptive by feeling' and *aisthisis* is the sensory experience of perception (Buck-Morss 6). While often placed in the background in our life-world, the lived body (*Leib*) becomes predominantly foregrounded in moments of crisis: in pain, sickness, or self-conscious emotions like shame or guilt (see Leder). Aesthetic experience allows the lived body to be foregrounded in a safe and pleasurable way: Pathos substitutes for apathy.[11]

There is yet another reason that speaks in favor of employing Ricoeur's use of the term 'self-recognition' for our purpose. In self-recognition, Ricoeur's *first* meaning (that of first identifying/distinguishing) is still very much present. The *logical* sense of identification is reprised by and then turns into its *existential* sense: The self wants to be identified and made distinct (Ricoeur 250). One might also say that one is supposed to *stand out*, less in a social than in an existential way. This is precisely what happens in cinematic shock. My phenomenological description will show how, in moments of shock, the viewer experiences him- or herself as being rapidly and abruptly dragged out of the habitual flux of everyday life. For a brief instant the self becomes individualized and—shockingly—aware of his- or herself as an embodied being. Furthermore, in some cases the individual *asserts* him- or herself in the face of shock by actively and literally screaming out loud to indicate that he or she has been affected. In his account of recognition, Ricoeur underscores the semantic proximity of 'attester' and 'reconnaissance': of attestation and recognition. As will become clear by the end of my first argument, the scream can be seen as an act of assertion—Ricoeur, in fact, uses the German word *Selbstbehauptung* in this context (251). It is here that the intersubjective dimension of self-recognition comes into play, and that my first mode of aesthetic recognition blends into the second through the ambiguity of the scream: I hear myself screaming, but in screaming I also make myself heard. I recognize myself—but others recognize my existence, too.

[11] As Nietzsche famously exclaimed: "Art [...] is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life" (452).

The Benefits of Aesthetic Experience and the Work of Art

There are several characteristics that distinguish aesthetic experience from mundane, non-aesthetic experience and therefore make it particularly effective in its affective dimension and its ability to enable self-recognition. Most importantly, during an aesthetic experience we adopt a certain stance toward the world: an aesthetic attitude. What sets an aesthetic attitude apart from other everyday activities is our disinterested perceptual devotion to objects. Aesthetic experience is not a simple stimulus-response mechanism, but an active, voluntary encounter with an object that becomes an aesthetic object only through the attention we give it. If we focus solely on its perceptible properties and phenomenal characteristics and ignore its functional purpose, we can turn every object into an aesthetic one. Think of a chair. If we sit on it in order to study the latest book by Axel Honneth, we use the chair as a functional tool for other ends. If we forget Honneth and give our attention to the chair *as* a chair and remain disinterested in its function, it might then enable an aesthetic experience. Mikel Dufrenne therefore argues in favor of an involvement for its own sake, as "it is only when the spectator decides to exist wholly for the work, in accordance with a perception which is resolved to remain nothing but perception, that the object appears before him as an aesthetic object" (16). Importantly, this also goes for the work of art. In its essential, material 'thinghood,' the work of art can be used for all kinds of purposes: A Walker Evans photograph might decorate a wall; a portrait by John Singer Sargent could be used to identify a historical individual; a *Nirvana* song might be employed in order to drown out a noisy neighbor.

Phenomenologists like Dufrenne, Roman Ingarden, and Wolfgang Iser have persistently emphasized how the work of art needs a perceiver with an aesthetic attitude in order for it to become an aesthetic object. This distinction between the work of art and the aesthetic object is crucial.[12] The former is the structural foundation of the latter. If there is no one to perceive the projection of *Gone with the Wind*, the film shrinks to its status as a physical thing; its colors become light vibrations, its music and dialogues sound waves, etc. (Dufrenne 48). These light vibrations and sound waves certainly exist in the world and they might easily be measured by some instrument, but they are not *experienced*. As Dufrenne writes: "The work of art is what is left of the aesthetic object when it is not perceived—the aesthetic object in the state of the possible, awaiting its epiphany" (14). However, insofar as we traditionally assume that the vocation of the work of art is to become an aesthetic object, it is dependent on there being a perceiver. The work of art as the intentional object of an aesthetic experience is completed, concretized,

[12] Georges Poulet describes this difference nicely in his discussion of books: "Books are objects. On a table, on bookshelves, in store windows, they wait for someone to come and deliver them from their materiality, from their immobility. [...] Made of paper and ink, they lie where they are put, until the moment some one [sic] shows an interest in them. They wait. Are they aware that an act of man might suddenly transform their existence? They appear to be lit up with that hope. Read me, they seem to say. I find it hard to resist their appeal. No, books are not just objects among others" (53).

actualized only by the perceiving recipient who—through this very constituting activity—turns it into an aesthetic object.

Now, if we adopt an aesthetic attitude, two things happen that are crucial for my argument. First, the object-cum-*aesthetic*-object confronts us like a quasi-subject. Second, by embracing an aesthetic attitude we open up and become sensitive to the effects that this quasi-subject might have on us. Let me illustrate the first claim by turning to the film experience. In her detailed phenomenology, Vivian Sobchack describes the film experience as more than a mere look through a frame or window to another world. When we watch a film, we not only perceive the perceived world of the film, but we also perceive the film's perception of this world. The film not only presents the *seen*, but also its own *seeing*. It therefore exists simultaneously as a *viewed*-view and a *viewing*-view.[13] It is something that we can look at and look through, but it is also something that looks itself: the perception-cum-expression of an anonymous cinematic subjectivity (which must neither be confused with the camera nor with the filmmaker). In other words, what we look at on the screen addresses us as the expressed perception of an anonymous, but present, other. In her work, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience,* Sobchack variously calls it a visual "subject-object" (133) or an "embodied subjectivity" (142).[14] She notes: "The film lives its perception without the volition—if within the vision—of the spectator. It visibly acts visually and, therefore, expresses and embodies intentionality in existence and at work in a world. The film is not, therefore, merely an object for perception and expression; it is also the subject of perception and expression" (167). Again, this existential presence must not be mistaken for something human, nor confused with the artistically and technologically responsible humans involved: "It is an intentional and visual bodily presence (not an objectively present and intended visible body)" (218). Hence, when watching a film, I *sense* an embodied intentionality at work, even if I do not *see* a body.

An aesthetic attitude generally constitutes the aesthetic object as a quasi-subject. However, our aesthetic attitude also changes *us*. Constituting the aesthetic object implies a self-constitution; consciousness now tacitly understands itself as being properly attuned, as it were, to the possibility of further aesthetic experience (Feezell 89). And as Dufrenne notes: "The more I lay myself open to the work, the more sensitive will I be to its effects" (405). Adopting an aesthetic attitude therefore implies that I have deliberately put myself in a position to be affected. I temporarily set aside the goal-oriented, instrumental attitude of everyday life and allow myself to be sensitive and vulnerable to what the aesthetic object might 'do' to me. Hence, only if I am attentive and open to the object can

[13] To be sure, in our habitual grasp of things (what Husserl calls the 'natural attitude'), we are immersed in the filmic world and rarely become aware of the film as a distinct, intentional cinematic subjectivity. Sobchack shows how phenomenological reflection can bring the film's embodied intentionality into our awareness.

[14] The fact that the film is an embodied subjectivity in its own right can be judged *ex negativo*: We never really accept subjective camera scenes, which purport to merge the film's intentionality with a character's, as convincing. See Sobchack's extended discussion of the famous example from Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (*Address* 229-48).

I be affected and moved by it as an aesthetic quasi-subject; at the same time, only if am affected and moved does the self-recognition derived from corporeal self-awareness become an option. It is here that we find the key to understanding in what way the quasi-subject can be said to 'recognize' me. Or, rather, how I can recognize *myself* vis-à-vis the aesthetic subject-object. Since I see it from the 'inside out,' the film certainly does not look *at* me (even if it visibly looks into the world). It also does not address me verbally.[15] However, I feel the film's presence affecting me emotionally (i.e., bodily). Seen from this perspective, granting the filmic object the status of a subject-object is nothing extraordinary or esoteric; we implicitly concede the point in ordinary language when we say that a film touches, moves, overwhelms, captivates, or spellbinds us. In German one can even say that a film 'geht mir nahe': It moves toward me.

While the affective element is, in general, part of the aesthetic experience, the work of art facilitates the process. What distinguishes a work of art like a film from other objects is, first of all, the fact that it assumes an audience. The structure of a film, poem, or symphony always and by necessity contains an implied reader, viewer, or listener. This address, deliberately directed at us, implies that the work of art 'takes us seriously': It is made for us and, therefore, literally *there* for us. Pre-focused and selected, this address is often made to affect us bodily; in the movie theater some genres are named precisely after their affective element. Think of the horror film or the thriller, for example.

The second thing that happens on adopting an aesthetic attitude is that the work of art can be distinguished from other things and tools that we might turn into aesthetic objects, insofar as it conventionally facilitates adopting an aesthetic attitude. This is particularly true for the cinematic experience. We deliberately drive to a special location. We spend money to enter a purposely constructed building. We sit down for two hours in a rigidly marked time slot that binds us silently and motionless to our seat. Inside the theater everything is designed so that we devote our full attention to the aesthetic object: Once the film begins, it is the only light source attracting our view; the audience remains quiet, isolated walls keep out external noise, and hence the film is the only sound source catching the attention of our sense of hearing; since the seats are soft-cushioned, the presence of our bodies is largely subdued and can therefore be affected first and foremost by the film. In short, the cinematic situation takes away the necessity of deciding what to do by dramatically limiting our options: We can hardly avoid an aesthetic attitude because there is very little else to do (Singer 53-54).

A third aspect that characterizes aesthetic experiences based on a work of art is the safe ontological distance it presupposes. This ontological distance is particularly relevant for those aesthetic experiences that thrive on emotions and affects. It enables, for instance, the vicarious experience of horror films or thrillers. I call this detachment 'ontological distance,' since the movie theater's 'Here' and the filmic world's 'There' are of different existential orders. Ontological distance implies the viewer's physical absence from the scene of action. It provides us with a form of

[15] Addresses to the audience are always connected to a character or an omniscient narrator, but they do not issue from the subject-object that is the film.

relative safety, insofar as we are not threatened by the serial killer in the same way as are his victims. Hence we are free to watch and listen. The practical concerns of everyday life, which would be very dominant if the ontological distance did not exist, are removed from our focus. This allows other aspects to come into view—our lived-body experience, for instance. Note, however, that the ontological distance is not necessarily part of every aesthetic experience. In a famous example, Edward Bullough has described how we can turn a dangerous fog at sea into a pleasurable aesthetic object by adopting an aesthetic attitude.[16] However, if the ship collides, say, with an iceberg, and starts to sink, the pleasure is over rather quickly; we are wholly concerned with practical action and cannot devote our consciousness to the experience itself. As we will see below, the ontological distance of the artwork-cum-aesthetic-object makes it possible to enjoy the vanishing of what I call the 'phenomenological distance,' i.e., those moments when the aesthetic quasi-subject seems to close in on us and we are psychologically overwhelmed (as the German expression has it: Der Film "geht mir *zu* nahe"). Even if the phenomenological distance breaks down due to shock, disgust, or overly violent horror, for instance, we are still relieved from action thanks to the existence of the ontological distance. Looking away or covering our ears withdraws us from the overwhelming 'There' and locates us in the safe 'Here.' When we have looked away or covered our ears, the phenomenological distance jumps back into place. Since the ontological distance is present as background knowledge, events that would in real life consume our whole attention can, in the cinema, become a source of enjoyment: the foregrounding of the body due to a loss of the phenomenological distance.

The Cinematic Shock as Self-recognition

To be sure, not every aesthetic experience is equally rewarding in terms of the recognition it affords. Let me therefore illustrate what I have in mind by the particularly effective example of the cinematic shock. It is a prime example of the affective power of the movies; in fact, I would argue that there are few aesthetic experiences that address the viewer more radically than the sudden, stabbing increase in volume and the abrupt, rapid visual change typical of cinematic shock. The strategy for bringing about this shock is aimed at me—the viewer—*directly*. It does not necessarily take a detour via empathy or sympathy with the characters. In many cases there is not even a character involved.

[16] Bullough writes: "Imagine a fog at sea: for most people it is an experience of acute unpleasantness. Apart from the physical annoyance and remoter forms of discomfort such as delays, it is apt to produce feelings of peculiar anxiety, fears of invisible dangers, strains of watching and listening for distant and unlocalised signals. [...] Nevertheless, a fog at sea can be a source of intense relish and enjoyment. Abstract from the experience of the sea fog, for the moment, its danger and practical unpleasantness [...]; direct the attention to the features 'objectively' constituting the phenomenon—the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outline of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesqueness; observe the carrying-power of the air, producing the impression as if you could touch some far-off siren by merely putting out your hand and letting it lose itself behind that white wall" (88).

Cinematic shock (and what is more generally referred to as the 'startle effect') is often discussed in terms of stimulus and response. But even if cinematic shocks seem to work in a highly localized and hardwired manner, they still depend on an important precondition: our attentional intertwinement with the filmic world. Shocks can be established without prior effort, being expended in creating a frightening atmosphere, but they work only if a sufficiently thorough fusion between the viewer and the film has taken place. How strongly the cinematic shock depends on the viewer's intertwinement with the filmic world can be judged from a series of negative cases. A viewer who enters the movie theater two or three seconds before the intended shock will hardly be affected at all. Or think of someone who is distracts him- or herself by looking at a cell phone display—chances are high that they will have little reaction. And what about viewers who can barely keep their eyes open (or at least focused on the screen) because they find the film to be overly boring? And finally, there could be a form of distraction resulting from the film rather than the viewer—perhaps the projection breaks down shortly before the startling moment and resumes only after a lengthy interval that cut off our relation with the filmic world. Again, the effect will evaporate or be highly attenuated.

Quite the opposite happens when there is a minimum level of intertwinement between viewer and film. This is clearly the case in those scenes of 'suspenseful dread' often preceding the actual shock.[17] During such highly immersive moments, the viewer seems to be glued to the screen. The *cinematic* experience is almost wholly dominated by the *film* experience. Absorbed by our interaction with the movie, we barely pay attention to anything happening around us. The intensity of the moment is defined by stillness—both inside the auditorium and in terms of our corporeal mobility. The cinematic shock unsettles this relationship between the viewer and the movie. Often initiated by a 'shock-cut,' the cinematic shock abruptly 'cuts' our deep and tacit merger with the onscreen world, and thus, the deep immersion ends.

At the same time, the distance between film and viewer, between aesthetic subject-object and aesthetic perceiver, suddenly and radically disappears. Again, this vanishing of distance does not refer here to the ontological distance between the filmic and the cinematic worlds. Nor does it imply the objective physical distance between the screen and the auditorium: To assume that I moved two meters forward or the screen approached five meters in my direction would be nonsensical. What diminishes so drastically is the phenomenological distance experienced by the viewer. In contrast to the seemingly forward movement in prior moments of suspenseful dread in which the viewer deeply immerses him- or herself in the filmic world, the direction of movement in a moment of shock is suddenly reversed. This abrupt vanishing of the phenomenological distance disrupts the viewers' perceptual flow so fast and so unexpectedly (even if it is in most cases not wholly unforeseen) that they cannot raise their hands, shut their eyes, or cover their ears as a means of defense in time. What works in terms of images and sounds of violence,

[17] A detailed discussion of such scenes can be found in chapter six, "Anxious Anticipations: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Dread," of my *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*.

monstrosity, and disgust always comes too late in cinematic shock (otherwise one would not be shocked in the first place). As a consequence, the extreme proximity of the subject-like aesthetic object cannot be averted; the startle effect often implies a temporary emptiness of consciousness (Schmitz, *Der Leib* 174-75). One could call it a microsecond of unconsciousness. Since it is preceded most often by the emotion of fearful dread, one might pun that the cinematic shock 'scares the audience witless' or manages to 'scare the living daylights out of the viewers' for a brief period of time.[18] At the speed of light and sound, the film seems to push forward, force on, and close in on the viewer who literally retreats, re-siles, recoils in a very real sense. The most obvious, three-dimensional proof of this is 'the jump.' If the shock makes you jump out of your seat, you are forced to loosen your tense position, your clenched fists, and let go of the armrest. You literally become 'unsettled.' The film thus shakes the body at its foundation and changes the viewing position in more than just a metaphorical way.

Hence, while in the 'hold' of and 'captivated' by the 'gripping' movie, we are suddenly 'taken by surprise' (or, perhaps more appropriately, 'taken aback') by a 'jumpy' scene. The loss of distance almost completely thrusts us out of the immersive experience in the filmic 'There' and forces us back into a momentary awareness of our cinematic 'Here.' During the shock and its short-lived aftermath, the film experience does not come to an end, as it were, but it is relegated to the fringes of our attention. Another aspect climbs to center stage of our awareness instead: a strong sense of our lived body. During the immersive moments prior to the shock, my self-consciousness is reduced to a minimum; I am lost almost entirely in the filmic world. I do not notice much of my surroundings, nor do I attend to my own body. When the shock bursts onto the scene, however, it is not only my relation to the film as the intended object that changes; the experience of my lived body also undergoes a quick and sudden metamorphosis. While there might be a microsecond of unconsciousness, the body subsequently returns with a vengeance and briefly dominates consciousness once again. Here we can sense the advantage of aesthetic experience. In cinematic shock the phenomenological distance breaks down for a microsecond before quickly jumping back into place. It has already been restored once the overwhelmed viewer recognizes the affective effectiveness that the cinematic shock has had on him or her. But this self-recognition is possible only because the ontological distance of aesthetic experience had existed throughout. Otherwise the viewer would be involved wholly in the practical side of life. For instance, if someone is afraid of thunderstorms, a shocking clap of thunder does not enable self-recognition in the sense described here; the individual would grapple with fright and a search for shelter and/or mental support rather than being consciously aware of his or her lived body.

As a figure-ground correlation, the shocking scene is most effective when it stands out clearly from its background, when it is distinctively experienced as a

[18] Concerning the anticipatory fear before the shock scene, cf. Diffrient, who notes that "the shock cut is typically associated with the anticipation and off-screen presence of an external, ominous force that threatens to unleash violence (thus positioning the spectator in an almost constant state of apprehension—a fear of what might appear)" (78).

gestalt. This is especially true when it is supported by a forceful noise so loud and stabbing that it penetrates our body like a knife. Robert Baird appositely talks about "affective punctuation"—a *subjectively* felt exclamation mark that, *objectively* measured, might last between three tenths of a second to a couple of seconds (13, 23). Even if, in the majority of cases, being 'cut off' from the intertwinement with the filmic world does not result in physical pain of our physiological body (which may be the case when the shock effect is too loud), the shock clearly 'cuts' into our phenomenological lived body.

In order to explore this experience more thoroughly, I will rely on Hermann Schmitz's compelling phenomenology of the lived body. This requires a short introduction to his convincing (albeit idiosyncratic) terminology. Schmitz argues that the lived-body experience shifts on a highly nuanced continuum between constriction and expansion. However, constriction and expansion are never reached in their entirety. Consciousness puts its lights out, as it were, before we arrive at pure constriction and pure expansion. Before expansion reaches its peak, we fall asleep; prior to the climax of constriction, we pass out (Schmitz, *Der Leib* 24). As we have seen, shock is one of those instances in which we, however briefly, lose consciousness because it is too constrictive. Other examples are sudden pain or panic attacks. Since their extremes are never reached, constriction and expansion usually stand in contending opposition. If constriction dominates, we experience tension. If expansion prevails, we feel swelling. This struggle can occur either simultaneously (when we experience it as bodily intensity), or it can take place in successive stages (Schmitz calls this experience bodily rhythm). Voluptuousness—with its characteristic heavy, rhythmic, breathing—is an example of the alternating prevalence of expansion over constriction and vice versa.

Another case in point, illustrating a rhythmic succession of constriction and expansion, is the startle reaction. At first, it involves a radical constriction that can, in its extreme, lead to a temporary unconsciousness. For a brief moment our usual "unfolded present" shrinks to a "primitive present," to use Schmitz's terminology. Just as with sudden pain, extreme forms of shame, or states of panic, the constricting suddenness of the shock implies a temporary withdrawal to the first poles of our five bipolar markers of orientation: the Here (as opposed to Vastness), the Now (as opposed to Duration), Being (as opposed to Not-Being), Identity (as opposed to Difference), and the Self (as opposed to the Other) (Schmitz, "Gefühle" 53). Consider the temporal aspect of shock. The time experience prior to the startling moment is dominated by a temporal *flow*. This could either be the rather loose and extended flow of time characteristic of unremarkable scenes. Or it could be the denser, forward-leaning time experience of a suspenseful dread scene in which we heavily anticipate the outcome and therefore experience the temporal flow more acutely. In either case the shock marks a strong caesura. The flow seems to come to a halt. Extended time suddenly shrinks to a very dense Now. The moment of shock stands out (Bohrer 46).

Since radical constriction is such an unbearable state, however, it is immediately followed by expansion. The loss of bodily intensity in strong constriction is compensated for by a rhythmic expansion. This expansion is the reason why we experience a conventional strategy to intensify shocks used in numerous horror

films and thrillers as particularly effective. I call it the 'disrupted relief strategy.' In disrupted relief scenes, such as in the example from *Friday the 13th*, we are falsely led to believe that a dangerous situation has been positively solved. The film successfully lures us into a position of non-expectation. Just like the characters, we physically relax and forget the offscreen threat. Precisely at this moment, however, the unexpected sting of shock penetrates. Disrupted relief scenes therefore involve a rapid back-and-forth movement between opposed somatic poles: A state of relaxed bodily expansion in the moment of relief is followed by the short-lived constriction and subsequent expansion of shock. As a consequence, the body has to bridge two gaps: from expansion to constriction and from constriction to expansion. These discrepancies allow for a powerful corporeal experience.

The subjective phenomenological expansion, moreover, finds an equivalent expression in some peculiar objective physiological reactions. These physiological reactions not only reveal a similar expansive tendency but can also make their way into consciousness. I mentioned one of the most common reactions before: the reflex-like bodily jump visualizing a literal three-dimensional expansion into the architectural space of the movie theater. Another very common reaction is the production of goose bumps that cause one's hair to stand on end. Moreover, the shock experience seems literally to set the surface of our body into motion: it makes our skin crawl; it gives us the creeps; it sends a shiver down our spines. Needless to say, these expansive physiological reactions do not, in every case, take place objectively let alone make their way into subjective consciousness. But in most cases, at least some of them do.

Last but not least, I have to mention the scream. Almost reflex-like, it breaks its way into the open by way of the viewer's mouth. Unlike inward-directed weeping, but similar to outward-directed laughing, the scream implies a sudden, eruptive opening; the inner constriction expands audibly into the world. Clearly, not everyone in the theater screams. While some viewers articulate their reactions in an expressive, public way, others experience the cinematic shock only privately. Moreover, while screamers are few and far between, American women often react more expressively. How can we reconcile these facts with the common assumption that the startle reaction is hardwired? Baird makes perfectly clear that cinematic shocks are more intricate than such simple reflexes as the knee jerk. The scream is merely *almost* reflex-like. While it is true that the startle reaction consists of an initial rapid involuntary phase, there is also a second phase which falls under some degree of voluntary control (Baird 22). It is at this very juncture that nurture takes over from nature. As Baird puts it, "startle is at once genetically hardwired, socially constructed, and personally expressed" (22-23). While some of our possible reactions seem to be unmistakably hardwired—notably the accelerated heartbeat and hair standing up—others, like the scream, are culturally shaped. Hence we must acknowledge that in screaming there is more active 'doing' than passive 'being done by.' This raises the question of what its purpose might be: What do we gain from screaming?

Following Helmuth Plessner, one could argue that the scream is a form of self-confirmation and self-verification (76). Breaking free from the constriction of shock, we expand not just by responding passively but by actively and literally

giving voice to our reaction. As a powerfully embodied expression of a powerful lived-body experience, the scream seems adequate. Hearing ourselves scream helps us to reassure ourselves in the face of a startling interruption: The scream can draw us even further away from the state of frightening re-immersion. It can prolong the self-recognizing bodily reaction that grounds us in the cinematic Here. It is an act of *Selbstbehauptung*, in Ricoeur's sense of the word—a self-assertion and sustaining of one's position.

The result of this phenomenological and physiological constriction and expansion is, first and foremost, a shift in consciousness from the film to our own lived bodies. By undergoing this corporeal metamorphosis, our otherwise backgrounded bodies enter the foreground of awareness or are, at least, felt more strongly.[19] Like an epiphany, the absent body literally comes to mind and is felt as a tangible presence. It is a literally un-settling effect, nicely captured by the German word *Entsetzen*; the *ent-setzte* viewer is dislocated. Leaving his 'inner center,' he or she is able to reflect on him- or herself from an eccentric position. As Thomas Morsch puts it:

> Der ästhetisch inszenierte Schrecken ist gleichzeitig unmittelbares, physisches Erschrecken und Selbsterkenntnis durch die simultane Einnahme einer Außenperspektive auf das eigene Ich. Körperliche Reaktion und selbstreflexive Perspektivierung stehen nicht in einem Widerspruch zueinander, sondern arbeiten in den ästhetischen Effekten des Schreckens Hand in Hand. (236-37)

> The aesthetically produced shock implies both an immediate, physical startle response and self-reflection through the external perspective one takes on one's own self. Bodily reaction and acts of self-reflection do not contradict each other, but rather go together in aesthetic shock effects. (translation mine)

In contrast to gradually approaching affective states like melodramatic tears or the feeling of dread that often precedes cinematic shock, however, the shocked body bursts abruptly and forcefully into our consciousness. Similar to comedic laughter, the scream asserts the experience audibly. In taking away control over the body, this experience of powerlessness causes uneasiness among some viewers—especially those who must be in control for professional reasons—critics in particular. Many viewers, on the other hand, experience the foregrounding of the body as both self-affirmative and pleasurable. As Dufrenne notes: "If the idea of an aesthetic pleasure has any meaning, it is in terms of a pleasure experienced by the body—a pleasure more refined and discreet than that which accompanies the satisfaction of organic needs, yet one which still sanctions self-affirmation" (339). The cinematic shock is self-affirmative because it enables a heightened experience of presence. I feel, therefore I am. Or: I recognize myself, because I feel myself affected.

The Cinematic Shock as Recognition of Accord

Todorov has pointed out the shared commonalities of the group as being another important source of recognition. What he calls "recognition of conformity" occurs when the individual not only *wants* to be, but *is* perceived by those who belong to the group as "being like them" (79-80). Since the word "conformity" has somewhat negative connotations, I prefer to talk of 'accord,' since it implies the comforting awareness that one is accepted inside the group as an equal among equals. It is less intra-subjective than inter-subjective. In the remaining paragraphs I want to explore this form of group recognition with regard to aesthetic experience. Again I will focus on cinematic shocks. Note, however, that the aesthetic recognition of accord recurs in various kinds of aesthetic experience: the collective laughter of a comedy; the collective singing of a rock concert; the collective movements of a techno rave. It is based on the fact that we, as perceivers, become intersubjectively aware of a shared lived-body experience by way of the visible and audible utterances and movements of our co-recipients: screaming, laughing, singing, dancing. As a common lived-body experience, it is related to, but ultimately distinct from, such collective *evaluative* experiences such as the common applaud at the ballet, booing at the theater, and standing ovations at the opera.

Sean S. Cunningham—director of *Friday, the 13th*, a film full of intense cinematic shocks—maintains: "If you see a horror film in an empty theater, it's just ugly and grim; there's no fun. But if you go with four hundred kids laughing and screaming, it's a different experience" (qtd. in Bouzereau). The cinematic shock not only raises an awareness of our own bodies, but it often (if not always) directs our attention toward the other viewers in the theater as well. In fact, it is precisely because our bodily reaction is both strongly felt and experienced as inevitable that cinematic shocks are able to foster an intersubjective understanding of affective equality. Because we can hardly avoid the shock reaction, we may implicitly assume that this goes for the rest of the audience as well. And even if this state of intersubjectivity does not necessarily have to enter our awareness, it often does so by way of a particular form of response. It is the scream that is the most clearly perceptible response that binds together the individual bodily with the collective social experience. This corporeal reaction—either practiced personally or perceived as a response of others—literally consists of crying out loud into the theater to indicate that we, as viewers, are at this very moment having similar physiological reactions and phenomenological experiences.

But why scream? Why not just cry out a sentence like 'Wow, this is shocking!'? Erving Goffman notes that expressive messages "must often preserve the fiction that they are uncalculated, spontaneous, and involuntary" (14). The scream expresses: 'My experience was so shocking that only an uncalculated, spontaneous, involuntary response like the scream seems appropriate' in a way that a lengthy sentence could not. If this explanation seems implausible, it might sound more convincing if we think of the ashamed laughter that often follows an isolated scream. The screamer who stands out by screaming while others remain silent is suddenly reminded of the intersubjective constellation inside the auditorium. He or she feels shamefully singled out because the overly obvious need for a reassuring scream puts him or her in stark opposition to the rest of the audience. As if trying to transform the situation and intending to take back the incriminating scream the screamer tries to cover it up with laughter, signaling as it were: 'I know that my scream was ridiculous! But please, don't think that I am a coward who

[19] For the concept of body foreground and background, see Leder; cf. Katz (332-43).

needs the reassurance of the scream!'[20] In his detailed description of shameful situations, Jack Katz has pointed out that a return into the imaginary or actual embrace of the community is crucial for the emotion to disappear (319-20). The isolated screamer who stands out begs for reintegration by sending the humble signal of ashamed laughter.[21]

Obviously, the laughing cover-up strategy is unnecessary if enough people scream simultaneously. In this case the viewer may not consider his or her possibly shameful scream as an act of isolated self-confirmation, as argued above, but could instead recognize it as a legitimate part of a common response. Since one is already part of a community, reintegration is not necessary. In moments of collective screaming, the taken-for-granted background of our cinematic experience suddenly comes to the fore. What was before tacitly acknowledged, now enters our awareness: the fact that we are not alone in the theater and that others are having the same experience. As we know from other instances of everyday life, sharing the experience of something fearful and shocking can have a relieving effect.

In extraordinary cases this effect can lead not just to reassurance but also to a specific, pleasurable experience that Schmitz dubs *solidarische Einleibung*, or "solidary incorporation" (*Was ist Neue* 140-41). Schmitz describes this phenomenon as a spontaneous formation of a comprehensive, quasi-lived body (*Quasi-Leib*),[22] which results from a cooperative 'fusion' of well-attuned and synchronized lived-bodies co-acting without thinking distance.[23] His examples comprise singing in a choir, clapping, playing in an orchestra, sawing, and rowing. Even more to the point might be the collective shout in the soccer stadium after a goal by the favored team. All of these examples have in common a shared focus. In the case of the cinematic experience, it would be the intertwinement between the onscreen world and the common audible reaction to a shocking moment. In contrast to Schmitz's twin concept of 'antagonistic incorporation,' solidary incorporation contains no domination or suppression among the various partners. In these moments the feeling of collectivity is not backgrounded, but stands out. It is literally ecstatic in the sense of the Greek word *ekstasis* ('standing out'). These moments create a distinct collective feeling, and for a short period of time, the social fragmentation, the feelings of isolation, and the contradictions, differences, and struggles of everyday life are forgotten and buried under a heap of pleasurable equality and integration; in short: an experience of collectivity (Scheler 36).[24]

To be sure, this collective experience does not follow every moment of shock. And obviously in those cases in which it does result, not everybody experiences it, let alone has an identical experience. The preconditions for the collective experience are best when the shocking scene is intense (encouraging a uniform reaction) and when the screaming crowd is sufficiently large (enforcing the 'fusion' of the individual viewers). As we have seen, screaming belongs to the culturally shaped side of the startle reaction. Hence, in order for collective screaming to take place, viewers have to actively engage in it. Among (at least minimally) experienced horror audiences, this is precisely the case. They share a tacit knowledge that only actively *doing* the scream can produce the pleasurable experience of being part of a collective. In fact, in the eyes of those who scream, those who remain completely silent might even carry an air of deliberate unwillingness and may therefore be regarded as killjoys. Quiet viewers potentially embarrass screamers by leaving them unaccompanied. As Goffman reminds us, "silence, coming from a person in a situation where participants are obliged to be busily engaged [...], can itself be a noisy thing, loudly expressing that the individual is not properly involved and attuned to the gathering" (214). Undeniably, this is a more valid description for the refusal to laugh in the face of a funny comedy. But complete silence vis-à-vis a shocking horror movie can create a feeling of being in the wrong place as well.

The reassuring, self-confirmatory aspects of screaming mentioned above certainly form part of the explanation as to why we actively engage in it on an individual basis. But as the discussion of the collective experience indicates, a more *social* element is involved. Screaming can also imply reaching out to and fusing with others. Since viewers find themselves inside a dark auditorium with everyone looking in the same direction, personal interaction cannot be based on the minute facets of facial expression and bodily postures; one must therefore employ the most expressive means of communication: the voice. Again we might ask why we scream rather than cry out a fully fledged sentence? If we presume a certain active (albeit tacit) willingness to make possible the collective experience, individual sentences would be counterproductive. Comparatively complex utterances like verbal sentences simply cannot be synchronized as easily as primitive screams. Unlike singing in a choir or chanting songs in a stadium, collective reactions in the movie theater are not actively coordinated and must therefore rely on the most primitive non-verbal expressions—like screaming. Only thus can the peculiar intersubjective experience of the cinematic collective become possible. And only thus can we gain recognition of accord.

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[20] Again, we can draw a parallel to early cinema audiences, since this type of embarrassed laughter seemed to have occurred as well with regard to the train effect at the end of the nineteenth century. Stephen Bottomore relates a story about two women watching a film depicting the approach of the Empire State Express in New York's Olympia Music Hall in October 1896, and "the *New York Telegram* claimed that the pair 'screamed and fainted' during the film, adding indignantly 'When you can throw the picture of an express train on a screen in such a realistic way that persons who see it scramble to get out of its way and faint from fright it's about time to stop.' However, 2 days later the *New York Mail and Express* published a correction: apparently the two ladies had not actually fainted, but had 'screamed and *nearly* fainted' (my italics [S.B.]) and that 'they recovered in time to laugh at their needless excitement'" (181).

[21] This kind of second-order laughter, a reaction to a reaction, should not be mistaken for the first-order laughter that responds directly to the film and that is therefore a part of the *film* experience.

[22] Cf. *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand* 137-40, 151-53.

[23] Even in the moment of highest integration into a larger collective, we obviously never become a single whole. As Max Scheler points out: "A man's *bodily* consciousness, like the individual essence of his *personality*, is *his and his alone*" (33; emphasis in orig.).

[24] Scheler classifies what Schmitz terms 'solidary incorporation' among his larger category of 'emotional identification' (*Einsfühlung*). Interestingly, he is rather critical of this category, influenced presumably by a generally wary attitude towards the phenomenon of the *masses* at the historical point of his writing.

Note that I do not claim an exceptional status for the types of recognition gained through cinematic shock. Instead, I merely want to show that the two forms of recognition identified here are possible in the context of cinematic shock, even if they also exist in other forms of aesthetic experience. For instance, corporeal self-awareness resulting from self-recognition can be gained from an extraordinarily good dinner. And recognition of accord might also be brought about by collective chanting in a soccer stadium. The quintessential features of experiencing something aesthetically—the peculiar openness to impressions, the loss of the burden of practical involvement, the existence of ontological and phenomenological distance—generally enhance the likelihood that we can both recognize ourselves and feel recognized through accordance with the group. Furthermore, aesthetic experience puts certain forms of self-recognition and recognition of accord at our disposal; we can deliberately opt for it. What makes the cinematic shock special, however, is the fact that it enables a very specific pleasurable and forceful form of lived-body experience that is quite different from enjoying a gourmet dinner and bathing in a whirlpool, thus bringing to the fore aspects of the body that are otherwise *not* experienced. Moreover, it abruptly and rapidly fuses two important forms of recognition—self-recognition and recognition of accord—into a single simultaneous experience (or, to be precise, a rapidly consecutive one). The cinematic shock experience is characterized by a series of quick transitions. It moves from self-recognition through intra-subjectivity to inter-subjective recognition of accord, from a strongly immersive experience (shortly before the shock), to a peak of non-immersive lived-body experience (during the shock), to an experience of the audience's collectivity (shortly after the shock).

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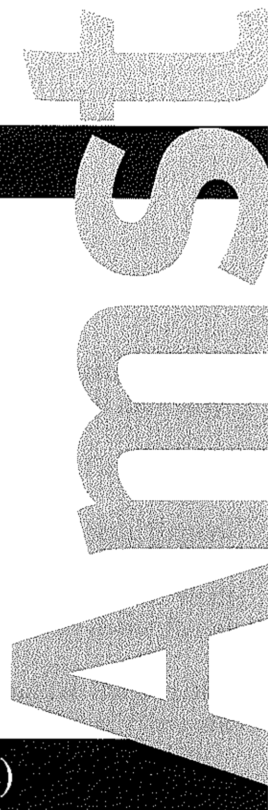

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