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JUDGE DREAD

WHAT WE ARE AFRAID OF WHEN WE ARE SCARED AT THE MOVIES

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ABSTRACT

In this text I explore the question what we are actually afraid of when we are scared at the movies. It is usually claimed that our fear derives from our engagement with characters and our ‘participation’ through thought, simulation or make-believe in fearful situations of the filmic world. While these standard accounts provide part of the explanation why we are afraid, I aim to complement them by showing that we often literally fear for ourselves as well. Concentrating on an anticipatory subspecies of cinematic fear I call ‘dread,’ I argue that we often fear a negative affective outcome, namely our own fearful experience of shock and/or horror that usually ends scenes of dread. By looking at viewers’ action tendencies and actions proper activated in dreadful moments, I suggest that we appraise scenes of dread as potentially harmful to our current (and even future) psychological well-being. Dread will thus turn out to be a specific kind of meta-emotion.

I. INTRODUCTION

COMPLEMENTING THE STANDARD ACCOUNT OF CINEMATIC FEAR

What are we afraid of when we are scared at the movies? According to a *standard account*, our fear derives from our engagement with characters and our ‘participation’ through thought, simulation or make-believe in situations of the filmic world. We either fear *with* characters, or we are afraid *for* characters, but we are not afraid for ourselves (cf. Neill 1996).¹ In the first case, we *empathize* with a frightened character who knows he or she is endangered – for instance, because she has realized that she faces an extremely dangerous serial killer. Through affective, somatic and motor mimicry we experience a congruent

¹ An exception might be the startle effect or what I call cinematic shock. Scholars like Jennifer Robinson (1995), Robert Baird (2000) and Carl Plantinga (2009: 118/119) take startle as a direct *visceral* or, in the case of Robinson, even as a full-blown *emotional* response that is if not a proper subtype of fear at least closely related to fear for oneself.

emotion: the fear we feel is not identical, but we are still afraid. In the second case, we *sympathize* with a character oblivious to an impending threat – for instance, while swimming in the ocean, she is unaware a shark is approaching her. Due to our information surplus there is no congruence in emotions: we fear for the character. According to a more complex version of the standard account, we entertain the *thought* how it would be if we had to face the monster ourselves (cf. Carroll 1990) or we *pretend* in make-believe fashion that we feel how it must be to walk into a dark jungle where we expect an unknown threat (cf. Walton 1990). In both cases we are not literally afraid for our current or even longstanding well-being.

To be sure, what I subsume under the heading ‘standard account’ is, in fact, an abstraction and simplification of an extremely intricate debate that takes place in many arenas and knows countless protagonists who use various related concepts and models to explain our emotional responses to fiction films: central and a-central imagining, primary and secondary imagining, simulation theory and theory-of-mind, allegiance and alignment, empathy and sympathy, thought theory, pretend theory, illusion theory etc (see, for instance, Smith 1995; Tan 1996; Eder 2007; Plantinga 2009). However, what allows me to lump all of them together is the fact that in one way or another they would base their account of our fearful emotional response to fiction films on the audience’s engagement with characters and the filmic world.² This strong commitment to characters and our thoughtful or imaginative engagement with their plight in the diegesis, however, makes it hard to acknowledge that we often literally fear for our own current *as well as* future well-being.³

I therefore want to complement the standard account. While engagement with characters is highly important, we have to widen our focus to explain more comprehensively what we are afraid of when we are scared at the movies. My unorthodox suggestion contains the claim that cinematic fear also involves proximal and distal fears for *our own psychological well-being*.⁴ If my argument turns out to be correct, then fear will prove to be more complex than

² This is certainly not to say that proponents of the ‘standard account’ would argue that *all* our emotional responses to films are caused solely by characters and their plight in the diegetic world. I am only referring to their arguments about *fearful* emotional responses to fiction films. For instance, in their respective accounts film scholars Ed Tan (1996) and Carl Plantinga (2009) also make room for emotional responses to films as *artifacts* and thus go beyond mere reactions to characters and the filmic world. However, these “A emotions” are not considered of the fearful kind. Tan, for whom A emotions are generally positive, lists enjoyment, desire, admiration, and astonishment (1996: 82), and Plantinga mentions admiration, fascination, gratitude, amusement, disdain, anger, and impatience (2009: 69).

³ One may find room for a type of *fear for oneself* in Jens Eder’s helpful notion of “perceptual affects,” which he distinguishes from “diegetic emotions.” For Eder perceptual affects are primarily subliminal feelings and moods that might be caused, for instance, by disturbing visual and acoustic effects in a horror film (2007: 236). Hence a loud or droning sound may cause a low-route type of fear for myself.

⁴ Referring to the main characters in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*, Tarja Laine seems to have something similar in mind when she notes “I am more concerned about my *own* peace of mind than about their safety.” (2011: 21). Consider also what Mark Cousins has to say about Alfred Hitchcock’s *Sabotage* (1936) in episode 4 of his 15-part documentary *The Story of Film* (2011): “Fear comes from knowing that the shock is coming.”

standard accounts of cinematic encounters of the fearful kind would have it. I will proceed in seven steps. I first narrow the field of cinematic fear to one subspecies I call 'dread' and subsequently define it. We shall see that in contrast to other types of cinematic fear like shock or horror dread can be categorized as a meta-emotion. Next, I underscore the teleological character of dread: in this anticipatory type of fear the expectation of a specific outcome – a fearful experience of shock and/or horror – will prove to be highly significant. Third, I will lend more weight to my claim that in scenes of dread we are afraid for ourselves by looking at the viewer's action tendencies and actions proper activated in dreadful moments. Then, I will discuss the idea that in moments of dread the intentional object of fear is split: we may be focused on the plight of the characters, but what actually causes dread is the fear of our own potentially overwhelming experience of shock and/or horror. Fifth, I will underscore the importance of two types of memory: remembering stereotypical filmic scenes of dread and recalling the overwhelming fearful effects movies can have. In the following section I underscore that dread is often a mixed emotion in which fear and pleasure commingle, producing the positive feeling of *angstlust*. Finally, I will refute a possible objection to my argument: the problem of repeat viewings, also known as the paradox of suspense.

II. WHAT IS DREAD?

DEFINING A SUBSPECIES OF CINEMATIC FEAR

In this article I build on and expand arguments put forth in my study on the phenomenology of fear at the movies. In *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers. The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* I have argued that in mainstream cinema fear – predominantly, but not exclusively – comes in five versions: direct horror, suggested horror, shock, terror and dread (with terror and dread being two *frightening* versions of the larger category of suspense). This distinction accords with what philosophers have said about fear in general: there are different kinds of fear. For instance, Christine Tappolet distinguishes between anxiety, anguish, apprehension, worry, phobia, fright, terror, and panic (2009: 328), and Robert C. Roberts separates fear, anxiety, fright, terror/panic, horror, and spook (2003: 195-199). In my account the word 'fear' functions as an umbrella term. It encompasses a number of emotional states sufficiently close to *each other* as well as to *prototypical fear in everyday life* in order to deserve this single name. However, for the sake of clarity and brevity, in this article I will focus on what we are afraid of in one type of fear only: cinematic dread. Direct horror, suggested horror, shock and terror work differently and therefore merit a separate discussion.

What is dread? First of all, this type of cinematic fear depends on a filmic stereotype – one could also call it a standard situation – that occurs in countless horror films and thrillers like *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *The*

Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991).⁵ However, as a standard situation it transcends genres and filmic modes and can therefore also be found in art-films like *Tropical Malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004) or *Amour* (Michael Haneke, 2012). Even comedies like *The Heat* (Paul Feig, 2013) can contain moments of dread. In terms of narrative content the paradigm case of dread presents a vulnerable character slowly and quietly entering a dark, forsaken place potentially harboring a threat. While the character might be informed about the threat or not (and hence behave either terrified or ignorant), it is highly probable that he or she will confront it anytime soon—even if the outcome is still uncertain. Although we, as viewers, often have at least some information about the danger, the exact nature of the threat remains open.

But what are we afraid of? Of course, we are often afraid for and/or with the characters, as the proponents of the standard account predict. However, for various reasons—ranging from genre experience to internal narrative cues—we also expect that the dreadful scene *itself* will blend into and thus end with the bursting effect of cinematic shock and/or a potentially overwhelming moment of horror – and thus *two other types of fear* (for detailed discussions of horror and shock as types of cinematic fear, see chapters 3 and 5 of my *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*). In countless cases a dread scene gives way to the viewer’s experience of shock and/or horror when a killer or monster suddenly jumps at the character and tries to kill him or her with a knife, a razor blade, a sledgehammer, a chainsaw. In these moments we, as viewers, are confronted with a sudden onscreen appearance of a moving-image representation of disproportional immorality and disturbing brutality inherent in the violent act, forced on us through the vividness and impressiveness of threatening cinematic images and sounds. What *shocks* us is the sudden and unexpected appearance of the threat that bursts into the vulnerable stillness of the dread scene; what *horrifies* us is the representation of disproportional immorality and disturbing brutality inherent in the violent act.

Note, however, that dread lasts *until* it gives way to shock or horror, but it does not include those other types of fear. This point is important: Since we know from our encounter with previous horror films and thrillers (but also other genres and modes) how these scenes usually end, we are afraid of our potential confrontation with a shocking moment of startle and/or a horrified response to a horrific representation of disproportional immorality and disturbing brutality. In dread we therefore *anticipate* certain fearful affective out-

⁵ My definition of dread shares features with, but ultimately has to be distinguished from what Cynthia Freeland (2004) has called “art-dread.” While Freeland also mentions the anticipatory nature of art-dread, her account emphasizes a deep, profound, and often religious and cosmic quality of the evil danger the characters face – a constellation experienced as *art-dread* by the viewer who follows the film in a safe environment. My definition is more *mundane* as it focuses on recurring, suspenseful standard situations of scenes in which the audience expects an impending confrontation with something shocking and/or horrifying. And it is also more *concrete* as the typical dread scene strives toward an imminent *telos*, while for Freeland art-dread implies a threat that remains vague, obscure, uncertain and nebulous and that is often connected to a sustained *mood* of suspense.

comes of the scene we are scared of.⁶ In other words, the thing that we have to fear is fear itself (to paraphrase Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous quote).⁷

Emotions that have as their intentional objects other emotions are called meta-responses or, more commonly, meta-emotions (Jäger and Bartsch 2006; Bartsch et al. 2008; for earlier accounts of meta-emotions in aesthetic experiences of tragedies and filmic melodramas, see Feagin 1983 and Oliver 1993). As Bartsch et al. explain: "Emotions as such can be monitored and appraised, they may become an object of affective reactions, which result in a desire to maintain or to change the emotion, or in a motivation to approach or avoid emotion-inducing situations or activities in the future" (2008: 15). In our case the second-order emotion of dread has the first-order emotion of shock and/or horror as its intentional object. In contrast to other types of meta-emotions – like the shame of being jealous or the happiness about having fallen in love – dread is an *anticipatory* type of meta-emotion: We experience an emotion about an emotion we may or may not experience in the near *future*. Here it may be important to note that meta-emotions do not necessarily depend on the *actual* coming into existence of the first-order emotion. As an example Jäger and Bartsch mention the teenager's pride about his or her eternal love – an actual pride that does not require that the relationship will turn out to be eternal (2006: 185). Hence the meta-emotion of dread can exist even in cases when the first-order emotion of shock and/or horror does not occur at the end of the scene, as mentioned above. It is enough that we highly *expect* those first-order emotions.

While for some readers the prefix 'meta' might imply a strong self-reflective stance, the meta-emotion of dread *can* but does *not* have to be reflective in a full-fledged sense: "appraisal of emotions is as intuitive and effortless

⁶ As an anticipatory type of cinematic fear, dread can also be described as a *frightening* kind of suspense. I believe that the current definition of suspense is overly broad because it groups together scenes that can be distinguished productively. Scenes of dread with their formal and experiential characteristics occur sufficiently often to merit a separate name (even if dread still remains part of the larger category of suspense). Of course, the larger category of suspense does not necessarily imply fear but can evoke less intense experiences as well, as when we hope for a good outcome and apprehend a negative ending in a sports film or a caper movie. While in a non-frightening suspense scene I may be merely *gripped* or *captivated*, in frightening types of suspense like terror or dread I am *scared*. In a recent paper on the paradox of suspense Christy Mag Uidhir similarly argues that there are different degrees in intensity when it comes to suspense. (2011: 131/132).

⁷ Paisley Livingston brought to my attention two other illuminating examples of anticipatory dread which are only *indirectly* related to the film and which are focused first and foremost on the theatrical situation and the co-viewers involved. First, he has a colleague who startles very easily and violently. Watching a dread scene with her, Livingston is just as afraid of her intense and jolting startling response as of the film's shock effect. Second, abhorring the shameless *laughter* about violence sometimes displayed by certain horror buffs, Livingston tends to dread the questionable reactions to violence more than the violent representations. In both cases he anticipates an affective state: While in the first case, he dreads being startled by someone else's startle, in the second case he dreads his own anger or moral outrage evoked by the laughter about violence.

as emotion-eliciting appraisal processes are at the level of primary emotions. Media users need not be consciously aware of appraisals that give rise to meta-emotions, much like they are often unaware of appraisals that elicit primary emotions." (Bartsch et al. 2008: 17). But what do we gain from identifying dread as a meta-emotion? I think that there are at least two upshots. First, dread may more easily become a worthwhile research topic for scientists working within the meta-emotion paradigm in media psychology and communication studies. Second, categorizing dread as a meta-emotion can help us to distinguish this *second-order* type of cinematic fear conceptually more clearly from non-meta-emotion first-order types of fear such as *horror* and *shock*.

But why can we be shocked or horrified by moving-image representations in the first place? For the purpose of this paper I think it is permissible to sidestep this epistemological question, because in dread as an *anticipatory* type of fear we are not yet afraid of the representation itself, but rather of the potential negative experience we might soon have to live through. It therefore suffices to trust the phenomenological-psychological facts that we are indeed afraid of something coming up anytime soon. Whether an account based on thought, simulation or make-believe theory best explains our horrified response to an actual horrific representation, I will have to leave open in this article.

Now, since neither the intensity of the shock nor the degree of horror evoked by the immorality and brutality inherent in the violent act are known to us in moments of dread, we face a largely unknown threat that is yet to come and that might overwhelm us. Edmund Burke is certainly not the only theorist who has argued that the diffuse potentiality of obscure and unknown horror is ultimately more frightening than straight-out *perceptible* horror (1958 [1757]: 58/59). Underlying this argument is the belief that something we can see is manageable, whereas unseen horror cannot be controlled. In other words, the epistemic deficit of anticipated, but unknown shock or horror leaves open the *potentiality* of something far worse than what we would usually expect in a film.

To a certain degree, this epistemic deficit is also true for scenes in which we seem to be familiar with the threat. Take the showdown of *The Silence of the Lambs*. On the one hand, we certainly know that it is the serial killer Jame Gumb (Ted Levine) who hides in his cellar and poses a threat to young FBI agent Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster). On the other hand, we cannot know the *exact* nature of her danger. Maybe the killer escapes through a backdoor. Maybe he slowly enters the scene and threatens Clarice with his gun. Maybe he suddenly and aggressively jumps around the corner with an axe in his hand and hammers it into Clarice's head. Or maybe something as yet unimaginably evil and shocking occurs. The fact that Jame Gumb was established as the threat changes our epistemic deficit of unknown horror only slightly.

III. SENSE OF AN ENDING

THE TELEOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF DREAD

Once the character enters the forsaken house, the empty corridor or the gloomy alley the situation immediately implies an ending: a *telos* to which the situation gradually pushes forward. The end is thus already prefigured in its beginning (cf. Strasser 1977: 205). While advancing the goal of the shocking or horrific outcome, dread scenes mark the opposite of the characteristic open-endedness of mere succession. The teleological element is so strong that we often experience the scene as unfulfilled when it stops without the expected ending. As an anticipatory form of fear that is felt *until* the very moment it gives way to shock or horror (or disappears otherwise), dread lacks closure as a gestalt without those other effects. This entails a double consequence. First, since we expect a *telos*, we lean forward in time and anticipatorily scan the imminent temporal horizon in 'search' of the prospecting threat. Second, since this delayed outcome is expected to be either shocking or horrific the time experience in-between becomes more accentuated; the duration of time is both *protracted* and perceived as *denser* than average scenes.

However, Gestalt psychological terms – an open Gestalt asks for completion – do not fully cover the emotional and hence bodily experience of what is at stake here. I therefore want to borrow a musical metaphor suggested by philosopher David Velleman who speaks of “emotional cadences”: a sequence of events completes an emotional cadence once it provides an *emotional resolution* (2003: 13). With reference to a clock metaphor in Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* Velleman also notes that “some episodes [...] set off an emotional *tick* to which subsequent episodes can provide the answering *tock*” (Ibid: 20). For Velleman narratives as such – and by implication *scenes within a narrative* as in dread – are rooted in the diachronic nature of human emotions and affects: “The cadence that makes for a story is that of the arousal and resolution of affect, a pattern that is biologically programmed. Hence we understand stories viscerally, with our bodies” (Ibid: 13). The narrative endings or emotional resolutions to a dread scene are instances of bodily felt shock and/or horror that we expect from the outset.

While an anticipatory type of cinematic fear like dread is future-directed, the expectation of the outcome influences the experience at the present moment.⁸ In his book *Sweet Anticipation* David Huron usefully distinguishes between two pre-outcome responses that expectations usually evoke prior to the actual event: the *imagination* response and the *tension* response (2006: 7-12). During the imagination response we anticipate what is most likely going to happen, even if there are usually no full-fledged visual or aural imaginations of the outcome involved. The upcoming event therefore tinges the pre-outcome phase and the future has, as it were, a backward effect upon the present. In other words, when we strongly anticipate being shocked or

⁸ In the following paragraphs I draw on arguments I made elsewhere with reference to moments of ‘anticipatory disgust’, scenes in which the viewer anticipates a confrontation with a disgusting object or event that revolts him or her even *before* the source of disgust is perceptually present on the screen (Hanich 2011: 14-18).

horrified, we are *already* scared. As Huron notes: “it is not the case that we simply think about future outcomes; when imagining these outcomes, we typically are also capable of feeling a muted version of the pertinent emotion. We don’t simply *think* about future possibilities; we *feel* future possibilities” (Ibid: 8, original emphasis).

The expectation of a shocking or horrifying outcome also involves a bodily and cognitive preparation for the confrontation. Huron chooses the felicitous term “tension” to describe this pre-outcome response. In moments of dread the viewer tenses up mentally – through increased attention and vigilance – and somatically – through changes in bodily feeling – when expecting the outcome. This is especially true for cases that promise an *intense* experience due to a particularly shocking or horrifying object or event (magnitude). Tension will also become pertinent when the outcome is not definite regarding its *when* and *how* (uncertainty). In other cases, the tension is particularly strong when an extreme magnitude is known and hence there is certainty, as in the case of repeat viewings.

IV. AFRAID FOR OURSELVES?

THE QUESTION OF DANGER AND HARM

In this section I further support my claim that in dread scenes we are indeed afraid for *ourselves*. But isn’t it a widespread assumption in the literature on fear at the movies that we, ourselves, face no danger and hence no risks? In a recent article on the paradox of horror Katerina Bantinaki writes: “our encounter with horror is not a risk-taking activity” (2012: 389). Or with regard to suspense, of which dread is a frightening type in my taxonomy, Christy Mag Uidhir notes: “suspense in our engagements with fictional narratives also looks to be a subspecies of apprehension for which *we*, ourselves, necessarily *cannot* be subjects of concern” (2011: 132, emphases added). One of the reasons for this presumption is the alleged *safety* of the movie theater and the *control* over our experience it entails. Think of the *ontological* divide that separates reality from fiction (an important aspect for fictional horror films and thrillers). And consider also the *medium* divide that disconnects the here and now of the auditorium from what once took place somewhere else in front of the camera and what is now projected on the screen (an important aspect for mockumentary horror).

In contrast I argue that we experience scenes of dread as fearful, because we *appraise* the situation as dangerous to *us*: we expect it to result in a potentially overwhelming and thus harmful moment of shock and/or horror (both of which might have longstanding effects). Lest this sounds implausible, let me add two significant claims about fear and the conceptual discussion surrounding it. First, I take it that many (if not all) types of fear are both about a danger *and* some kind of harm we anticipate – and thus *another affective state* like pain or psychological upheaval we wish to avoid. While in moments of fear we might focus on the danger (the ‘content’ of fear), the cause of fear is the

physical or psychological harm we could suffer from it (the 'reason' for fear). Even if conventional wisdom has it that the core-relational theme of fear is an immediate danger (Lazarus 1999; Prinz 2004), we need to acknowledge the simultaneous importance of harm. In section V I will therefore argue that in dread the intentional object of fear is split, whereas in section VI I will say more what kind of harm we fearfully anticipate.

My second claim refers to the problematic standard examples in philosophical and psychological discussions of fear: rare are the exceptions that do not discuss confrontations with a dog or a bear. In both cases the harm is a *physical* one and a *heavy* physical one at that, namely being injured by a dog and killed by a bear. Both are drastic examples that possibly exaggerate for reasons of intelligibility. But for two reasons they are too drastic to reflect milder cases of fear more prevalent in everyday life. First, we can dread physical harm that does not involve heavy bodily injuries and hence heavy pain, but mild types of cuts or wounds and thus lesser forms of pain. For instance, I can be afraid of dealing with a particular sharp knife in my kitchen, because I once cut myself while cooking. Or I may be afraid of bees, because I once was stung by this insect and since then fear the (mild) pain that came with it. Second, we may also be afraid of *psychological* harm. I might be afraid of roller-coasters, because a ride some years ago caused recurring nightmares in which I re-experience the fearful event: Although I know that roller-coasters are safe and no physical harm was ever done to me, I am afraid that going on a ride again might bring back the psychological effect it had inflicted upon me. All this is to say that the intentional object of fear does not have to imply grave danger and strong physical harm – it can also imply a *milder* form of *psychological* harm.

This is the case in cinematic dread, where the ending of the scene – the onset of horror and/or shock – is as-yet a threat. The potentially harmful effect of the two other types of fear is still an *eventuality* or, to put it in more Deleuzian terminology, a *virtuality*. However, this virtuality has a backward effect on the now, as we have seen. Hence I claim that dread in the movie theater is a full-blown type of fear and far from being a so-called *recalcitrant fear*. With this term philosophers describe the fact that we can fear an object or event even though we simultaneously judge that it is not fearsome – for instance, because Jane has been bitten by a dog when she was young, she cannot get rid of her fear of dogs, including her neighbor's little puppy which she knows is not dangerous at all (Cf. Benbaji: 2012). In moments of cinematic dread we do indeed appraise the situation as dangerous for our current and, possibly, long-standing well-being as the upcoming affective experience can be both unpleasant and psychologically harmful.

Where does my evidence come from? The most important indication that viewers are truly afraid I glean from their *action tendencies* and their *actions proper*. Yet when we look at the discussion of action tendencies and actions proper (i.e. the motivational component of cinematic fear), we face an astonishingly simplistic debate. Christine Tappolet has convincingly argued that we

should not reduce the motivational tendencies of fear to the three 'F's' of flight, fight and freeze. She points out a number of other types of fear behavior such as hiding, adopting a protective position or expressive movements and sounds (2009: 332). However, in the debate about cinematic fear the common argument one hears is the hackneyed assumption that people would have to run out of the theater (and hence display a panicking flight reaction) in order for their emotion to count as a genuine type of fear. The *locus classicus* is the beginning of Kendall Walton's famous essay "Fearing Fiction": "Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime. He *cringes in his seat* as the slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth, destroying everything in its path. [...] The slime, picking up speed, oozes on a new course straight towards the viewers. Charles *emits a shriek* and *clutches desperately at his chair*" (1978: 5, emphases added). Since Charles does not run out of theater and away from the green slime, he can only experience quasi-fear, or so the argument goes. But doesn't Walton overlook that Charles displays obvious fear behaviors – responses that are appropriate to a vivid and impressive moving-image representation?

True moments of dread not only evoke action tendencies, but sometimes these tendencies turn into full-blown actions: we tighten up in our seats, grab the armrest, hold the hands of our partner, peek through our fingers, look away, shut our eyes, cover our ears, leave the theater or turn off the film (for various ways how adolescences actively respond to frightening films, see Hoffner 1995). It would astonish me if someone would doubt that at least some of these responses are full-blown actions. Importantly, these action tendencies as well as actions proper are fully *adequate* to the intentional object of fear. By looking away rather than running away, by closing our eyes rather than panicking we respond in an appropriate way to the *medium of film* and its potentially shocking and horrifying representations as our intentional object of fear. In other words, we *do* flee in a very literal sense, but we escape in a way that is fitting to the threat of a dreadful representation. A similar thing can be said of Charles in Walton's thought-experiment: Cringing, shrieking and clutching one's seat are adequate reactions if one is afraid of the representations of a *filmic representation* of the green slime (and not the green slime itself!). Walton already went it to the very direction that I would endorse, but then dismissed this solution, when he wrote that Charles experiences "fear of the depiction of the slime, not fear of the slime that is depicted" (1978: 10).

In addition to the rarely acknowledged *variety* of fear behaviors, we should also take into account that individuals have a certain amount of *flexibility* in their fear responses. Tappolet (2009: 332) points out that the *distance* of the fear stimulus plays a role for the actual fear behavior: is the threat directly in front of me or will it strike in the distant future? So does the *nature* of the stimulus: is a dog attacking me or am I afraid of nuclear war? And so do *context* factors: if I have a cell phone with me I can call the police when a burglar enters my mountain cabin, otherwise I might have to hide in my panic room.

All of this is valid for fear in the movie theater as well. The temporal distance and the nature of the stimulus distinguish the fear behavior to shock (jumping, screaming) from the reaction to dread (peeking through one's fingers, looking away). And certainly the contextual factor also plays a role: While in the cinema I may have to *look away*, in front of the computer screen I can simply *stop* or even *turn off* the film.

V. A SPLIT INTENTIONAL OBJECT

TRANSCENDING CHARACTER-CENTERED APPROACHES

At the beginning I have claimed that my aim is to complement character-centered answers to the question what we are afraid of at the movies. I believe that character-centered answers tend to overlook the complicated nature of the intentional object in scenes of dread. Drawing on a suggestion by phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz I argue that the intentional object in dread is split. Schmitz illustrates what he has in mind with the following example: When we go to the dentist, we seem to be afraid of the dentist and his drill (1969: 316/317). But what we are *actually* afraid of is the pain that awaits us – in other words, we are afraid of another affective state. The dentist and the drill as the immediate objects of fear push the anticipation of pain into the background.⁹ Hence the intentional object of fear is split in two. The first part—the dentist and his drill—Schmitz terms ‘concentration section’ (*Verdichtungsbereich*). It is here that fear, so to speak, condenses; the dentist and his drill are the center of attention. The second part—the anticipation of pain—he dubs ‘anchoring point’ (*Verankerungspunkt*). It is this part of the intentional object where the emotion is *causally* anchored. The anchoring point remains mostly present as a background assumption and rarely becomes foregrounded. While this aspect might sound as if it was negligible, quite the opposite is the case: the anchoring point *dominates* the character of the respective type of fear and *feeds it*.

Schmitz' distinction is highly relevant for my discussion of dread. In dread the intentional object—the object or event that we are afraid of—is equally split. Or maybe better: two different aspects simultaneously acquire different roles as part of the intentional object. On the one hand, the viewer fears *for the character*: He is afraid that in *The Silence of the Lambs* serial killer

⁹ Philosopher Robert C. Roberts takes another position when he discusses fearing a slippery sidewalk. He claims that the reasons for fearing a slippery sidewalk are the lack of traction and the problems of remaining upright on the ice. Roberts acknowledges that someone may object that we do not really fear the sidewalk itself, but the harm that might come with it. Yet Roberts argues for the opposite: “this reply goes against our ordinary way of talking and thinking about fear. We do speak of fearing slippery sidewalks, and it seems, experientially, that such objects as snakes, precipices, the ridicule of others, and so forth are typically what is feared, and not just the harmful consequences or properties of these things” (2003: 194). I would argue that “our ordinary way of talking” is not always the best guide and that the objection that Roberts mentions but ultimately rejects does indeed carry weight. While in some cases the reason for our fear may be rather simple and direct, in other cases the concentration section and the anchoring point may diverge (as in the case of the slippery sidewalk or the dentist and his drill). In these cases the intentional object of fear is split.

Jame Gumb will harm FBI agent Clarice Starling or that in *Psycho* private detective Arbogast (Martin Balsam) will become the next victim of the knife-wielding mother. This is the viewer's focal center of attention (the concentration section).

On the other hand, the spectator fearfully anticipates the confrontation with the two potentially overwhelming emotional states that usually follow in the wake of dread scenes—shock and horror. Their impending experience is the viewer's background assumption that dominates the character of dread and feeds it (the anchoring point). The viewer therefore crucially fears *for him- or herself*. To make things even more complicated, one could argue that the anchoring point itself seems to be split in two: the anticipation of a confrontation with shocking and/or horrifying moving-image *representations* and the two potentially overwhelming *affective states* evoked by these vivid representations. And finally, to add yet another turn of the screw, we not only fear the immediate negative affective experience, but are also afraid of the potential negative long-term effects – a point I will return to in section VI.

Schmitz' argument that in cases with split intentional object the concentration section tends to push the anchoring point into the background is extremely valuable, because it may explain why film scholarly attention has focused primarily on character engagement when it comes to emotions—and why fear for oneself was often overlooked. This move yields two advantages. First, the analysis becomes less monolithic since we depend less on the explanatory value of sympathy and empathy. Second, heading in this direction might answer the intriguing question why scenes of dread scare us even when neutral or even unpleasant characters are involved. To put it bluntly: Why should we care for an annoying cardboard character in a teenage slasher film if it wasn't for our own sake?

Let us consider the extreme case of an utterly annoying character who ventures unknowingly into dangerous territory: If the film prepares *us* – through appropriate stylistic and formal means – for a potentially overwhelming experience of shock or devastating horror, we might nevertheless feel strong dread. This shows us that *in principle* we could even do without fearing for the character, if only the dread scene endangers us strongly enough. In this case *sympathy* would not be the cause for our fear, but first and foremost the fear for our own present and long-standing psychological well-being. Of course, I am not saying that fear for others does not exist. But sympathy for an extremely likable or funny or beautiful or erotic character (and *actor* playing this character) and the fear of losing this cherished character (and actor) in our encounter with the film – especially when we have grown fond of the character through parasocial interaction or are strong fans of the actor – *adds* to the more fundamental fear for ourselves.

Now, if sympathetic fear *for* a character is less important than previously assumed, what is the role of fearing *with* a character? I would argue that empathy is not necessary let alone sufficient for dread, because we can also

experience dread when characters are oblivious to a dangerous situation (think of the scene in *Psycho*, when Detective Arbogast enters the Bates house and does not expect anything dangerous). Surely, the empathy we feel with Clarice during the showdown of *The Silence of the Lambs* adds an important emotional layer, as we empathically feel *with* an anticipating heroine who is strongly afraid. Clarice facial expressions, her comportment as well as her bodily movements display *dread* which adds to our own dread: She is fearful of something unknown that might harm her anytime soon, but it is not harming her right now. Just like the viewer she is probing the situation in extreme apprehension: the *displayed* emotions of the character and the *felt* emotions of the viewer are largely congruous (albeit not identical). Hence I do not want to deny the *factual* importance of characters which always add a stronger sense of teleology and, in many cases, also empathy. But *in principle* they are not as significant as many accounts would have it.

VI. LEARNING TO FEAR THE DANGER THE IMPORTANCE OF FILMIC MEMORIES

For my argument to sound fully convincing I need to establish how we can be afraid of something we may confront any time soon in the film, although we do *not* know the outcome. It is therefore important to describe the role of memory in watching frightening films. While for the proponents of the standard account the viewer's *past* does not play an explicit role, we obviously do not come to the cinema as blank slates. Our memories of previous films are of vital importance for an explanation why we fear for ourselves at the movies. For *heuristic* reasons I will separate two kinds of memories. First, there is the specific memory that scenes of dread follow a stereotypical pattern involving a horrific and/or shocking experience at the end. One could speak of a *filmic stereotype memory*. Underscoring the importance of the filmic stereotype memory also involves a plea to take into account *para-textual* information when it comes to types of suspense like dread or terror. While a purely *text-inherent* account of information distribution would have to make a strong difference between a character who is informed about the threat (like Clarice) and who is ignorant about the danger (such as Detective Arbogast), what really counts is *our* knowledge of the impending danger.

Second, there is the more general recall, stemming predominantly but not exclusively from childhood, that films can be fearful and may have enduring psychological effects. One might call this the *filmic effect memory*. Just to give you one illustration consider the following quote from Alan Garner, a well-known author of children's novels. Note that the quote is not intended to illustrate dread itself, but to show that films can have extreme fearful repercussions that in later viewings may become significant in dread experiences: "I was three years old. Nobody had told me what a cinema or a film was, and certainly nothing about the concept of an animated cartoon; and I was taken into the largest enclosed space I'd ever seen, into a crowd of strangers, put on a

seat, and the lights went out. The film was Snow White; and I felt my sanity slipping until the moment when the queen metamorphosed into the witch. Then I screamed and screamed, and could not stop. [...] The nightmares began and have haunted me ever since" (Quoted from: Breakwell and Hammond 1990: 9). This is only one of numerous examples that could be quoted to support my claim (for many other examples, see Cantor 2004). Once a dread scene begins both filmic *stereotype* memory and filmic *effect* memory are activated.

The first type of memory should be uncontroversial. It is commonsensical enough to assume that our familiarity with filmic modes, genres, and stereotypical scenes leads us to expect certain outcomes. Think of romantic comedies: just as we expect a happy ending from the film as a whole, so we anticipate a kiss at the end of a scene in which the romantic couple is shown facing each other in silhouette. The same goes for dread scenes in horror films and thrillers. Apart from the typical *narrative scenario* of a vulnerable, lone character entering a forsaken place, in chapter 6 of my monograph on the paradoxical pleasure of fear at the movies I have discussed a number of elements that help to activate the stereotype memory of dread (Hanich 2010: 162-180). First, there are *explicit* cues like narrative forewarnings (the inclusion of mysterious objects, violent characters or ominous occurrences) as well as verbal foreshadowing (such as the warning "There is something wrong with this house."). Second, there are *implicit* cues. Think of the disregard for the principle of maximum visibility: Through a specific use of cinematography, editing, sound and mise-en-scene scenes of dread restrict the usual spatial omnipresence of narration and thus stand in opposition to common practices in other genres. Or consider the narrative surplus that derives from a disregard of the principle of temporal economy. Hollywood cinema generally functions according to a tight temporal economy: it excises the irrelevant and focuses attention on the important parts. In scenes of dread instead we follow activities that usually would not be integrated – as when we see, in painstaking detail, how a character goes into a house or a dark alley. Third, there is the creation of a constricting and isolating *atmosphere* through the use of settings (the cut-off place), daytime (night), season (fall or winter) and weather (rain or snow). And there is yet a fourth factor contributing to the activation of the stereotype memory: *stillness*. With stillness I do not simply mean silence, but the calming down of the film on the level of mise-en-scene, camera movement, editing pace and sound. All of these elements – and there may be more – activate us to pre-reflectively appraise a certain moment in a film as a dread scene.

However, our filmic *stereotype* memory is complemented by a memory of the (deeply) scaring *effect* that movies can have, a memory that may derive from childhood, but can also be of more recent nature. While the filmic effect memory may sound more controversial, there is ample evidence from empirical research in mass communication studies and media psychology. Various studies show that almost every individual remembers a frightening film with an enduring effect on his or her well-being and behavior. Hence mass commu-

nications scholar Joanne Cantor, who has done various studies on the subject, summarizes her insights: “Most of us seem to be able to remember at least one specific program or movie that terrified us when we were children and that made us nervous, remained in our thoughts, and affected other aspects of our behavior for some time afterward. And this happened to us even after we were old enough to know that what we witnessing was not actually happening at the time and that the depicted dangers could not leave the screen and attack us directly” (2002: 287). Moreover, following a study on autobiographical memories of young adults remembering instances of fear at the movies, Steven Hoekstra, Richard Jackson Harris and Angela L. Helmick note: “Virtually every participant readily offered and described in some detail the experience of being scared by a movie as a child or teen [...]. Far from being unusual, being very scared by a violent movie at a young age seems to be a nearly universal experience, at least in this culture” (1999: 126). Even if these studies come from the US, it is difficult to imagine the situation drastically different in other Western countries.

With reference to Ronald de Sousa, we may therefore speak of ‘paradigm scenarios’ of cinematic fear: early in life children learn to fear forceful representations of sound-supported moving images and subsequently store in their filmic effect memory a recollection that films can spark nightmares or other long-term effects.¹⁰ Note, however, that during the film we usually do not vividly recall a *specific* past experience of cinematic fear. Even if this may be the case for some viewers in some cases, I take it that scenes of dread remind us *more generally* that encounters with movies can be fearful. As a consequence, as grown-up viewers we still know that films may have negative long-term effects (whatever they are) and can therefore pose a real danger to our psychological (not physical) well-being. To be sure, I do not want to sound a conservative bell here claiming that all horror films and thrillers are psychologically harmful. I am even less inclined to suggest any political measures. All I am saying is that films in our past sometimes had – and in our presence sometimes have – an overwhelming psychological effect. Moreover, I am not arguing that these psychological effects on our well-being need to be extreme, let alone cause trauma or even lead to a clinical diagnosis. But this is not necessary at all: just as a mildly painful bee-sting can make me afraid of bees, a mildly upsetting horror film can make me dread horrific and/or shocking scenes.

Interestingly, the two types of fearful *memories* correspond with two types of fearful *expectations*. In dread a *proximal* and a *distal* fear are inter-

¹⁰ De Sousa explains: “We are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with *paradigm scenarios*. These are drawn first from our daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which we are exposed. [...] Paradigm scenarios involve two aspects: first, a situation type ..., and second, a set of characteristic or “normal” *responses* to the situation, where normality is first a biological matter and then very quickly becomes a cultural one” (1987: 182).

twined: we are both afraid of the *impending* confrontation with an experience of shock and/or horror and the possible *enduring* effects that this confrontation might entail. In other words, we are not only afraid of a possibly unpleasant fear state that may await us any time soon, but also of a longer term effect this unpleasant fear state might carry with it. The emotional impact of dread is clearly rooted in the *present*: in our anticipatory confrontation with dangerous moving-images and sounds. However, we must also take into account the possibility that we are intuitively and unconsciously afraid of a *future* effect. The *proximal* appraisal ("This is threatening to my well-being right now!") might be interlinked with a *distal* appraisal ("This can harm my psychological integrity for a long time!"). Scenes of dread – just as other types of cinematic fear like horror, shock and terror – might haunt us in our dreams and daydreams.

VII. THE DOUBLE VALUE OF DREAD

ANGSTLUST AND INTUITION

But if it is true that we are truly *afraid* of a negative and potentially overwhelming affective experience at the end of the dread scene, why do we watch at all? The answer is as straightforward as it is complex: we watch because we often simultaneously experience *pleasure*.

In my account of learning to fear at the movies I was strategically one-sided, because I wanted to underline the negative aspect. After all, my main goal in this paper is to give an answer to the question why one might be *afraid* in the first place. For the sake of simplicity I assumed that dread is a meta-emotion with a negative valence about another emotion with a negative valence. This is certainly not to deny that scenes of dread usually imply what in German is appositely called *angstlust* – a mixed emotional experience of fear and pleasure which I have discussed in detail in *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers* (for an interesting psychological experiment on mixed-emotional responses to horror films, see Andrade and Cohen 2007; for a helpful overview of empirical research on the appeal of horror and suspense, see Oliver and Sanders 2004; for a meta-analysis of empirical studies on the enjoyment of mediated fear and violence, see Hoffner and Levine 2005). Following phenomenologist Stephan Strasser I would like to introduce the notion of 'double value' for emotional experiences like dread: "Every situation is a relation which has its positive and negative 'sides.' The means is seen together with the end, the alluring together with the dangerous, the inimical with the possibility of abolishing it, and so forth," Strasser writes (1977: 223). The fact that certain situations involve a *double-valued emotion mix* is something we certainly learn and bring to the movie theater as well. Philosopher Jesse Prinz therefore claims that fear can become a positive emotion through experience: "Perhaps people discover that certain dangerous situations have benefits that outweigh the risks. This discovery could transform fear into a positive emotion under certain circumstances, which would explain some thrill-seeking behavior" (2004: 175).

Due to the potentially *pleasurable* experience also inherent in shock and horror, the teleological character of the dread scene therefore not only implies a *negative* outcome (as suggested above). While it could be *overwhelmingly* negative, it may also imply an *excitingly and thrillingly* mixed but overall positive experience of shock and horror. Hence not only the dread scene itself has a double value, but also the *telos* to which it pushes forward. Since dread scenes temporally delay the strongly expected confrontation, the viewer responds with ambivalence. On the one hand, the viewer has to take into account a potentially overwhelming negative experience. On the other hand, the confrontation promises to be not only shocking and/or horrific, but maybe also fascinating, exciting, thrilling. Hence in dread the viewer is caught in an ambivalent double-bind. He or she is cautious or even afraid of the upcoming confrontation – and drawn to it out of sheer attraction and the curiosity about whether the prediction will turn out to be true.

Jäger and Bartsch claim that *angstlust* is a meta-emotion (2006: 183). However, analogous to bittersweet emotions like nostalgia or poignancy in which positive and negative components commingle, I prefer to consider *angstlust* as a mixed emotional state consisting of fear and pleasure (psychological evidence for mixed emotions can be found in Larsen and McGraw 2011 and Larsen and Green 2013). If we categorize *dread* as a meta-emotion (as argued above) and identify *angstlust* as a mixed emotion, then moments of pleasurable dread – moments in which dread and not some other type of cinematic fear is the fear-component of *angstlust* – would have to be considered as a *mixed meta-emotion*. While this intriguing concept would certainly be worth discussing in depth, penetrating the differences between meta-emotions and mixed emotions as well as the idea of a mixed meta-emotion lies far beyond the scope of this paper.

However, claiming that *angstlust* is a mixed and mostly *positive* emotional experience consisting of fear and pleasure elements also allows for the possibility that the fear component may *outweigh* the pleasure aspect. In this case the emotion assumes a negative valence, which might lead to the various acts of withdrawal described above: peeking through one's fingers, looking away, turning off the film etc. But it can also imply a weighing of pros and cons, so to speak: We may be afraid, but we are also looking forward to the outcome. A desire *not* to look sets the goal to 'avoid' what is going to come, whereas an even stronger desire to look sets the goal to 'approach' what is about to happen. In this case one goal overrules the other, which is hardly an unusual case. Take the fear of flying: It involves the desire not to be on the plane and thus the goal to avoid the flight; but this goal is overruled by the goal to get to your desired destination (Tappolet 2009: 337).

However, the decision between staying with the film and avoiding it is rarely a rational act, as my formulation 'weighing pros and cons' may indicate. Instead, it predominantly rests on intuition. In recent years considerable scholarly attention has been paid to intuition or what has also been called "gut feel-

ings" (Cf. Gigerenzer 2007). As neurobiologist Antonio Damasio explains: "A gut feeling can suggest that you refrain from a choice that, in the past, has led to negative consequences, and it can do so ahead of your own regular reasoning telling you precisely the same 'Do not.' The emotional signal can also produce the contrary of an alarm signal, and urge the rapid endorsement of a certain option because, in the system's history, it has been associated with a positive outcome. In brief, the signal marks options and outcomes with a positive or negative signal that narrows the decision-making space and increases the probability that the action will conform to past experience" (2004: 148). With regard to dread scenes we can argue that our gut feelings most of the time tell us to stay with the film, but to be wary: the scene is both rewarding *and* dangerous. Once the situation becomes too threatening we *intuitively* take the appropriate avoidance reactions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

REFUTING AN OBJECTION

At the end I want to discuss a possible objection. One may question my argument by appealing to the so-called paradox of suspense: How can I explain that viewers feel suspense even when they know the outcome of the scene? There are a number of answers.

First, if the dread scene does indeed end with an extremely strong instance of shock and/or horror, the repeat viewer might still experience dread because he or she fears *re-experiencing* these emotions. Just because I know an emotional experience, does not preclude experiencing it again. My account may therefore come across as particularly convincing for precisely those cases in which the emotional experience *was* highly negative on first viewing. To be sure, the experience is of a slightly different kind, as I am not *uncertain* about the outcome anymore, but *know* that it ends negatively. But this is only to show that uncertainty is not always necessary for dread. Christy Mag Uidhir, for one, claims that anticipatory fear can be most effective in case of certainty rather than uncertainty (2011: 128). Those viewers who remember the negative ending of the scene quite well therefore dread its re-occurrence.

Second, those viewers who for some reason do *not* recall the negative experience of shock and/or horror the dread scene led to – and who are therefore not *true* repeaters – may also dread re-experiencing it, because they may have stored the previous experience in their *emotional* memory. Drawing on work by Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux and Patrick Colm Hogan, Karen Renner has argued: "our sensory perception of an object or event is stored as a *representational memory* (what LeDoux refers to as an 'explicit' or 'declarative memory'), whilst our emotional response to that object or event is stored in the form of an *emotional memory* (otherwise known as an 'implicit' or 'nondeclarative memory'). [...] Hogan points out that people without brain damage often find themselves experiencing emotion without realizing the cause; this occurs when an emotional memory is reconstructed but the accompanying represen-

tational memory is not, perhaps because attention is focused on something more salient" (2006: 111). Viewers can subconsciously be afraid of the outcome of a dread scene, even though they do not recall it exactly.

However, the problem with these two answers to the paradox of suspense is that they rely on a *negative* outcome of the dread scene. What about those cases in which I know the outcome to be positive and I still feel suspense? What happens to a viewer who recalls that the film did not end with a bursting moment of shock and/or overwhelmingly immoral and brutal moment of horror? One explanation might be our *empathetic response*: if a character is extremely afraid in a dread scene, various mirroring mechanisms (like affective, somatic and motor mimicry) may be activated. Hence we may be strongly affected even though we know that the scene ends well, because due to a largely involuntary empathetic response we experience an emotion congruent to the one displayed by the character. Remember, above I have underscored the powerful effect of empathy, even if it is neither sufficient nor necessary for the emotion of dread. Since empathy is involved in many, maybe most dread scenes, this leaves us with cases of dread in which a character *unknowingly* faces what on first viewing seems to be an apparent threat in a dark house and we therefore cannot be afraid due to empathy. I am inclined to doubt that this is a true candidate for the paradox of suspense: if a character went into a dark house *without* expecting any threat and I simultaneously know that *nothing* will come about (neither shock nor horror), would I really experience dread on second viewing? While I cannot provide a definitive answer, I hope that future research in empirical audience studies can shed light on this particular problem.

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