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Gut Feelings: The Special Effects Body at the Limits of Taste

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Film and Media Studies

by

Rachael C. Ball

Committee in charge:

Professor Bhaskar Sarkar, Chair

Professor Peter Bloom

Professor Alenda Y. Chang

Professor Bliss Cua Lim

December 2022

The dissertation of Rachael C. Ball is approved.

_____

Peter Bloom

_____

Alenda Y. Chang

_____

Bliss Cua Lim

_____

Bhaskar Sarkar, Committee Chair

September 2022

Gut Feelings: The Special Effects Body at the Limits of Taste

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by

Rachael C. Ball

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have had the incredible benefit of being supported and inspired by so many during my studies at UC Santa Barbara, for which any brief acknowledgements here will be insufficient thanks. I want to give my greatest thanks to my committee chair Dr. Bhaskar Sarkar, who has always supported my pursuit of even the wildest directions of inquiry, and has shepherded me throughout my degree with imaginative inspiration, kindness, and good humor. I owe a tremendous debt as well to Dr. Bliss Cua Lim, who first inspired me to pursue film and media studies - and also fired my imagination and curiosity in what was no doubt the germination of this project – when I first took her "Camp, Cult, and Trash" course as an undergraduate at UC Irvine. Since then, she has been not only a generous and caring mentor, but a true friend. It was through her sparkling wit, boundless wisdom, and gracious feedback that my initial hunches, interests, and research rabbit holes have been transformed into this dissertation project, and that I have grown as a researcher, writer, and theorist.

I also benefitted greatly from the kind support and thoughtful feedback of Dr. Peter Bloom and Dr. Alenda Y. Chang, both of whom went above and beyond to nurture my ideas into fruitful directions, and together formed the supportive bedrock of my committee. I also am incredibly grateful to Dr. Dick Hebdige and Dr. Charles Wolfe, who both provided a great deal of support and inspiration for this project. The coursework and thoughtful counseling of Dr. Melody Jue, Dr. Constance Penley, Dr. Greg Siegel, and Dr. Aranye Fradenburg was also critically important to my work on this project.

I also owe an enormous debt to my cohort member Jeremy Moore, who not only helped me survive graduate school with weekly film clubs and sage advice, but who also contributed a great deal of ideas and feedback through numerous instantiations of this project. I also am endlessly grateful to Nicole Strobel, Dr. Lisa Han, Dr. Danny Grinberg, Xiuhe Zhang, and Dr. Tyler Morgenstern.

Finally, I want to express my immense thanks to my husband (and coparent to my canine child), Josh Friedberg, without whom I would have never survived the pandemic, let alone graduate school, and who inexplicably shares and enables the same flavor of "bad taste" that powered this dissertation. I love you!

VITA OF RACHAEL C. BALL

September 2022

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Film and Media Studies, University of California, Irvine, March 2012
Master of Arts in Film and Media Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, June 2017
Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, September 2022 (expected)

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2016-2021: Teaching Assistant and Associate, Department of Film and Media Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara
2020: Graduate Student Researcher, Carsey-Wolf Center, University of California, Santa Barbara
2016-2019: Editorial Assistant, Camera Obscura, University of California, Santa Barbara

PUBLICATIONS

"Of Love and Death: De/Constructing the Special Effects Body at the Limits of Taste," *Monstrum* 3.1, September 2020

AWARDS

Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Horror Studies Special Interest Group, Graduate Student Essay Prize, 2020
University of California, Irvine School of Humanities Award in Film and Media Studies, 2011
Franco Tonelli Memorial Prize in Writing on Film and Media Studies, University of California, Irvine, 2010

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Cinematic Special Effects and Horror Film

Studies in Science and Technology Studies and the Body with Professor Alenda Y. Chang

Studies in Transnational Media and the Global Popular with Professors Bhaskar Sarkar, Bishnupriya Gosh, and Michael Curtin

Studies in Feminist and Queer Approaches to Science, Technology, and the Body with Professors Melody Jue, Constance Penley and Aranye Fradenburg

Studies in the History and Theory of Horror and Exploitation film with Professor Bliss Cua Lim

ABSTRACT

Gut Feelings: The Special Effects Body at the Limits of Taste

by

Rachael C. Ball

This dissertation centers spectacular displays of the body and its component parts in horror and exploitation film. Working against the prevailing discourses of immateriality attached to the discussion of digital effects in critical, fan, and even academic conversations, this dissertation focuses on the materiality of both practically and digitally produced special effects bodies. I argue that these corporeal spectacles are visceral in every sense of the word—as hybrid assemblages of the bodily bits of humans and animals that intersect with technics, in their preoccupation with the revelation of what lies beneath, and in their reliance on bodily interaction between themselves and sensing bodies offscreen for their affective charge. By taking these spectacular assemblages of biology and technology as my object, I analyze and contextualize the material, affective, and experiential dimensions of our bodily engagement with these assemblages; violence, death, and decay as it relates to biological and technological structures; and ethical and practical questions raised by the lives and deaths of these constructed beings.

As a guiding heuristic and a means of rerouting media experiences beyond sight and cognition, this project argues for the potentialities of the gut as a knowing, feeling, and even imagining system. I propose the concept of the enteric imaginary as an intervention that centers the hyper-presence of the gut—its experiential, emotive, and image-generating capacities—in the affective dimensions of bodily special effects, reinscribes the importance of biological matter within both digital and analogue scapes, and seeks to broaden both our understanding of what constitutes possible embodied engagements with the digital beyond simply cognition, as well as what "counts" as cognition.

This dissertation foregrounds the critical role of disgust, taste, ingestion, digestion, and excretion in the varied modes of engagement (pleasurable and otherwise) and cultural meaning-making applied to special effects bodies, and to the films and contexts in which they appear. Taking inspiration from Siegfried Zielinski's media anarchaeological model, this project utilizes a promiscuous scope in selecting case studies from a wide array of media contexts, and grounds this admittedly chaotic approach by organizing these varied objects around a guiding figure in each chapter: the écorché, the wolfman, the cannibal, and the revenant.

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"The essence of what was 'wondrous,' that is, 'monstrous,' consists in crossing the line of demarcation between the species, in the mixing of animal and vegetable, of animal and human. It is extravagance, which changes the properties of things that God has given a name to. It is metamorphosis, which allows one order to pass over into another; in short, the transmigration of souls."
- Roland Barthes, "Arcimbaldo, or Magician and Rhetoriqeuer"

1. Introduction

At first glance, the cultural products of the cookbook and the horror film might seem to be about as disparate as two media objects could possibly be. The publishing of *Horror Caviar: A Cookbook* in 2021 saw a small flurry of popular press reviews heralding its novelty, its popularity no doubt bolstered by the cool-kid-cache of indie studio A24 having released the book through its publishing arm. Praised in *Vogue, Eater*, *Nylon,* and *Vice* as a handsome art book squarely aimed at "a certain type of millennial, i.e. the type who can afford a $65 cookbook-cum-coffee table book that isn't remotely practical,"[1] even the volume's editor Lee Yin Yuan was quick to insist that while recipe editors and tasters ensured that every recipe was "reproduceable," this was a book not intended to stray far from the coffee table.[2] While the highly stylized photography creates a sumptuous counterpoint for the surreal recipes, which are outnumbered by the short and longform essays provided by luminaries from the worlds of cuisine and horror (and even the odd film studies scholar!), the decisive dismissal of the culinary function of this ostensible cookbook suggests discomfort with the equivalence of gustatory delights with the feast for the eyes, equal parts grotesque and beautiful, that the book also offers up for consumption. In relegating *Horror Caviar's*

[1] Emma Specter, "A New Cookbook from A24 Offers Up Frightfully Delicious Fare," *Vogue*, 17 November 2021; Madeleine Davies, "With Cookbook 'Horror Caviar,' A24 Brings Terror to the Kitchen," *Eater*, 18 November 2021; Sophia June, "A24 Gets Culinary with 'Horror Caviar' Cookbook," *Nylon*, 17 November 2021; and Roisin Lanigan, "A24 is releasing a horror-inspired cookbook," *Vice*, 17 November 2021.
[2] Specter, "A New Cookbook."

pleasures to the visual realm, perhaps the disquieting rumblings of one's own stomach can be distanced from the pleasurable horror and delightful disgust offered in spreads such as the miscarriage scene which illustrates the dessert recipe inspired by 1981's *Possession* (dir.

Figures 1 and 2: Horror Caviar*, Photography by Justin J Wee.*



Andrzej Żuławski, France/West Germany). Over the course of 30 images, a model reenacts a frame-by-frame revision of the famous miscarriage scene, which replaces the mysterious streams of blood and indeterminant bubbling excreta that originally poured from Isabelle Adjani's every orifice with the splattered and dismembered ruins of the accompanying "White Chocolate Mousse & Walnut Dacquoise Torte."[3]

Horror Caviar follows in a modest genealogy of disquieting and discomforting cookbooks, perhaps the most well-known being Salvador Dali's 1973 epic *Les Diners de Gala*, a highly eroticized, surrealist journey through the wild site of French haute cuisine. Upon its recent reprint by Taschen (famed for their monumental art books which look just so

[3] Natasha Pickowicz, "White Chocolate Mousse & Walnut Dacquoise Torte," in *Horror Caviar*, ed. Lee Yin Yuan, (New York: A24, 2021), 111.

when arranged on a midcentury coffee table), their senior editor was more openly sanguine about the possibility of consumers using the cookbook for its ostensible intended purpose, emphasizing that despite their seeming eccentricity of form and matter (and their absolutely eccentric presentation), "You can really make these things," though she tempers this point with an exhortation to "leave [the peacocks] in the park where they belong," and notes that the fraction of readers "who are going to get right in there and cook up some pig's-ear soup" is likely slim.[4] An even earlier progenitor that likewise provoked ambivalent responses to its selection of mammalian ingredients can be found in philosopher, scientist, and alchemist Giovanni Battista della Porta's 1589 tome *Magia Naturalis*, which contains a recipe for roasted goose slowly cooked alive as a dramatic centerpiece to a dinner party. That della Porta's experimental recipe was one "for which even Salvador Dali, egomaniacal eccentric and esoteric, was moved to express utmost admiration" is unsurprising. Della Porta notes that he had attempted this experimental concoction, which required the unfortunate plucked and basted goose to be surrounded by a ring of fire and carefully kept alive throughout the entire process, only once, and that his friends and dinner guests had become so ravenous with anticipation at the spectacle that "they pounced on the goose before it was properly cooked."[5]

In each of these works, there is a rich undercurrent of the abject, that mixing of the viscerally repulsive with the fascinating as elaborated by Julia Kristeva,[6] which provokes the

[4] Ruth Kinan, "Look Inside Salvador Dali's 'Les Dîners De Gala,'" *Entertainment Weekly*, 3 November 2016.
[5] Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 57.
[6] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

creation and shoring up of cultural boundaries and dividing lines. By troubling the divisions between living animals and dead, comestible meat; or between the species (or even specific body parts) deemed subject to pleasurable human consumption with those that are not; or the affective valences we are accustomed to associating with the preparation and consumption of meals, versus those that we are not, both della Porta and Dali's cookbooks are media objects which provoke strong gut feelings in those who encounter them. In Dali's case, having made the provocative claim that he had actually attempted della Porta's byzantine instructions for roasted live goose at least twice, he had already participated in a transgression of the safe distance between reader and the abject text in making this (albeit unlikely) claim, designed to fire the imagination—and turn the stomach —of those who heard it.[7] The original recipe had already participated in such vivifying viscerality by including not only careful description of the myriad practical details of achieving such a torturous experiment, but also conjuring up the vivid primal scene of the dinner guests setting upon the partially raw (and by implication, still living) creature even before it had been converted through death into properly edible "meat." Here we have a transgression of "proper" temporal, physical, and conceptual distance between eater and eaten, dead and alive, flesh and meat, man and meal—dividing lines that are deeply culturally ingrained and that are everywhere reinforced by the



Figure 3: Horror Caviar*, Photography by Justin J Wee.*

[7] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*, 57.

daily rituals (and technologies) of the market and the table. That such transgressions provoke a bodily-felt response of disgust seems self-evident, though these dividing lines are eminently dependent on culture and custom. However, while the passage of centuries may go a long way toward explaining how distanced we feel from della Porta's culinary lifeworld, this distancing effect can less clearly explain the abject nature of *Les Diners de Gala*, and certainly fails in the case of *Horror Caviar*.

Both of these later texts, I would argue, gain their clear commercial value from the tacit agreement between creator, publisher, and consumer that there are indeed pleasures to be taken in the use of these cookbooks. Beyond their clear aesthetic beauty, inexorably mixed as it is with the contaminating trace of the disgusting,[8] there is a clear investment in the pleasurable experience of bodily revulsion, an experience perhaps most easily agreed to by the majority of readers when routed through purely visual mediation. While the fascinating thrill offered by the repulsive and the transgressive has long been experienced through film, art, and other media, it seems that it is not *Horror Caviar* or *Les Diners de Gala* as objects of display that appears to be a bridge too far by combining food and consumption with the bizarre, the horrific, and the disgusting. Rather, it is the suggestion of increasingly proximal and fully embodied encounters with the figured foodstuffs necessary to their preparation and consumption that seemingly requires the sanitizing quarantine of the coffee table. By denying the role of the body necessarily implied in utilizing the cookbook for its practical use—the

[8] See figure 3, A "meat pithivier" inspired by *Raw* (dir. Julia Ducournau, France/Belgium, 2016), Nokx Majozi, *Horror Caviar*, 168.

fingers and hands feeling and processing the varied, often bizarre ingredients, the nose responding to each of their distinct smells and to their combination, the arousal of the appetite triggering salivation in the mouth in response, the eventual encounter with the finished dish, the teeth and tongue working it over with the aid of utensils or perhaps bare hands, the corrosive processing in the stomach, the final digestion and excretion—the "coffee table" defense attempts to reduce the pleasurable dimensions of these books to a disembodied realm of visual aesthetics. Yet, to divide these pleasures from the production and consumption of comestibles on the basis of purely visual engagement misses a trick entirely, as any engagement with a cookbook—or with media and art broadly conceived—is always already embodied. Just as it is impossible to divide visual engagement from the remainder of the body's interaction with media, it is a further impossibility to disentangle the erotic threads of pleasurable entanglement experienced in these encounters. These abject cookbooks in particular are especially predicated on the body, especially the digestive system, and its ability to imagine, engage, feel, and even think. Even at the coffee table, far from the kitchen's leaky and messy potentialities, the reader's body is fully engaged in the imagined preparation and tasting of these recipes, without which the corporeally-distributed affect of disgust could not be provoked or felt. Moreover, in the case of *Horror Caviar*, the gut is obliged not only to imagine but to affectionately remember—in recalling the cult films by which each recipe is inspired and explicitly references, the horror fans to which this book is almost entirely marketed must bodily engage to experience a further affective pleasure of fanning.

I chose *Horror Caviar* to inaugurate this dissertation because it makes literal the affective and material dimensions which firmly ground the relationships between viewing body and spectacular body onscreen, in film and media broadly conceived and in the horror film in particular. The mouth, the stomach, the gut, the anus—all are uniquely relevant systems through which we engage with and relate to media, perhaps most of all with the emphatically visceral displays of spectacular effects bodies most often showcased in horror film. Moreover, the intermingling foodstuffs and bodily matter (animal and human) in the production of spectacular, stomach-churning scenes of bodily display has been a staple of filmmaking since the silent era, as we will see. This entangling of who (or what) eats and who (or what) is eaten is also bound up in the interplay between the animal and the human. Finally, the affects experienced by the gut—disgust, revulsion, the dictates of taste and moral opprobrium—are the hallmarks through which mediated bodily spectacle has been made to mean and matter at an individual and a cultural level.

In this dissertation I focus not on the horror film as such, but rather on the spectacular displays of the body and its component parts with which the genre is most often associated. These corporeal spectacles, achieved through digital and practical special effects work, are visceral in every sense of the word—in their hybrid construction from the bodily bits of humans, animals, and technics, in their obsessive dwelling on the revelation of what lies beneath the skin of the humanoid or monstrous body, and in the critical reliance on bodily flows and entanglements between the bodies onscreen and the bodies of the viewers for their affective charge. Yet while our current mediascape is increasingly dominated by high budget

digital animation, leading to a growing number of studies focused on special effects in film over the last twenty years, the majority of these remain solely concerned with digital effects, localized to Hollywood from the 1970's to the present, and grounded in an industry studies perspective which overwhelmingly leaves the visceral materiality of the special effect out of the equation. I move to explore both practically and digitally produced special effects, preserving their specificity while also placing them into critical conversation. By taking special effects bodies—spectacular assemblages of biology and technics—as my object, I seek to access the material, affective, and experiential dimensions of our bodily engagement with these assemblages; violence, death, and decay as it relates to biological and technological structures; and ethical and practical questions raised by the lives and deaths of these constructed beings. As a guiding heuristic and a means of rerouting media experiences beyond sight and cognition, this project takes as its frame the potentialities of the gut as a knowing, feeling, and even imagining system. I propose the concept of the enteric imaginary as an intervention that centers the hyper-presence of the gut—its experiential, emotive, and image-generating capacities—in the affective dimensions of bodily special effects, reinscribes the importance of biological matter within both digital and analogue scapes, and seeks to broaden both our understanding of what constitutes possible embodied engagements with the digital beyond simply cognition, as well as what "counts" as cognition.

The majority of work in the field of film and media studies which focuses on special effects zeroes in solely on digitally animated effects (or VFX), and overwhelmingly favors an industry studies approach. When practical special effects (or SFX) are discussed at all, they

are almost overwhelmingly considered in terms of early cinema history, particularly through the work of Georges Méliès, and are linked to Gunning's cinema of attractions thesis. In certain rare occasions that range beyond this approach, as in Kristen Whissel's book-length exploration of special effects,[9] practical special effects are folded into broad theorizations based upon analyses of computer-generated effects, de-emphasizing their distinct histories, contexts of production, and unique affective and experiential dimensions while also missing what might be productively gained from placing practical SFX in conversation with VFX. The global renaissance of increasingly spectacular bodily special effects work, particularly situated around the opening, manipulation, and dismembering or decomposition of the body in scenes of gore, which took place roughly between the 1960's-80's has almost entirely fallen out of academic focus, and largely has not entered into related investigations of taste, embodiment, haptics, or genre studies of horror and exploitation film. Moreover, the predominantly industrial bent of the majority of existing work on special effects has meant relatively little attention paid to questions of aesthetics or the phenomenological, which when discussed is overwhelmingly done in the disembodying and distancing language of the digital morph. Even less often considered is the materiality of either analogue or digital effects bodies, leaving the very real role of varied laboring animal and human bodies within these hybrids unexplored and glossed over.

[9] Kristen Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects: CGI and Contemporary Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

In taking up the underexplored and undervalued area of analogue special effects, I aim not to undertake a recuperatively-minded historical project, but rather to place both analogue and digital bodily special effects in conversation, and to contextualize their appearance across a wide field of iterations. My focus on the body attends to the hyperpresence of bodily effects across transnational and historical locations, as well as to the form's widespread uses of animal and human biological matter and anatomical forms in the creation of its bodily architectures. That special effects bodies are "ghostwritten" by all manner of transhuman bodies can be said of both analogue (animal offal used to simulate spilled internal organs, gelatin used to thicken stage blood) and digital practices (the scanning of human gestures in motion capture, the reference to various animal bodily textures in skinning digitally animated monstrous chimeras). Reorienting the special effect to the body beckons us to approach what is expressly material, and what "matters," in systems which are typically conceived of as invisible or immaterial—both within media and within the body itself.

This project's bodily focus also foregrounds the enteric as a means of interrogating questions of consumption, rumination, digestion and excretion as they relate to our interaction with media, while also attending to the multilayered imbrication of the gut with bodily special effects. The enteric nervous system, "a complex network of nerves that encases and innervates the digestive tract from the esophagus to the anus,"[10] is heavily implicated with the genre of body horror, and the gore sequence—often the hallmark product

[10] Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 24.

of cinematic special effects technologies— in particular. The enteric system's most obvious affective feedback is that of disgust, the hallmark affective response of the genre. In working toward a definition of the offensive film as 'cinema vomitif,' Nikita Brottman notes that "by displaying the nauseating, these movies induce nausea; they are both a spectacle to be witnessed and a part of our bodily lives."[11] Alongside the disgust which is (most often) pleasurably experienced by the spectator upon the viewing of scenes of bodily mutilation, there is also the wider disgust that is directed towards the genre of horror as a whole, and which functions to structure and inform wider regimes of cultural taste classifications. The "bad object" of the special effect often colors, and is colored by, the media objects or genres in which it appears—denigrated or dismissed as the whiz-bang fakery of the mindless action film, for example, or the disgusting excess of the horror film which rises (or sinks) to the label of "torture porn." William Miller identifies "disgust's powerful image-generating capacities" as fundamental to "the important role it plays in organizing and internalizing many of our attitudes toward the moral, social, and political domains."[12] These disgust-inspired judgements of moral opprobrium are not simply culturally vital, as in the case of Bourdieu's class-inflected taste distinctions, but also have a long history of driving legal and economic action within the genre of body horror and the exploitation film, as the UK's "video nasties" legislation in 1984 makes clear.[13] Given the visceral subject matter and

[11] Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 3.
[12] William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11.
[13] See Julian Petley, ""Are We Insane?": The "Video Nasty" Moral Panic," *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*. Ed. Julian Petley, Chas Critcher, and Jason Hughes. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013) and Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films*. Video nasties will also be substantially undertaken in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

affective appeal produced by the layered foldings and enmeshing of the special effects body, the inside/outside liminality of the intersubjective, interstitial border zone of the human gut, itself a series of nestled interior folds constituting an exterior zone, becomes a valuable element in conceptualizing such modes of cinematic address.

I. Enteric Materialisms and the Cinematic Special Effect

The special effect has been defined differently across the works which take it as their central actor, though the general consensus—reached by Scott Bukatman, Norman Klein, and many others—locates the special effect at the intersection of the technological and the spectacular. Dan North defines special effects as essentially "disruptive" illusions produced through a cluster of techniques "designed to alter, enhance, or create an element of the diegesis," and abandons the industry division in terminology between special and visual effects (those produced profilmically and in post-production, respectively).[14] Stephen Prince takes this unifying gesture even further, describing all techniques which digitally work upon the film frame under the banner of "visual effects."[15] While I recognize the utility of thinking a wide range of effects technologies together, I share Julie Turnock's unease with this grouping, as it erases the specificity of a vast array of different technologies and processes, with very different production contexts and goals. In her study of the rise of digital special effects out

[14] Dan North, *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* (London: Wallflower, 2008), 4.
[15] Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

of the Hollywood blockbuster of the 1970s, Turnock admirably seeks to advocate for the importance of the special effect as an overlooked object of study for film scholars, while also attending to the historical and technological specificity of the different "optical effects" she examines.[16] For the purposes of this dissertation, I will utilize the blanket term "special effect"- either practical or digital— as a heuristic to lead me toward a wide variety of media processes and technologies, while also striving to attend to the historical, cultural, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions of the different objects I explore.

Much of the industry studies-positioned work on special effects raises questions about relative degrees of verisimilitude and photorealism these effects achieve (or are perceived to achieve). These discourses, endemic not only in fan and popular press circulation but also in what John Caldwell calls the "tactical self-disclosures"[17] of the industry-produced "behind the scenes" info dump, can alternately be understood as critiquing from a particular historically-situated moment (the technology is not yet as convincing as a profilmic practical effect), or as a more proscriptive claim that the horizon of acceptable visual and textural fidelity to ontological reality will never be reached. As Julie Turnock asserts, despite the common rhetorics in technical and fan discourses of VFX as naturally progressing towards greater photorealistic fidelity, the "historically dominant ILM style of photorealism involves a much more complicated and multifaceted example of photorealism than is usually assumed,

[16] Julie Turnock, *Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 6.
[17] John Thornton Caldwell, "Cultures of production: Studying industry's deep texts, reflexive rituals, and managed self-disclosures," in *Media industries: History, theory, and method*, (2009), 198.

including a great deal of stylization and what might be called anti-realistic techniques."[18] Claims of VFX's unconvincing appeals to verisimilitude place the digitally rendered effects object in opposition to the profilmic object of the practical effect by decrying a loss of materiality, marshalling an imagined response feedback between the performers sharing the space/time before the camera with the effects object. Turnock traces a lineage of the "technophobic" anxiety in certain strands of journalistic and academic criticism around the loss of "something essential, and essentially real, about the cinema in the shift to digital production."[19] This anxious critique has an even longer cinematic history, as Lisa Bode's work makes clear, cropping up around the much earlier grafting of flesh and technics as elaborate prosthetics and make-up capable of radically disfiguring or concealing the performer were developed for film in the 1920's.[20] The extrafilmic discourses of justification which arose in response to the anxieties and ambivalences provoked by early practical effects' radical decomposures and restructurings of the architectures of the human body were again pressed into service with the rise of full digital motion capture and imaging, which as Bode argues again dredged up the concern that a new special effects technology "removes the physical reality of the body and replaces it with something, or someone, digital."[21]

A similar justificatory move can be seen in the case of the transnational action cinemas, in which films which make heavy use of computer generated environments and

[18] Julie Turnock, *Plastic Reality*, 66.
[19] Julie Turnock, *Plastic Reality*, 66.
[20] Lisa Bode, "Fleshing it Out." *Special Effects*, (London: British Film Institute, 2015).
[21] Ibid., 34

effects tend to insist upon the fleshy materiality of the musculature of their central bodies. In addition to narrative and visual economies which value human exertion and bodily transformations, this is often achieved through focusing paratextual discourses around the beauty and body-building regimes supposedly undergone by the actors, thereby effacing the corollary labor of literal body-building undertaken by scores of VFX workers in the construction of the increasingly outsized musculature of the bodies of central performers. In his exploration of the musculature materialities of the seemingly techno-hybrid literal "hardbodies" of 300 (dir. Zack Snyder, 2006), Drew Ayers suggests that it is both the hyperbolic musculature of the Spartan protagonists itself that, along with paratextual discussions of the personal training and body-building regimes supposedly undergone by the actors, strive to make possible the shedding of digital blood's affective indexical relation to the body of the viewer, in some way grounding the digitally rendered world through an insistence on bodily physicality.[22] Ayers' example harkens back to Bode's work on 1920's popular press and industry publications that insisted upon bodily presence and human effort in composite special effects bodies—stressing first the hours of discomfort and often intense physical pain undergone by the individual actor, and thereby relating tortured physicality to valued performance—and then later connecting these same physical discomforts to a high degree of skill necessary to produce a legible performance through motion capture rigs and

[22] Drew Ayers, "Digital Materialism: "300" Bodies in Virtual Space." *Special Effects*, (London: British Film Institute, 2015).

digital prosthesis, most visible around the body of work of actors like Andy Serkis and Doug Jones.[23]

The defensive rhetorical techniques undertaken within major global film industries speak to the presence of popular anxieties around the possibility of digitally mediated unmooring, highlighting a fundamental assumption that an intersection with the digital is inherently a disembodying experience, that privileges cognition and sight over other bodily systems. Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the existing theoretical and aesthetic work on the digital special effect shares this limiting assumption, which centers around the concept of the digital morph. Scott Bukatman identifies the morph as constituting "a phenomenology of the digital," in which digitally-imaged morphing transfers the promise of spatial elasticity embodied in virtual reality to the mutability and potential transformation of the body and the self.[24] Bukatman locates such performative elastic potentiality of the digitally rendered body in the modern superhero film as flowing from the logics of the morph within digitality itself, "in which nothing is immutable, nothing is essential."[25] In a similar vein, Norman Klein traces the digital logic of the morph back through the history of traditional animation, in which the body's plastic potentiality is enabled by a corollary collapsing of environmental laws which previously prevailed on the morphing subject, enacting a parallel phenomenon in

[23] Lisa Bode, "Fleshing it Out."
[24] Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
[25] Ibid., xi

which “gravity itself seems to disappear. Laws of nature collapse,” and the mercurial, “uncanny logic” of morphing triumphs.[26]

Julie Turnock notes that the combination of new digital imaging technologies with “traditional” (practical) effects in the 1970’s enabled an increased “plasticity of previously ‘inflexible’ live-action photography.”[27] Such a plasticity reimagines the film frame as “infinitely mutable and designable,” while maintaining a toe-hold in ontological fidelity through its visual similarity to live-action photography.[28] Commonly theorized and understood in opposition to the more static, additive logics attributed to practical effects work, the liquid morph reinforces in many ways conceptions of the digital as immaterial, just as thinking of it as the purview of the digital inscribes practical special effects as rigid, limiting, and static by virtue of their materiality—obfuscating the ways in which both modes are emphatically material, transformable in their potentiality, and enmeshed with the body in fundamental ways. This is perhaps clearest in Kristen Whissel’s adoption of Eisenstein’s concept of exuberant “plasmaticness” in early American film animation, predicated on an overcoming of biological divisions in the rapid morphing between various animal forms, to historicize the morph in the context of digitally-animated special effects bodies in 2010’s Hollywood.[29]

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[26] Norman Klein, “Animation and Animorphs: A Brief Disappearing Act,” *Meta Morphing and the Culture of Quick Change*, Sobchack, Vivian, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 22.
[27] Turnock, *Plastic Reality*, 17.
[28] Ibid., 26
[29] Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*.

Anna Munster reminds us, however, that technofuturist conceptions of new media as necessarily posthuman or postbiological "give technology a utopian or transcendental place in cultural development, situating it spatially or temporally beyond embodiment." For Munster, such conceptions reinforce Cartesian divisions between mind and matter, and are part of larger discourses (such as that of the interface) that work to erect divisions between the technological and the organic, as well as between our cognitive and our material selves, and which in their oppositional conception of the human encounter with the virtual cloud our understanding of our richly embodied engagement with the digital.

In arguing that "the incorporeal vectors of digital information draw out the capacities of our bodies to become other than matter conceived as a mere vessel for consciousness or a substrate for signal," Munster draws upon Deleuze and Liebniz to assert the baroque aesthetics and praxis of the fold as an alternative way of conceptualizing the digital as a site of interaction between human bodies and technics.[30] Along similar lines, Timothy Murray has advocated the baroque motion of the fold as itself an interface between bodies and digital environments.[31] It is the concept of the fold that foregrounds the dialogical, entangled interactions between "technical and organic forces" which is absent from the concept of the digital morph, reinscribing the place of the body and the material within the world of VFX. Anna Munster's work on the baroque fold is expressly intended to reinscribe digital bodies and worlds with materiality and corporeal weight and engagement, yet in many ways it is

[30] Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics*, (Lebanon: Dartmouth University Press, 2006) , 11.
[31] Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 19.

highly generative in helping us approach the logics of the fold within practical special effects sequences as well. Allow me to provide a brief example. Bernhard Siegert has argued compellingly that doors in our current "electronic age" have become unhinged from their classical nomological meanings, and have instead become cybernetic folding mediums that symbolize the incoherence between hallucination and perception, inside and outside, flesh and technics.[32] He links this insight to the example of *Videodrome* (dir. David Cronenberg, US, 1983), arguing that the media-made-flesh and the entanglement between reality and psychotic perception at its center reveal the complicated fold logics that have come to bear in our modern use of the door as symbol.[33] However, his linking of the cybernetic and the digital to the mobius-strip-like narrative of *Videodrome* neglects the material nature of the spectacular, body-horrific set pieces central to the film and its legacy, which add a level of practical special effects work to this discussion of the digital fold. As protagonist Max Renn investigates a dark media underbelly of indexical violence broadcast into his home through a mysterious pirate TV station, time, space, and the stuff of the human body become increasingly chaotic in their arrangement and connections to each other – bowels hinge outward from a torso and then into a hand and into a gun; television screen reveals both mediated broadcasts and its own suppurating, protean skin; the seductive femme fatale is revealed to be both long dead and reanimated in film and flesh – all produced through the extensive use of the hybridized human, animal, and mechanical biomatter that is the practical

[32] Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[33] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques,* 204-6.

special effects body. In foregrounding (and figuring, in the human and technological body) a series of leaky thresholds between inside and outside, obscured and revealed, body and technics, past and present, life and death, *Videodrome* offers a compelling aperture into the fold logics of digital cybernetics as well as into the practical special effects body.

I'd like to offer another brief example, which more directly centers digital-produced bodily spectacle – *Uzumaki* (*Spiral*, dir. Higuchinsky, Japan), a 2000 film adaptation of Junji Ito's famed horror manga of the same name. A mysterious obsession with spiral shapes and twisting, internestled movements slowly takes over a small town, beginning with the obsessive aesthetic pleasure taken in spirals in many different forms – in *narutomaki* fishcakes he then greedily devours, or in bowls being shaped on a potter's wheel that he obsessively films with a camcorder - by a local family's patriarch. Eventually he films his suicide within a washing machine, an attempt to fold and coil his own body as tightly as possible. This desirous search for spirals within the world and within the self spreads throughout the town, leading one woman to sever the whorls of her fingertips, and later to fatally attempt to extract the cochlea deep within her ear; several students to excrete mucilaginous coatings, only leave home on rainy days, and eventually slither up the side of the school building as shell like formations grow on their backs; one teenage girl to sprout bizarrely long curls of hair which reach many feet above her head and languidly float around her; and the protagonist, Kirie's, boyfriend to contort his entire body into elongated ribbons of impossibly tight coils. The majority of these digitally-achieved affects of bodily disaggregation are captured in multiple different layers of mediation, including personal and

crime-scene photographs and televised news and camcorder footage, which are slowly and deliberately mapped across the screen in ways which privilege first distortion and then revelation of the gory details. *Uzumaki* reroutes visual pleasures to the entirety of the infinitely moldable and textile-like body itself, and both withholds and reveals the material exterior (and interior) surfaces of the human body. Never revealing the cause of the contagious obsession, or elaborating on the motives of its victims' quests to "become a spiral," *Uzumaki* instead focuses on the body as plasmatic, foldable, and radically interconnected to the various surfaces and bodies of the material and the natural world, as well as threshold between disparate points in time, space, and affect.

In her exploration of the psychosomatic body as an opportunity to reconsider the value of biological determinism for feminist conceptualizations of the body, Elizabeth Wilson quotes Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi's call to approach biology "from the other side," in order to rescue what connective tissues of somatic transformation fall out of physiological and anatomical constructions of the human body.[34] The "other side" Ferenczi refers to is psychoanalysis, but his call to step beyond accepted vantage points of the biological offers for Wilson a jumping off point to consider ways in which hierarchical models which enthrone the cognitive function of the brain or central nervous system limit our ability to conceive of other types of thinking, experiencing, and feeling that are spread out throughout the soma, while also enshrining human cognition as both separately routed and

[34] Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 55.

superior in function to biological matter of all kinds.[35] Wilson's sensitive treatment of 'the brain in the gut' offers a generative model to consider embodied affective relationships between viscerally hailed fan body and special effects bodily architectures, while also highlighting, much as the concept of the enfolding digital baroque does, that biological matter matters within new media technologies and environments, and that there are a multitude of ways of bodily interacting with virtualities and the digital, which do not sever cognition from the fleshy weight of the physical body, as something that must be cast aside in order to free the mind to interface with the digital immaterial.

The curious interior and exterior mobility and vitality of the affect of disgust calls to mind Wilson's exploration of the digestive system as interstitial boundary, which like the skin separates us from the exterior world, yet which is unique in that it itself contains an exterior zone, in which digestion necessitates a tunnel within us that "allows the outside world to pass through us."[36] Given this unique connection and interaction with the outside world, the gut is vitally implicated in our relationality to others and the environment—rather than simply metaphors for internalization, Wilson suggests ingestion and digestion are themselves literal mechanisms of relation and intersubjectivity.[37] It is this mechanism of relationality and lived emotional experience rooted in the enteric nervous system that beckons us to consider what types of bodily 'cognition' might be implicated in literally

[35] Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[36] Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 44.
[37] Ibid., 44.

visceral affective relationships with media, and how we might more broadly conceive of the biological realities of embodied media experience.

While comparing digital bodies to Donna Haraway's famous cyborg has been overdone to the point of cliche, and is unfortunately often utilized in a mode that suggests its immateriality, Donna Haraway's location of what is powerfully potential and radically political in "boundary figures" who corporeally enact an effacement of dominating binarisms offers a crucial support for this project.[38] These embodying figures, including Simians and the cyborg, trouble the boundaries between technological and biological matter, as well as between human and animal life. Haraway's project to theorize "the invention and reinvention of nature" identifies the shifting discourses surrounding nature as the locus of legacies of domination and contestation.[39] The "permanent partiality" of the cyborg offers one line of flight away from the ontological discursive power of dominating narratives predicated on naturalized binaries. In plumbing the depths of biological and natural scientific thought, Haraway locates refigurations of relationships between "same and different, self and other, inner and outer, recognition and misrecognition" which offer modes of evading limiting boundary lines.[40]

Haraway's work also advocates moving past the reluctance on the part of feminist critics to deal with the biological, given its hegemonic associations with determinism, a limit

[38] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991).
[39] Haraway, *Simians*, 1.
[40] Ibid., 3.

Elizabeth Wilson also works against with her enteric reinscriptions of bodily (often feminized) power. In tracing the role of the biology and social science in providing "legitimating ideologies and in enhancing material power" of existing power structures, Haraway notes that animal bodies have long been used in these projects of "rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic."[41] Moreover, the social body is so implicated in nature's reimagining in terms of "capitalist machine and market" that neither it nor our "personal" bodies are "natural," or free of circuits of labor exploitation.[42] It is here that Haraway locates one site for bodily political action—in the refusal "to become or to remain" gendered, bodies can move away from the dominating legacies of the discursive (mis)use of corporeal materialities and of the natural sciences. Necessary for this refusal is a contextualized and historicized reckoning of naturalized categories of difference, including gender. Haraway's utopic vision is thus a collective and biological one in which heterogeneity and situated knowledges become "hatched in odd siblingship with contradictory, hostile, fruitful, inherited binary dualisms." Continuing this image, she suggests that alongside the egg of phallogocentrism "ovulated by the master subject, the brooding hen to the permanent chickens of history," this utopic scholarly collective would bodily produce their own egg into that same nest, "the germ of a phoenix that will speak in all the tongues of a world turned upside down."[43]

[41] Ibid., 11.
[42] Ibid., 10.
[43] Ibid., 148.

This critical focus on animal bodies and histories as they are made to mean and matter in human power structures is found in Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" as well. In conceiving of the cyborg as hybridizing machine and organism and reality and fiction as well as human and animal, there is clear material attention and speculative power. Despite being produced by "militarism and patriarchal capitalism," (for "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins") the cyborg represents for Haraway a boundless potential of political power in its ability to not simply transgress boundary lines but to liminally embody the boundary.[44] This liminality implies not only connection, but also "affinity" over "identity."[45] Crucially, as well, embodiment is also important to the cyborg figure in its sensuous and affective dimensions—Haraway suggests that the ambivalent cyborg relationship to "high-tech culture" offers "subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game."[46] Political potency is ground in a sensing, pleasurable fully-embodied experience, as much as in liminal identities. It is within this lineage that my notion of the liminally hybrid, expressly material special effects body must be situated.

Moreover, the critical place of animal bodies within this boundary figure is instructive. In the gelatin used to thicken corn syrup "blood clots," in the offal of slaughtered animals large and small that are collected in order to simulate both specific human organs and unspecified mashes of flesh, in the animal bones and all other manner of biological

[44] Ibid., 152.
[45] Ibid., 145.
[46] Ibid., 173.

byproducts, practical special effects work has long relied upon the stuff of animal bodies to simulate the interiors of the human and monstrous body in scenes of unindexical bodily violence and gore. Digital special effects bodies are often "ghostwritten" by animal (as well as human bodies), through the scanning of gestures through motion capture, for instance, or the remixing of captured vocalizations often marshalled in the creation of imagined monstrous VFX figures. Additionally, cinema, at least, has always already been an animal product—as Nicole Shukin reminds us, the production of celluloid required the use of gelatin until as recently as the last fifty years.[47] In a very real sense, then, animal becomes cinema becomes animal in the enfolding realm of biological materiality.

To return to Munster's emphasis on the inexorable materiality of the digital, her related examination of the baroque Wunderkammer offers a potent image for approaching the folding and unfolding logics of the special effects body. The cabinet of wonders tradition predated and shaped Western museum culture, and presents a uniquely generative object for thinking through not only enteric materialisms, but also the special effects body itself. In its haptic, chaotically heterogeneous mixing of widely varied animal and human biomatter, together with optical technologies, wax scientific models, artworks, and plants, the Wunderkammer foregrounded embodied, affective, and emphatically wonderous connections to science and technology, and did not reify sight or disembodied rationality above bodily experiences and modes of knowing. Munster argues that in offering "an epistemology that

[47] Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 28.

did not operate via binary divisions between nature and technics," the Wunderkammer offers a richly affective model that does not deny the bodily or the artistic, the excessive, or the magical its place within valuable means of knowing and making sense of ourselves and the world around us.[48] Munster's argument that these cabinets illustrated "the heights to which science, as an art turned toward the wonderful, could aspire" provides a uniquely generative aperture into the supposedly immateriality of media of all kinds, and of the special effects body in particular.[49] In their combination of multiple different haptic materialities, as well as their sensational, expressive, and even explosive presentation according to modes that might be considered in excess of "properly" rational scientific presentation, such cabinets provide a productive window onto the special effects body, which enacts through folding, excessive presentational logics a corollary merging of biological matter and technics. Enacting anatomy "turned toward the wonderful," the body horror film's gore sequence, for instance, enacts a cabinet of wonders around the practical special effects body, itself an explosive, unfolding, and enveloping mélange of mechanical riggings, animal viscera, and human limbs, organs, and excreta, both simulated and real. These structures, like the cabinet of wonders, model (and make a marvel of) the body's component parts, while also making full use of expressionistic techniques aimed at channeling and inspiring sensation, rather than (or perhaps, in excess of) striving toward pure anatomical fidelity.

[48] Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media*.
[49] Ibid., 11.

II. Wandering Paths and Curious Discoveries

"Hippocrates,

who thought the womb wandered the ruddy
crags of a woman's body, wreaking a havoc

whenever it lodged, shoving aside
more sensible organs like the heart.

All manner of moral failings, snits,
and panics were thus explained, the wayward

organ floating like Cleopatra's barge
down the murky canal of any appendage

or tying up at the bog of the throat…
It's all still beautifully true

what these good scientists alleged: the brain
is as good a place as any for the manufacture

of evanescence, and why not allow
that the round and sturdy skiff of the uterus

may float and flaunt its special appetite for novelty,
even if we dub it dumb, lined with tentacles,

many-chambered, and errant as the proverbial knight
seeking out adventure, but loyal to one queen.
-Leslie Adrienne Miller, "Wandering Uterus"

In exploring analogue and digital special effects, I will focus primarily on cinematic iterations from a transnational canon of films which create a spectacle of the formation, deformation, or manipulation of animal, human, or other bodies. While many of these films may fall under the loose categorization of horror or exploitation, these objects will not be restricted to a single genre or production context. Moreover, this project will identify and critically interrogate widely drawn constellations of special effects bodies, contextualizing their appearance across a wide field of historical and epistemological iterations. With a special sympathy for Zielinski's methodological proposition of a media anarchaeology, I aim

to take into consideration objects from throughout the long legacy of spectacular special effects bodies, both animal and human, identifiable across media broadly conceived—including public execution, scientific demonstration, early museum culture, and magic and ritual practice.

In exploring the cinematic special effects body and situating it within branching constellations of mediated iterations which reach across wide swaths of historical, geographical, and epistemic ground, I will employ an interdisciplinary approach. My mixed theoretical grounding at the intersections of film and media studies, animal studies and ecocriticism, queer critique, and science and technology studies subtend this dissertation, which takes as its object bodies that are not traditionally archived outside of their filmic representation. Beyond their representational trace in the films in which they appear, the vast majority of special effects assemblages are physically inaccessible in their material dimensions—as such, I will excavate as much as possible from their textual trace, referring wherever possible to extrafilmic resources to aid in reconstructing (or re-membering) these effects bodies. While I will supplement my analysis with these industrial references, sidestepping a purely industrial focus allows this project both to reroute the cinematic special effect outside of the Hollywood-centric/global periphery model in which this technology has overwhelmingly been historicized, while also opening up the special effects body to a wider field of questions around materiality, experience, and affect.

This project thus requires the construction of a somewhat unusual canon –the collection of objects of study is in itself an intervention. Its promiscuous nature is inspired by

Siegfried Zielinski's media *an*archaeological model, which seeks to sidestep media archaeology's potentially "bleak search for origins" and linear search for chronologies by producing instead constellations, reversing technological origin stories into instead seeking "what's new in the old," and privileging as objects of study those which exhibit the "bioluminescence" of the curiosity.[50] If this method can be said to have an antagonist, it would be order, or perhaps a limiting view of the rational, which seeks to reign in the "free—sometimes delirious—thought" through which curiosities are made, mediated, and studied. That Giovanni Battista della Porta, whose endlessly fertile imagination and appetite for the curious produced the unforgettable recipe for live roasted goose, inspired this exploratory approach is unsurprising. In advocating ranging far in search of the "fortuitous find," Zielinski draws on Heinrich von Schubert in advocating the "view from the night side of natural sciences," which embraces the "semi-dark feelings" of moonlight as oppositional to the clear rationality associated with sunlight, thereby asserting the value of clairvoyance and dreaming within scientific thought.[51] This approach is interested not only in objects that involve technical processes of sensing, but also those which inspire, or perhaps resemble, dreams. I am also inspired by Diana Taylor's reminder that the body, while traditionally excluded from the archival model, is a vital producer of and repository for knowledge.[52] In seeking to access some of the "so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge," this project will contest the conservative scope and medium specificity

[50] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media.*
[51] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*, 15-16.
[52] Diana Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

of the archive in constructing a canon of bodily special effects which cuts across historical and epistemological lines.

In so doing, I am inspired by Hye Jean Chung's model of the media heterotopia as a form of perception which accesses contemporary digital cinema as a series of "composites of multiple layers that contain material residues of globally dispersed film production."[53] Examining the ways in which contemporary cinema's increasing deployment of globalized workflows in the production of digital special effects coincides with industrial and scholarly discourses of seamlessness which serve to efface the laboring bodies and technical knowledges bound up in these workflows, Chung identifies "digitally constructed assets and composited environments as incarnations of material realities attached to actual locales and physical bodies."[54] It is precisely through a return of the material, perceptible as what Chung dubs a "spectral residue" in the digitally composited image, that an understanding of the global circuits and flows in which films are increasingly produced becomes visible and open to critical intervention. For Chung, it is a haptic or multi-sensuous attention to the material grit and grain of a media object that can transcend the often facile lip service to the global that can arise in discussions of the transnational.[55] A fleshing out of the material dimensions of globally-produced special effects media is for Chung of the highest ethical stakes at the moment that the conversion of material objects into numeric code includes an effacing of a

[53] Hye Jean Chung, *Media Heterotopias: Digital Effects and Material Labor in Global Film Production* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.
[54] Chung, *Media Heterotopias*, 3.
[55] Ibid., 5.

laboring human (as well as, I would suggest, an animal) body.[56] Of critical importance, then, is an attention not only to the globalized circuits of laboring bodies, which are texturally encrusted as residues in the (supposedly seamless) film surfaces themselves, but also an attention to the material dimensions of the bodies onscreen. Rather than enforcing a rhetoric of seamless immateriality which "idealizes effortless mobility and disembodied flight," a materializing and geographically contextualizing heterotopic viewpoint also brings into focus the "composite bodies that enact cross-border trajectories of economic and cultural exchange."[57]

I am also guided by Bhaskar Sarkar and Joshua Neves model of the penumbral global in an effort to make visible and "flesh out" mediated forms and practices too-often effaced by additive models of global media as area studies. Their project also foregrounds a concern for media practices and interfaces that "for their allegedly divergent, ad hoc, and derivative nature, have long been relegated to the scandalous peripheries of global media."[58] Advancing the penumbral as a centering model, Sarkar and Neves seek to reject universal narratives which collapse the global into "light and shadow, center and edge" and frame the global South as always secondary; while at the same time conceiving the global as "productively chaotic" and "always in the process of becoming."[59] As a constantly evolving formation, the penumbral global highlights the partial, the contingent, and the emergent in ways that both

[56] Ibid., 14.
[57] Ibid., 18, 105.
[58] Joshua Neves and Bhaskar Sarkar, "Introduction" in *Asian Video Cultures: In the Penumbra of the Global*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 28.
[59] Neves and Sarkar, "Introduction," 8.

avoid static and rigid models of globality and the flows of practices and relationships therein, while also casting light on objects and systems that are themselves chaotic, contingent, or confounding. Against the real possibility that such framing might tip over into "metaphysical romanticization, untethered from and unmindful of real divisions"—their remedy of grounding such projects in contextualized and "tangible materialities" is instructive.[60] As with Chung's media heterotopic perception, it is a return of the material which guards against smoothing or erasure of the seams of the global and of the embodied.

A workable concept of transnational media objects, then, foregrounds globality in a way that seeks to make visible the flows and affinities which flow throughout and across national lines, while maintaining a concern for the material natures of practices, bodies, and flows. While the term "global genre" could also be utilized, I prefer the transnational for its evocation of the transitory and the actively becoming. Truly transnational genre perspectives—as a way of approaching and perceiving, not just categorizing—access forms and flows which are on the wing, as it were, and constitute a mobile target which resists easy conceptualizations and capture, yet is all the more lively for it. Such a perspective speaks the lie of seamlessness or immateriality by foregrounding the seams and wrinkles, or partiality and contingency, as well as the materiality of the bodies and practices which proliferate around and within it. Drawing on Chung and Sarkar and Neves formulations of mediated globality, I seek to figure my chosen canon as transnational in a way which matters the seemingly immaterial.

[60] Ibid., 21.

By working to theorize the material, affective, and experiential dimensions of these sophisticated frameworks of assemblage beyond simple technofuturist, cybernetic notions of "jacking in" or often ableist ideas of constructing superhumanity through prosthetic praxis, I seek to develop a working theoretical frame for conceiving of the complex functions of the special effects body as (and in) media. This dissertation will utilize the enteric imaginary and a promiscuous anarchaeological scope to explore the special effects body at the intersection of materiality and the (supposedly) immaterial, magic and technology, meat and technics, and interior and exterior experience. My intervention with this project is to pull together both the material and the speculative in approaching the gap in the field around the special effects body as a site of flows and connections between the socio-, cultural-, and biomatter of many disparate human and more-than-human bodies. I propose the enteric imaginary as a system which opens up the bodies at play in the production and consumption of the spectacular effects I analyze, as well as their interactions, to a much wider field of possibility—a queer intervention which troubles the boundary lines between aesthetics and the biological, mind and soma, human and nonhuman, among others. Drawing on both Elizabeth Wilson's feminist explosion of what are typically understood as thinking and feeling bodily systems, as well as Mel Y. Chen's mobilization of queer affect in conceptualizing animacy's transgressions of the "proper intimacies" between the human and the more-than-human,[61] my concept of the enteric imaginary seeks to trouble the normative ontologies and binaries surrounding the special effects body, and to bring into view new horizons of corporeal

[61] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

relationality and interaction across the different bodies at stake in the context of these effects' production and consumption.

In the following chapters, I will range through a wide array of cultural moments and discussions as I unpack my central case studies. In order to tether this admittedly chaotic approach, I have centered each of the remaining chapters around a guiding figure, each of which reveals distinct elements of the special effects body's hybrid natures. The first, the écorché, will enable an examination of the role of curiosity and wonder as applied to architectures of disparate bodily matter, foregrounding their enteric and animalistic dimensions, across an examination of the digital biomatter in both *Hollow Man* and *Arrival*. Next, I'll follow the wolfman through a twisting exploration of early 1980s "arms race" waged over the development of practically-mounted werewolf transformation scenes, which achieved radical plasticity without cut-away effects. From there we'll range across an exploration of orality and digestion, disgust and good tastes, and the transgressive liminal power of wolf/human hybrid identities. This centrality of taste and digestion continues in the third chapter, which is led by the cannibal and which focuses squarely on colonial violence and visual technologies in the construction of the monstrous anthropophagous body as the seat of abject horror. Finally, I'll enlist the revenant in a concluding chapter which takes as its object the shaky body genre of exploitation or grindhouse, and the role of radical enteric repurposing in the construction of retrosploitation media.

In drawing together seemingly disparate figures and histories, I hope to move towards more situated, contextual excavations, rather than flattening these curious finds into seamless

equivalences. It is my hope that this meandering path through the wilds and the forests, far from the “dreary path” of seamlessness, immateriality, and bodily denial, will uncover a rich trove of bioluminescent wonder which is alive to the imaginative, speculative potential of alternative modes of bodily knowing, thinking, and dreaming.

What have they done to deserve this beauty?
Did they, like Marsyas, invite some knife-
wielding God with petty transgressions,
the crime of a few tunes on Athena's lost flute?

Or were they simply too poor for deep
graves, locked gates, and good husbands
to watch over the mounds of new soil
tossed toward them and their hunted unborn?

Whoever they were, they're still with us,
posing demurely in suits of blood
and muscle, the bruised shadows
of what skin they do have, purpling like

crushed petunias as they spread their legs
and raise their meaty arms to show
dissected breasts, unfinished infants, sundry
viscera on the ground about their feet

as if this were Thanksgiving and they
cornucopias stuffed with squash and fruit.
And who delivered their sentences?
Surely not the muses who, at least,

let them keep rococo faces. In 1773
the womb and brain were the last outposts
of the body to be mapped. D'Agoty bought
the rights to Le Blon's technique of printing

mezzotints and gave these ladies homes
in scientific texts, but anatomists believed
D'Agoty's prints too gorgeous to be accurate.
Perhaps that's why they open other wounds

so easily in us. All so like the single rabbit
I downed at twenty with a borrowed rifle,
and then was obligated to see skinned,
first scoring the length of the spine,

then peeling the fur in one steaming piece,
while the perverse uncle who clearly desired
to touch me, instead held up a dripping pelt
in one hand, and in the other, a flayed carcass

still wrapped in its bundle of muscle like a gift.

- *Leslie Adrienne Miller, "Gautier D'Agoty's Écorchés: Anatomie des parties de la generation, Paris, 1773"*

2. The Écorché: Unveiling the Void and Skinning the Digital Corporeal

The name Honoré Fragonard likely calls up visions of bodies—sumptuous silks wrapped around doe-eyed lovers set in arcadian landscapes popularized by 18th c. painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard. These "scenes of gallantry and feminine pulchritude"[62] are perhaps the best-known works of the Rococo period, and their legacy has long eclipsed that of the bodily works produced by anatomist-surgeon Honoré Fragonard. Born just two months apart in 1732, the cousins were given nearly identical names in accordance with the family's devotion to the medieval Saint Honorat, and later served together in a national arts

[62] Christophe Degueurce, *Fragonard Museum: The Écorchés,* (New York: Blast Books, 2011), 7.

commission during the French Revolution.[63] On its face, the bodily legacy of the more obscure cousin appears to be squarely in the realm of scientific attainment—one of the rare biographies of Fragonard characterizes the difference between the two thusly: "While one enjoyed a life of exuberant artistic creation and renown, the other was 'continually hunched over cadavers,' engaged in repugnant work in an icy dissection hall."[64] And despite noting that "in the expansive dialogue between art and science, Fragonard certainly had much to say,"[65] the definitive monograph on Honoré Fragonard's life and work asserts that "the two Fragonards are symbols of the intellectual ferment that defined the Age of Enlightenment; Janus-like they face two directions, toward the beauty and joys of the world and toward an austere passion for science."[66]

However, the startling écorchés for which Honoré Fragonard is known—twenty-one of which are still extant two centuries later—occupy the contact zone between art and science, wonder and reason, technology and magic, the same curious and uncanny zone presided over by the Wunderkammern in which such écorchés typically were housed. Far from separating "austere" science from all the "beauty and joys of the world," Fragonard's écorchés blend them together, while freely intermixing the wonderous and the curious with edification and the advancement of medicine and natural history. The energetic presentation of a flayed horse and man together as its rider, dynamically posed as if frozen in mid-gallop, was originally accompanied by a crowd of tiny "squires"—flayed human fetuses mounted on

[63] Degueurce, *Fragonard*, 19.
[64] Ibid., 7.
[65] Ibid., 15.
[66] Ibid., 8.

skeletal infant horses, each gripping reins of blue silk and holding aloft whips.[67] At witnessing this spectacle in 1783, naturalist Heinrich Sander expressed annoyance at its "frivolous spirit," which he attributed to the nation at large, and its imbrication within such a "truly grand and noble [undertaking], where this whimsical and frolicsome character would best be hidden."[68] This "whimsical and frolicsome character" can be found throughout Fragonard's écorchés, which also included various flayed human fetuses performing a macabre jig, their craniums folded open to reveal their colorfully painted vascular systems; and a flayed biblical Samson wielding a donkey mandible, his partial musculature, organs, and circulatory system presented for view, his face twisted in rage in the collection's "most beautiful sculpture using the anatomy of an actual body to express emotion."[69] Clearly, then, Fragonard's collection exhibits a great deal of careful work performed for motives in excess of the sterile, rational advancement of medical and natural science. In this way, Fragonard's work represents not a radical departure from but a dogged insistence on the traditional place of the playfully curious and the artfully bizarre within the cabinet of curiosities tradition—a foundational element that became increasingly contested over the Age of Enlightenment, as I'll explore in the next section.

Yet the very selection of human and animal biological matter as medium in presenting the art historical form of the écorché—anatomical depictions of partially or entirely flayed humans in paint, charcoal, or sculpture generally undertaken as studies for

[67] Ibid., 86.
[68] Ibid., 86.
[69] Ibid., 94.

future (un-flayed) figures—sets Fragonard's anatomical works apart even from the tradition of such figures traditionally housed in cabinets of curiosity. While teratological bodily specimens of all kinds had long taken pride of place in such collections[70]- from preserved human infants suffering from hydrocephaly or harlequin syndrome to two-headed lambs and six-legged calves—edifying and wonderous écorchés were primarily replicas effected with wax.[71] This was at least partially down to the practical limitation of preservation, which relegated the fullness of bodily preservation behind the screen of formaldehyde-filled glass jars, and limited the spectacular arrangement of the body and its component systems to the enduringly stable (and easily poseable!) skeleton. However, this limitation was spectacularly overcome by surgeon Frederick Ruysch in the late 1600's, who developed a world-renowned cabinet at the University of Leiden's Anatomy Center.[72] This cabinet became so famed due to its art and artifice as much as to its scientific value, both of which reached baroque and excessive heights upon the development of Ruysch's groundbreaking intravenous preservation methods, which allowed for human and animal organs and circulatory systems to be both indefinitely preserved and sculpturally molded.[73] As Anna Munster asserts:

> Ruysch used foetal skeletons, dried membrane tissue, gallstones, kidneystones, stretched stomach lining and injected and preserved arterial and venal systems, among other bodily bits, to create embodied tableau designed to depict the transience of the mortal world.

[70] It's worth noting as well that teratological objects—in both senses of the word—were customarily prized features of the cabinet of curiosities. That is, material evidence of actual physical deformity was the relatively mundane counterpart to "evidence" of mythical creatures, both of which were arranged for maximum spectacular impact. This linguistic intersection gestures as well to the easy slippage within the Imperial imaginary between fantastical humanoids like the Blemmye and the mermaid, and the actual indigenous peoples and animals who became subject to empirical control, that is undertaken in my third chapter focused on the figure of the cannibal.
[71] Degeuerce, *Fragonard*, 82.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 86.

> Although the argument can be made that his work fits squarely into the serious *vanitas* tradition, a sense of grotesque delight and humor flows from these displays.…Ruysch's collection certainly seemed to contain not just the wonderfully constructed but also the mightily curious, as for example "a box of fly eggs obtained from the anus of a 'distinguished gentleman who had sat too long in the privy."[74]

Fragonard can be understood as extending both Ruysch's breakthroughs in anatomical preservation and artifice, as well as his resulting marriage of all of the "frolicsome character" historically located in the sensuously engaging Wunderkammer to the stuff of the body itself as substrate for aesthetic innovation.

The resulting écorchés represent the height of the Wunderkammer's melding of human and animal biomatter with technics in the production of spectacular displays which confound easy divisions between art and science, the understood and the unknown, the occulted and the hypervisible. As the contested site over which the place of high-minded rationality or bodily-based (and therefore "mindless") entertainment within wonder and curiosity were relentlessly negotiated, the Wunderkammer provides a uniquely fertile ground from which to consider the special effects body in film, while the écorché extends these debates even further to the clashes between necromancy, art, and medical science. In this chapter, I will first unpack the cultural history of the cabinet of curiosities tradition, its relationship to cinema and optical technologies, and the place of the écorché within this tradition, and will then turn to the fundamental elements of the flayed figure—skin and what lies beneath it. Honore Fragonard's écorchés offer a uniquely fertile object for thinking through the role of disgust, aversion, and tastes, the tangle between human and animal

[74] Munster, *Materializing New Media*, 77.

biomateriality, and challenges to immaterial logics as they relate to the special effects body. I will then consider the écorché in the context of the spectacular digitally-produced effects bodies in Paul Verhoeven's *Hollow Man*, a representative case study that suggests the fertile crosspollination between the Wunderkammer, the écorché, and cinematic special effects bodies of all kinds. Finally, I offer a meditation on the (not so) alien hybrid bodies at the center of *Arrival*, as a speculative vision of radically interrelated bodies produced in digital worlds.

I. Curious Cabinets and Phantom Flesh

As a major predecessor of Western museum culture, the cabinet of curiosities has been primarily discussed in the context of 16th and 17th century Europe, as a tradition in which the logics of colonial expansion, aesthetics, and knowledge production were materially and culturally developed. However, its utility far extends its historical beginnings. Following from Anna Munster's insightful extension of the Wunderkammer's material and cultural contours to the project of defining the digital baroque in new media,[75] I argue that the cabinet of curiosities—in its imbrication in the interwoven threads of occulted knowledge, magic, science, technology, and art—not only elucidates historiographic projects of mediated viewership and spectacle in the intervening centuries between the curiosity cabinet's height

[75] Munster, *Materializing New Media*.

and the development of cinema, but also provides a uniquely revealing aperture into spectacular bodily effects in film.

The Wunderkammer tradition relied not only upon the collection and display of "curious" objects themselves, but also a complex social milieu of the owners and patrons of these curiosity cabinets: the self-described "curiosi".[76] In her study of the "culture of curiosity" that undergirded the Wunderkammer tradition in seventeenth century Britain, Kate Whitaker focuses onthe communal nature of the Wunderkammer's production, maintenance, and patronage, as well as the social nature of the collections themselves, in which curiosi frequently gathered to discuss the objects therein. However, these were relatively closed social circuits. These "gentlemen and scholars" and the economic, social, and geographical travels they undertook in the cultivation of their "curious" attitudes epitomize one broad (and foundational) characteristic of the Wunderkammer—its exclusivity.[77] Across Europe, curiosity was cultivated

among the wealthy and the aristocratic precisely because it was considered an important distinction of nobility, and the continental travel required to develop one's curious tastes served both to stock an individual's cabinet of wonders and to construct his identity as its rightful owner.

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[76] Kate Whitaker, "The Culture of Curiosity" In *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and Emma C. Spary, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); see also Mark Meadow, "Merchants and marvels: Hans Jacob Fugger and the origins of the Wunderkammer." *Merchants and marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[77] Whitaker, "Culture of Curiosity," 75.

Alongside this exclusivity, the mode in which these curious objects were displayed provides another cornerstone of the Wunderkammer tradition. Paula Findlen describes the varied and freely intermixed display of objects within cabinets of curiosity as designed "to intermingle harmoniously the natural and the artificial, the real and the imaginary, and the ordinary and the extraordinary, to underscore not only the fecundity of the universe but the breadth of the human faculties for comprehending and explaining the theatrum mundi."[78] These artifacts included a wide array of objects, including preserved human and animal remains and their component anatomical parts, plant and insect life, art and craft of all kinds, mechanical assemblages including optical devices, trompe l'oeil, and automata. The implications of this fundamental design trope are twofold—Whitaker argues that the arranging of objects for their greatest variety prompts the visitor to marvel not just at the objects themselves, but at the skill of the collector in affecting their arrangement.[79] More importantly, however, this visually chaotic organization strategy seemingly arranged by "singularity, chance and the shuffle of things"[80] reveals that curiosity was as much in the art of the contrast of object against wildly different object, and in the overall affective dimensions of their presentation, than it was contained in the discrete objects themselves. It is this fundamental devotion to the haptic, sensual, emphatically embodied experience that subtends the Wunderkammer across the various cultural and historical moments in which it has appeared.

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[78] Paula Findlen, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy," *Journal of the History of Collections* 1, (1989), 68.
[79] Whitaker, "Culture of Curiosity," 89.
[80] Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1.

It is within this embodied combinatory strategy that Fragonard's écorchés can be understood. Following from Fredrick Ruysch's revelatory creation of wonderous diorama constructed from wildly diverse pieces of the human body, made possible by his proprietary processes of bodily preservation, Fragonard developed an even more radical process which allowed him to manipulate and indefinitely display not only small excisions of bodily organs or systems, but entire bodies denuded of the veil of their skin. While the écorché tradition had long pictured human figures spectacularly alive and in action despite their skin being lifted away to reveal musculature or even organs to the viewer,[81] and Wunderkammern in the intervening centuries had contained reproductions in sculpted wax of similarly living écorchés,[82] Fragonard's figures dramatically confront the viewer with their own materiality. This materiality, however, is not singular—like Ruysch, Fragonard constructs an often chaotic and affectively enmeshing experience by layering, combining, and unfolding a variety of both infant and adult (and human and animal) biomatter with all manner of inorganic elements, creating a densely layered mélange of matter designed to provoke a layered experience of somatic and affective reactions.

It is likely that the aforementioned "tiny squires eternally riding in death"[83] that accompanied Fragonard's flayed horseman, as well as his dancing fetuses, originally flanked by a tiny infant holding his heart in his outstretched hand,[84] were directly inspired by

[81] Jonathan Simon, "The Theater of Anatomy: The Anatomical Preparations of Honoré Fragonard," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36:1 (2002).
[82] Simon, "Theater of Anatomy," 66.
[83] Degeuerce, *Fragonard*, 91.
[84] Kit Heintzman, "A Cabinet of the Ordinary," *British Society for the History of Science* 51:2 (2018).

Ruysch's many "macabre tableau" of sculptural infants.[85] A contemporary catalog engraving of such a tableau produced by Ruysch, now lost, depicts one of these—three fetal skeletons are carefully posed among a waving forest of tree-like human veins, branching out from a rocky landscape of "urinary calculi" of various size and shape. One skeletal infant theatrically clasps at his heart while holding aloft a miniature scythe, while another dabs mournfully at his eyes with a "handkerchief" made of a much larger human's preserved peritoneal tissue.[86] This poetically chaotic arrangement of adult and fetal bodily matter continues throughout the catalog of diorama—in another famous tableau, a cluster of fetal skeletons play miniature instruments fashioned from adult arteries, pathologically devascularized bone, and renal stones to a similarly skeletal audience, one playfully dangling a preserved mayfly from its tiny hand, another adorned in feather and pulmonary stone approximations of feminine finery.[87] Flanked by an arbor of preserved arterial "trees," this diorama also includes a (relatively) towering monument effected from the inflated outer tissue of an adult testicle, while nearby a final fetal skeleton is "swathed in a delicate pattern of intestine much too large to be his own, and leans on a staff made from hardened adult vas deferens."[88] While echoing the *vanitas* still life tradition then-popular among the Dutch Masters with its *memento mori* (feathers, pearls, and skulls were commonly pictured objects suffused with allegory in these paintings),[89] Ruysch extended its attendant desire to reveal

[85] Degeuerce, *Fragonard*, 91.
[86] Elisabeth Brander, "Bidloo and Ruysch: Anatomy and Art in the 17th century Netherlands," *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities*, 6:2 (2014).
[87] Brander, "Bidloo and Ruysch."
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

hidden layers by drawing back the peels of pictured fruits or depicting pies and other dishes with clear apertures into their innermost layers[90] to the very stuff of the body itself. In combining the adult and the infantile, the human and the animal, diseased and dead biomatter with preserved health and life, Ruysch's diorama bubble over with a lively excess of material and metaphor which resists any one interpretation or reaction, and which champions humor, surprise, and whimsy in combination with the sacred and the serious.

While Ruysch's tableaux beckoned visitors to inspect these unsettled and unsettling visions up close, situated in a discrete field of existence by the surreal organic "landscapes" in which these scenes were staged, Fragonard's écorchés occupy the same field of experience as the viewer. In both their scale and their fullness of body, beyond what Ruysch's preservation process could achieve, Fragonard's flayed figures confront and enfold the onlooker within their dense admixture of bodily materiality.

The devotion to the surround of affectively charged, bodily based experience in the Wunderkammer tradition was also a site at which tensions between rational attainment and fleshly amusement were contested. In the case of the British curiosi, curiosity itself was carefully defined as "reasoned and articulate," quite unlike the mind overcome by a confrontation with the sublime.[91] Alongside the barriers to access presented by wealth, mobility, and class, the borders of the curiosi community were thus also policed by a studied adherence to codes of rationality in discourse. Supported by a Christian theology in which "true wonder" was reserved for religious miracles, such communities of curiosity limited

[90] Ibid.
[91] Whitaker, "Culture of Curiosity," 80

themselves to careful description and comparison between their objects of study and cast the role of observer of the curiosity as a seeker of truth, rather than simple entertainment. This "reasoned and articulate wonder which sought understanding" inaugurated a new formation of natural history dedicated to careful description and taxonomy,[92] but it also reveals a suspicion of wonder itself as a sensuous antithetical to the rational, and perhaps too close to facile entertainment.

This suspicion of wonder as tainted by embodied (and thus irrational) experience was also flavored by a suspicion of the occult. The exclusive nature of the cabinet of curiosities' production left it open to charges of magical and alchemical practices. Literally occulted from public view, the production of hidden knowledge served as the scientific standard in pre-Renaissance Europe, but soon became the site of larger tensions between public and private spaces and modes of knowing.[93] Paula Findlen argues that during the 16th century, previously accepted mores of occult (whether magically illicit or simply hidden) collection of knowledge, and the monistic tradition of privately cultivated knowledge, overlapped with encyclopedic logics of collecting which privileged repositories of natural and artificial objects of curiosity.[94] As, partially under the influence of religious institutions, Renaissance Europe began to gravitate toward public museum over privately consolidated collection, the Wunderkammer became a site of contestation between science and magic. Findlen argues the shift toward publicly oriented museums was designed to ameliorate "a crisis of knowledge

[92] Ibid., 82.
[93] Findlen, "The Museum," 59.
[94] Ibid., 62.

provoked by the expansion of the natural world through the voyages of discovery and exploration, the concomitant explosion of information about the world in general and, more particularly, the moral and social imbalance created by the religious and political events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[95] It was in the context of this crisis that the construction of private cabinets, and even the act of knowing in itself had become a politically and religiously precarious action, as the condemnation of natural scientist and Wunderkammer owner Giovanni della Porta and others under the Inquisition can attest.[96] It would seem knowledge produced in secret was particularly dangerous, as della Porta's magical methodology and alchemical leanings, reverently examined by Siegfried Zielinski in *Deep Time of the Media*, would suggest.

Following from this shift wherein occulted knowledge became associated primarily with the magical and therefore the abject—and thus punishable by religious and state institutions—knowledge production in Europe continued to push further toward hypervisibility as a premise of its facticity, as new regimes of observations of the curious arose in the context of the Age of Reason.[97] At the same time, secret knowledge became decried not as heretical, but as lacking in scientific discipline. Rather than existing between the poles of Christian piety and Satanic heresy, curious objects—in particular new technologies that intersect with the observer's body in distinct ways—now operated along a similarly Manichean divide between rational, publicly accepted science and vapidly

[95] Ibid., 68.
[96] Ibid., 68.
[97] Steven Shapin et. al., "Seeing and believing : the experimental production of pneumatic facts," in *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

entertaining hucksterism or sleight of hand, still associated with their degree of visibility. The magic practitioner still serves as dubious polar opposite to the scientist within this framework, though more as mountebank or carnival barker than diabolical sage. Barbara Stafford identifies a central ambivalence rooted in occulted vs. publicly witnessed knowledges in the union of science and entertainment in projects of popular edification and leisure in 18th c. Europe—what she calls "artful science." These "subtle sensory forms of knowing" included wonderous, embodied technologies of all sorts which grew out of the Wunderkammer tradition: "illustrated popular books, optical cabinets, marvelous machines, astonishing experiments, and provocative museum displays."[98] Stafford links the strong ambivalence and suspicion which congealed around these spectacular pleasures—such that the project of "rational recreation" was developed as a "deliberate counterpoint to fantastic or irrational recreation"[99]—to a fundamental suspicion of occulted knowledge or skill, as associated with practices of deception, illusion, and defrauding schemes as collectively witnessed empiricism was to enlightening and uplifting science. The hidden dexterity of the mountebank's sleight-of-hand, or the "irrational" presentation of technologies or public experiment not sanctioned by established science, were viewed with such suspicion as deceivers of the masses that licit spectacular science display, among other educational amusements of the time, became somewhat liminal practices themselves, as they "similarly called into question the reliability of ocular testimony."[100] Moreover, while the edifying

[98] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), xxi.
[99] Stafford, *Artful Science*, 68.
[100] Ibid., 73.

performers of experimental demonstration strove to "distinguish himself from the deluding conjuror," it was also true that they appealed to the same public desire for the spectacle of wondrous new technologies at work as did morally-suspect hucksters. The project of respectably filling expanding leisure hours in 18th c. Europe was thus both one of appealing to high-minded rational attainment, while at the same time primarily utilizing "sophisticated fairground apparatus": "Amusement thus seemed to require control."[101]

Stafford's work on this discursive purification in 18th c. "artful science" dovetails with the later push in Western modernity to foreground the eye as a line of flight from the fleshy fallibility of the body and its senses, toward a rational ideal of disembodied reason. In the new epistemic regime inaugurated by the Age of Reason, optical observation was both problematized as easily fooled and in need of technical supports, while also being reified as the foundation of science through collective witnessing.[102] Despite the limitations of the eye, and its easy susceptibility to occulted sleight of hand and trompe l'oeil in the form of optical amusements,[103] empiricism firmly came to rest on collective observation—whether actual or virtual—as a check against the frailty of "man's natural knowledge" in the production of scientific fact.[104] Moreover, this foregrounding of the eye was accompanied by technological and discursive disciplining of all the bodily senses, and a subsummation of the sensory experience of the individually-produced experiment to the larger reasoned evaluation of

[101] Ibid., 85.
[102] Shapin et. al., "Leviathan," 23.
[103] Stafford, *Artful Science,* 78.
[104] Shapin et. al., "Leviathan," 23.

community observation.[105] That this hypervisibility was explicitly defined against the secret experimentation of the solitary alchemist or lone philosopher[106] further supports the ascendency of the eye as rational ideal at the expense of the sensate body itself. This denial of bodily modes of experience, as well as bodily ways of "knowing," aligns rational knowledge and fact with the Cartesian sterility of the disembodied eye, and has proved difficult to shake despite the voluminous amount of varied work which rails against it. Following from this critical foundation of new visual and epistemic regimes within Western culture, Jonathan Crary has compellingly argued for a further elaboration and complication of these logics of observation and of disembodied sight.[107] Under 19th c. modernity, he argues that in place of the disembodied gaze of the previous, Cartesian-inflected "camera obscura" model, a decentered and subjective observation takes hold, in which the eye is endowed with all the "carnal density" of the body. Crary folds all manner of optical devices, including the ludic and scientific, into his survey of the visual culture of the 19th century, arguing that the eye no longer held claim to primacy over these devices. No longer simply metaphorically tied to devices like the camera obscura, in a construction that left no doubts to the mastery of an ideal eye, Crary argues that "the relation between eye and optical apparatus becomes one of metonymy: both were now contiguous instruments on the same plane of operation."[108] At the same time, mid-19th century optical devices like the stereoscope unmoored the perspective of mediated observation between object and perceiving subject established by the

[105] See Findlen, Shapin et.al., and Jonathan Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
[106] Findlen, "The Museum," 59.
[107] Crary, "Techniques."
[108] Ibid., 43.

camera obscura. For Crary, this seeming dissolving of the mediation between eye and image established both a possessive possibility and a sense of obscenity that quickly lent itself to erotic and pornographic purposes.[109] The stereoscope's "simulation of tangible three-dimensionality hovers uneasily at the limits of acceptable verisimilitude," providing observers access to a sensuous experience which hailed the eye of the viewer as thickly embodied, while the "undisguised nature of their operational structure" did not attempt to convince their users of an illusory objective reality.[110] The hypervisibility of the technical production of subjective vision aligns the stereoscope with a more free (and even populist) model of knowledge than the Wunderkammer, but the fully embodied visual and haptic perception which relies on the meeting of technics and bodies, along with the undisguised "curiosity" of mediated perception calls back to the curiosity cabinet.

Within the constellation of his concept of the cinema of attractions, Tom Gunning includes optical entertainments devices as well as early cinema and its varied modes of exhibition. He rejects the mythical narrative of frightened audience members fleeing the onslaught of the Lumieres' projected train as the cinema's primal scene, reminding us that at all moments these early viewers of cinematic technology had complete knowledge of the constructed nature of the entertainment, and rather than fear what these observers experienced was "the particularly modern entertainment form of the thrill… which combined sensations of acceleration and falling with a security guaranteed by modern industrial

[109] Ibid., 127.
[110] Ibid., 127, 13.

technology."[111] Rather than "a simple reality effect," the primary mode of cinematic observation at this moment followed from the long history of pre-cinematic optical entertainments, and for Gunning what was offered by Louis Lumiere's early films was "a vital energy alongside the scientific curiosity addressed by his reproduction of motion and daily life."[112] The primary observational mode of the spectator of attractions, under Gunning's model, is curiosity maintained through sustained awareness "of the act of looking," a curiosity "aroused and fulfilled through a marked encounter, a direct stimulus, a succession of shocks."[113] Like the users of Crary's stereoscope, Gunning's early cinema spectators were given no pretense that they were witnessing reality, nor was there an attempt to suture the viewer into a narrative. And just as the cinema of attractions eventually gives way to classical codes of spectatorial address, Crary notes that the stereoscope's obsolescence likely has much to do with its insufficient "phantasmagorical" qualities, in that it doesn't disguise the fact of its apparatus, and refers "as much to the functional interaction of body and machine as…to external objects, no matter how 'vivid' the quality of the illusion."[114]

Moreover, for Gunning, the 19th century is an important moment for the development of his model of viewership, identifying an intensifying "lust of the eyes" rather than Crary's optic carnal density as its significant development. The increasingly modern urban experience, growing consumerism, and accelerating colonialist expansion "all provoked the

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[111] Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art & Text* 34 (Spring 1989), 85.
[112] Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment," 87.
[113] Ibid., 86.
[114] Crary, "Techniques," 132.

desire for images and attractions," in response to which early cinema eagerly "categorized the visible world as a series of discrete attractions."[115] Gunning's description of the accelerating program of attractions which seeks to apprehend the entirety of the world itself into discrete digestible chunks resonates with the Wunderkammer's ambition of apprehension of the universe itself through the collection and display of curiosities, right down to the similar exploitation and consumption of "exotic" human and animal bodies within colonialism's project of knowledge through capture present in both systems.[116] Moreover, the coexistence of intellectual curiosity with affective, spectacular address speaks to the Wunderkammer logics of ostentatious presentation and display.

In teasing out the tensions between magic and science, the Wunderkammer tradition dovetails with cinema's preoccupation with this same conflict. Dan North has convincingly argued for the place of the Victorian magic theater in the visual logics of early cinema and the wonderous effect, and notes that the acceptance of illusionism as mainstream theatrical performance depended upon "a dilution of its associations with the occult and with timorous superstition."[117] At the same time, an educational valence that lets the audience in on the fact of the trick helped dispel the ambivalence around hidden sleight-of-hand, and wonder's suspect connection to frivolous entertainment identified by Stafford, an aversion now well congealed in the Victorian era. By maintaining a pedagogical discourse and utilizing new technologies of the day, the magic theater both distanced itself from the occulted knowledge

[115] Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment," 87.
[116] Ibid., 33. The Wunderkammer's imbrication in Imperialist violence and bodily exploitation will be taken up in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
[117] Dan North, *Performing illusions: cinema, special effects and the virtual actor*, (Wallflower Press, 2008), 26.

of the alchemists while also rerouting the undeniable pleasures and attraction of the magical arts into a sanitized, thoroughly modern experience.[118] And yet, entertainment and scientific education, technology and tricks, magical imagination and rational attainment were never quite subsumed into the visual regime of the magic theater or of early cinema in a way that made them anything but uneasy bedfellows, provocative spaces of contestation which bump against each other rather than lay smoothly. It was this same frisson that provided the Wunderkammer's great well of affective and embodied experience, and that continues to make the special effects body such an ambivalent and ambiguous figure of endless fascination.

It is here that Siegfried Zielinski's work on the "deep time of the media" again becomes instructive. In his admittedly "romantic" approach to media studies, one that foregrounds hybrid approaches and curiously seeks "the fortuitous find," Zielinski defines his media anarchaeological approach as "a collection of curiosities."[119] Noting that the term was "slightly disreputable then [in the time of Descartes] as now," he continues:

> By curiosities, I mean finds from the rich history of seeing, hearing, and combining using technical means: things in which something sparks or glitters— their bioluminescence—and also points beyond the meaning or function of their immediate context of origin.[120]

This inherent (and organic, embodied) "spark" which marks the curiosity holds a particular magic not just for those who encounter it, but also signals its fecund nature through which to think media studies writ large. It is through the consideration of the widely varied curious case studies he selects that Zielinski asserts that the magical is not the primitive ancestor of

[118] North, *Performing Illusions*, 27.
[119] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*, 33.
[120] Ibid., 34.

the scientific, and that the body and its senses are of critical importance to any study of the technological. In constructing his case for media anarchaeology, Zielinski links curiosity to the continued power of the magical, asserts the fundamental place of the body in any study of media given its relational, "in-between" nature, and argues for the productivity of chaos, "if one understands chaos to mean that dynamic linkage of multifarious Elements of chance and necessity."[121] While he does not explicitly link these ideas to the Wunderkammer, this methodology which foregrounds affective, embodied, and imaginative relationships with science and technology, and valorizes "a magical relationship to things and the relationships between them"[122] speaks to the cabinet of curiosities as a progenitor and potent model for thinking through the hybrid materialities of special effects bodies, and the wide array of networks and flows that crackle between these bodies and those of viewers.

The Wunderkammer, while its own distinct historically and socially contextualized practice, can be productively applied as a model to cinematic viewership, particularly, I argue, to the bodily special effect in film. Julie Turnock's argument that the birth of digital animation in Hollywood led to a radical unfixing of all elements in the frame, which could then be dynamically rearranged and recombined for fantastic purpose,[123] calls back to the cabinet of curiosities' structuring of observational wonder through artful combination and variation in presentation. Jacques Ranciere's work on the production of art as a meaningful category identifies the "regimes of thought" surrounding the camera's supposed objectivity

[121] Ibid., 227.
[122] Ibid., 257.
[123] Turnock, *Plastic Reality*, 17.

as enabling cinema's "love of pure forms" to "coincide with the apprehension of the inexhaustible historicity found at every street corner, in every skin fold, and at every moment of time."[124] For Ranciere, this predilection toward dynamic combination of disparate objects, actions, and gestures taken from the fabric of daily life brings together artistic and political revolution best embodied by Vertov's constructivist montage: in "working with the sensible facts of Soviet life, treating them like materials that it organizes to construct forms of perception for a new sensible world" cinema itself can be understood as enacting combinatory logics to sensuous and philosophical effect familiar to the Wunderkammer.[125] Gunning's work, in addition, suggests the symbiosis between attractions in early cinema and the concept of the curiosity. As we have seen, the Wunderkammer's sensuous varied presentational logics and the corollary drive to consume the world through "curious" images, as well as its enmeshing of bodies and technics are all implicated in cinema itself. However, I would argue that the most specific and most rewarding application of the Wunderkammer model is to the cinematic special effects body.

Critically, however, this new visual culture did not disrupt empiricism's effacing of the body. Despite the fact that the spectacle and the observational logics of modernism are both constituted through the new notion of a fully embodied observer, Crary argues that "the eventual triumph of both depends on the denial of the body, its pulsings and phantasms, as the ground of vision."[126] Just as the curiosi explicitly distanced their perspective from the

[124] Jacques Ranciere, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, (London: Verso, 2013), 224.
[125] Ranciere, *Aisthesis*, 227.
[126] Crary, "Techniques," 136

dumbstruck wonder of an encounter with the sublime, thereby effacing as much as possible the very real spectacular and sensuous dimensions of engagement offered by the Wunderkammer, so too did reason and knowledge production in the intervening centuries become defined against bodily sensation and affective spectacle. This gravitational pull towards hypervisibility as the height of masculinist rationality, and occulted technologies and knowledges as mindless, bodily-driven (and thereby coded as feminine) amusements, continues to erect cultural divisions around wonder, curiosity, magic and science, the threads of which are still critically bound up in cinematic special effects bodies, as we will see in the next section.

As a thread within the cultural negotiation of objectivity and of knowledge itself, the discursive sacrifice of the body in order to enshrine the eye alongside the disembodied mind has been as important to the historical Wunderkammer as it is for film and its optical ancestors. Yet, just like cinema and the wide array of spectacular amusements that predate it, the Wunderkammer remains a site where sensuous enmeshment and affective modes of knowing become impossible to contain, erupting forth and troubling the discursive purification rituals long erected against them. The body's "pulsings and phantasms," so fundamental to our engagement with the technological and the mediated, so vividly haunt the Wunderkammer that it becomes a potent device for thinking through cinematic special effects of all kinds, in particular the digital effects whose materiality continues to be most explicitly denied.

II. The Cabinet of Dr. Cronenberg: Fold Logics and the Curious Body Onscreen

Despite (or perhaps, because of) its ambivalent place within such tensions, the Wunderkammer has persisted as a cultural form in the centuries since its inception, and I argue that its curious magic persists to this day. Beyond offering a handy media archaeological ancestor for the mediated special effects body, the Wunderkammer serves as a generative ground from which to return the excessively material, the fleshly, the carnivalesque, and the chaotic to these biotechnical assemblages. The surprisingly stubborn Cartesian dualism that persists in popular and academic conversation around special effects in film works to vacate these critical threads, which must be equally as stubbornly returned to and ruminated upon if a full picture of SFX bodies is to be worked toward. As Anna Munster has compellingly argued, the Wunderkammer offers a productive aperture into the supposed immateriality of the digital and of media itself.[127] As part of her larger project to interrogate lingering Cartesian dualisms in our notions of the digital and our engagements with it, Munster identifies the Wunderkammer as a valuable aperture onto "an epistemology that did not operate via binary divisions between nature and technics."[128] In freely mixing different aesthetic and scientific threads it forged multiple crossovers between artisanship and biological matter, combining a myriad of object materialities in a presentational style grounded in techniques of humor, the surreal, and "affective relations to 'science.'" In their humorous and expressive, rather than purely representational, models of the body and the

[127] Munster, *Materializing New Media*.
[128] Ibid., 77.

world around it, these unfolding (and enfolding) structures demonstrated "the heights to which science, as an art turned toward the wonderful, could aspire."[129]

It is within the unfolding dimensions of the Wunderkammer that Munster identifies the baroque logic of the fold, drawing on Deleuze and Liebniz, and argues for the baroque fold as a frame for conceptualizing the digital bodies and scapes which returns their often-effaced material dimensions to the conversation. For Munster, the fold as an aesthetic and as a praxis rewrites the digital as a site of interaction between human bodies and technics, rather than a dismembering encounter that forgets the flesh. Against logics of the immaterial digital morph, the fold accounts for the myriad tangle of affects and engagements inherent in any organic being's encounter with the digital, and asserts the place of the body within VFX. And despite Murray and Munster's primary application of the baroque fold to reinscribe digital bodies and worlds with corporeal weight and interconnectivities, I argue that it remains highly generative in approaching the practical special effects body as well. It is within the intersubjective, entangling logic of the fold that the major throughlines of the effects body, digital and practical, are illuminated—in their densely layered and baroquely enveloping presentational logics, which speak the lie to seamlessness discourses; in their critical imbrication of animal and human matter alongside technics and the organic; and in their profound entericity, interwoven with the varied intimacies with the gut and its affective feedbacks.

[129] Munster, *Materializing New Media,* 78.

Thus articulated, the cabinet of wonders tradition offers a productive aperture onto both the spectacular effect's bodily entanglements onscreen, and those enacted between image and viewer. The Wunderkammer attends to the special effects body's melding of multiple materialities into a grafting of mechanical prosthetics and biological flesh, as well as the visceral address of such dismembered, manipulated, constructed and deconstructed bodies, which is intrinsically tied to the logics of the fold. Here, multiple different object materialities are folded together—in the grafting of biological structures and membranes sculpted from latex, plasticized rubber, synthetic fibers, and clay press skeletal forms, blood and viscera created from animal entrails, gelatin, and corn syrup, together with human skin, sweat, and tears—and areas of the body become enfolded and enveloped by applications of artificial skins, exposed organs, and simulated recessions into the body itself. The logic of the fold in these scenes is also a folding into themselves of exterior and interior surfaces, as the exterior edge of human skin becomes interior, and the breath of a special effects crew creates a distension beneath the skin of the special effects body, collapsing divisions between inside and outside. I have suggested that the Wunderkammer tradition can be read through a historical progression of shifting modes of viewership leading up until modernity, and that it speaks to the throughlines of secret or occulted knowledge, art, magic, science and technology revolving around these moments of observational flux. Chief among these cultural ley lines for this project is the attempted dismembering and de-mattering of the material chaos at the heart of the Wunderkammer, against which the ameliorating process of the enteric imaginary can productively be conceived. As I hope to demonstrate throughout this and the following chapters, such an embodied excavation of special effects bodies

reveals them (and our connections with them) in fuller complexity than the skimming of seamless surfaces will allow.

Perhaps nowhere are the Wunderkammer's attendant fold logics more clearly expressed in the special effects body than in the skin. As layered, textile-like sheaths for the body, our skin is deceptively simple, while also constituting a major element of our bodily knowledges, experience, and identity. In his work on the senses, Michel Serres identifies the skin, in its folding over of the bodily exterior onto itself, as the seat of cognition, and even of the soul. Declaring that "Klein bottles are a model of identity," he conceives of the skin as an intensely textile-like medium driven by the logics of the fold, and historically inscribed upon both visibly and invisibly to the point of becoming an organ of human memory.[130] Serres rejects dualism and instead insists on enfolding, enmeshing, entangling corporeality. Moreover, a relational, intentional skin which communicates is foregrounded in this "mingled body," which through touching and folding into itself transforms what it touches, changing and making potential through the logic of mixtures.[131] His reliance on the metaphor of the veil suggests a visual dimension to his concept of sensate topologies of the touched and touching body, yet he wants to insist that there is no "reality" underneath the veil to be revealed to the viewer—rather that the layers and layers of the veil are corporeality itself—"nudity reveals more pleats and wrinkles."[132] Serres identifies the soul as enclosed within the body's protective nested boxes, a vulnerable "white doll" always willing to shed a layer

[130] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley, (London: Continuum, 2008), 22.
[131] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 28.
[132] Ibid., 82.

of skin and take flight, until in shedding the last possible skin the soul is denuded of the body in death.[133]

Within this model of folding, textile-like skins, wherein living beings are always already hybrid, shifting, becoming, multilayered, the accelerated layering of the special effects body presents a uniquely fascinating object. In presenting the humanoid body as wonderous, the cinematic special effects sequence relies on a wide array of hybrid, layered materialities, whether such bodies are profilmically or digitally created. The écorchés of Fragonard's cabinet relied upon a similarly expressive mélange of human and animal bodily materials with technics, a presentational hybrid layering that is only accelerated in the context of cinematic representation.

While practical special effects are most clearly understood as relying on additive layers in order to picture recessions into a living body (at least where a living actor needs to be part of the mélange, rather than relying on a full modeled form or prosthetic), the picturing of voids or recessions into the body of a living actor that are digitally achieved also rely upon a textile layering of skins on skins. The ubiquitous green screen, when commonly worn as a bodysuit over either part or the entire body of an actor, is an additive sheath which allows for the bodily weight and density of an actor to be "removed" in postproduction, which is itself an adding on, a layering of the filmed background behind them easily over the green sheath in the frame. There's also the motion-capture suit, another added colorful sheath, that cloaks the skin of the actor (human or animal) in whatever color is most digitally useful for the body's

[133] Ibid., 145.

removal, marked throughout with spheres that allow for only the captured motion of the now absent body to be animated by a digitally produced skeletal rig, giving the illusion of naturalistic movements. In both cases, there's a layering of skins in order to allow for an apparent unsheathing or flaying of skins, paradoxically achieved in both cases through further layering. Conceiving of these hybrid materialities requires an unfolding, a peeling back and a careful analysis of each of these excavated layers, and this process relies on the logics of folding, unfolding. As this application to both practical and digital SFX bodies will continue to be a focus of the following chapters, in particular Chapter 3's unpacking of the wolfman which necessarily foregrounds shifting skins and layered anatomies in practically mounted werewolf transformation scenes, the remainder of this chapter will center digital examples while continuing to explore what flayed bodies and skins themselves can show us about special effects bodies in film when approached through the baroque fold logics of the Wunderkammer.

III. Wandering Biology: Skinning the Digital Corporeal

In ruminating on the original concept of hysteria as the literal unmooring of the womb to wander freely about the body, Elizabeth Wilson offers the provocation "perhaps all biology wanders."[134] Her suggestion immediately calls to mind the textual materialities of cinematic body horror, in which the ubiquitous motif of the opened body and displayed

[134] Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic,* 13.

viscera becomes baroque Wunderkammer; in which biology bites back (consider the alien-infiltrated intestines of *The Thing* (dir. John Carpenter, US, 1982) which transform a man's torso to a gaping maw with which to devour the people around him, biology in revolt in *City of the Living Dead* (dir. Lucio Fulci, Italy, 1981), in which possessed organs force themselves out from their owner's own screaming mouth, or the pursuant dripping biology that constitutes the figure of the rotting zombie horde); and the fans of which are themselves bodily proscribed by the classifying mandates of taste. Wandering biology also offers us a potent way for thinking against models of our bodily materiality as locked in one space and in one function, of which the mind is only element free enough from fleshy boundaries to interface with the vast immaterial void of the digital. In this section, I explore the spectacular VFX-produced body at the center of *Hollow Man* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, US/Germany, 2000), an "invisible man" reimagined as a radically shapeshifting grotesque of layered human anatomy, in order to consider the role of unfolding and enmeshing logics in the material elaboration of the digital corporeal, particularly located around the appearance (and disappearance) of the skin. As in practically-mounted scenes of gore, the body's exterior and interior zones become folded unto each other, and the unfolding presentational logics of the body-as-wunderkammer formulate inner anatomical and organic structures as marvel, while the film's visual foregrounding of its erstwhile invisible man as flayed viscera and organs (thereby formulating horror through biology out of place and emphatically not out of sight), together with its insistence upon mapping the fleshy weight, volume, and topography of its seemingly immaterial central body, resist easy divisions between additive practicality and digital immaterial morphs.

Hollow Man centers around a remarkable special effects body, produced primarily through digital effects work, who embodies both a flayed, powerfully mobile biological materiality exposed for the eye of the viewer, and a completely eviscerated husk as an apparently empty, yet violently ambulatory, skin. Briefly, the narrative concerns a group of military scientists and pathologists developing an experimental serum capable of making mammals completely invisible, by placing them in an indefinite state of "quantum phase shift" which lasts until the proper antidote is administered. Having successfully made invisible all manner of animal test subjects, it is not until Dr. Sebastian Cane perfects the antidote that the project becomes feasible for human experimentation. Cane, hungry for power and laboring under significant delusions of personal grandeur, talks the team into letting him be the first human to undergo the procedure, but becomes trapped in an invisible state. Gradually, he begins devising ways to escape from the watchful eyes of the team he once led in order to perpetrate an escalating series of violent sexual and physical abuses first on strangers, and ultimately on his erstwhile colleagues after he traps them in their locked-down lab. As Cane sets to work murdering the scientists, Dr. Linda Kay escapes, confronting Cane and ultimately casting him down an elevator shaft to perish in the chemical fire below.

Materially, the "phase-shifted" Dr. Cane is a complex creature indeed, appearing at times as an eroding or reforming series of bodily layers, as either flayed musculature and bone or hollowed shell, or as a total void of perceptible form, often partially "skinned" over with nearby objects like electrocardiographic pads and bedsheets. Visually, Cane's radically shifting anatomy congeals around 3 major forms throughout his life as an "invisible man"—the flayed man, the hollow man, and the invisible phantom. Though the film's central horror

is ostensibly the promise of the latter, a powerful, intentional human completely severed from a (visible) body, Cane is rarely depicted in this form without the aforementioned improvised "skins," and almost never without some limited visual mapping of his bodily topography or location, as when an apparently floating cup or knife divulges the location of invisible fingers. It's worth noting that the difference between the three states of visual presentation Cane undergoes is one of degrees, not of kind; here, biological matter is modeled as a series of layers, with each form representing a removal or addition of certain visible bodily strata.

This layering of the body into separable anatomical sections, progressively made visible or invisible, is foregrounded in the films' centerpiece VFX sequences of first the gorilla Isabel, and later Dr. Cane undergoing the procedures to become invisible and to reenter the world of the visible. We are first introduced to the procedure as the team continues its experimentation on Isabel, one of many captive creatures in the lab, by administering the antidote Cane has just developed. The completely invisible Isabel is initially only mapped on the screen through a tangle of medical tubes and monitoring wires whose placement suggests the topography of the animal below, gently rising and lowering in time with her breath. As the antidote is injected her digitally-animated arterial system slowly comes into view, shifting into various brilliant colors as constellations of arteries and veins seemingly bloom out from the injection site. This is rapidly followed by the similarly branching "growth," or reappearance, of her skeletal structure, then her musculature, organs, and finally skin and hair. Significantly, these systems do not sprout in whole, one after the other—instead, her (and later, in a nearly identical sequence, Cane's) body reappears as an

architecturally deep, recessed space, where the topmost edges of skin and musculature are the last to (re)grow, maintaining for as long as possible an unobstructed view of the surging biological ferment of the body's seemingly regenerating interior—the digital special effects body as Wunderkammer. This calculated approach to the body's biology is maintained in Cane's appearance as a flayed anatomical monstrosity later in the film, when an electrical shock transforms the previously invisible (though often skinned over) doctor into a partially reappeared figure, in which apparently every biological layer has been restored save for his skin. It is significant that the climactic final sequence in which Cane murderously pursues the surviving scientists, and is finally defeated by Linda, depicts the monstrous invisible man not as invisible at all, but simply as removed of the "veil" of his skin. Interior zones and systems are here made exterior, and vice versa, as biological matter is both presented for viewing and enfolded and turned unto itself.

Throughout *Hollow Man*, the folding, unfolding, and enmeshing logics of the special effects body are located most clearly in the skin, whether in Cane's visually unstable epidermis which reveals interior systems beneath, the series of improvised skins which are placed over his phase-shifted body, or in the multiple colored bodysuits employed in the creation of the digital effects body itself. Three of these bodysuits were used, one green, one blue, and one black, specifically chosen for their relative performance in different environmental conditions, in order to allow for the films' obsessive motif of partial skinning without requiring full digital skeletal rigs and animation. Instead, each necessary shot was filmed twice, with identical camera movement, so that actor Kevin Bacon could easily be digitally removed from the final frame while preserving his gestural performance and the

topology of his body underneath a given skin. In their folding, textile nature, these fabric jumpsuits are part of a larger play with the surface of biological and object skins within the film, as well as being a necessary component of this play's visual representation. As I mentioned before, one of the three major forms the shapeshifting Dr. Cane assumes is that of the titular hollow man, an effect achieved by the full, rather than partial, skinning of Cane's completely invisible body. This occurs when the scientists, realizing they will be unable to return Cane to visibility in the near future, pour a flesh-colored latex polymer over his entire body, in the manner of taking a life-mold, which once it has solidified is slit to accommodate his mouth and eyes. It is these orifices which provide convenient openings into the sheath of the artificial skin, revealing the awkwardly wrinkling, bunching prosthetic skin to be completely emptied of visible contents. While Cane is partially skinned by a wide range of substances during his life as invisible man, including water droplets, smoke, and even gallons of human blood hurled onto him by a desperate scientist to reveal his location, it is this latex skin that most fully enacts the image of man as evacuated skin, completely eviscerated of biological filling. This hollow figure is the double of Cane as exposed viscera, which resembles both a man flayed and a man turned inside out, biological matter completely enfolded on itself.

The repeated discourse of the films' characters around invisibility as a journey, or resulting in material absence, resembles the larger tangle of representational concerns situated around the digitally-produced special effects body. Isabel is repeatedly described by the scientists as having "gone away" following her phase-shift, ultimately causing concern that she may have "been away too long" to preserve normal cognitive and behavioral

function. Upon awaking from the invisibility procedure, Cane anxiously shouts that his eyelids are missing, until he is reminded by Linda that they are still there and functional, but as invisible coverings are no longer capable of protecting his eyes from the light; later, he tells her he feels like he "isn't there," prompting her to lay a hand on his (completely invisible) chest, as a reassuring reminder of his materiality and presence. The repeated references made of Cane as ghostlike on the part of the scientists—to which Cane replies "ghosts are dead, I'm very much alive"—are echoed in the many scenes in which a fully invisible Cane assumes the makeshift skin of the draped bedsheet, a visual reference to ghostliness associated with children's improvised Halloween costumes. *Hollow Man* responds to these anxieties expressed by its characters—and likely also projected onto the viewer, who is presented with not only a heavily VFX-mediated performance on the part of Bacon, but also with the concept of a central character as visual void—by insisting that materiality will out, dwelling upon the indentations created in chairs, beds, and pooled liquids on which the invisible man sits or stands, obsessively intercutting footage captured with thermo-imaging cameras, and as we have seen, visually foregrounding not the seemingly imperceptible body, but the exposed viscera of a body turned inside out, or the textile-like wrinkling folds of the seemingly eviscerated "hollow" skin.

It is certainly interesting that this hollowness, presented as clear companion piece to the flayed and layered body, came out of the gift of a book on the Museo della Specola's (wax) anatomical écorchés of Helen Verhoeven to her director father.[135] Paul Verhoeven's

[135] Douglas Keesey, *Paul Verhoeven*, (Koln, Germany: Taschen, 2005), 169.

entire approach to the project seemed rooted from the beginning in the history of the ecorche, its growth from the curiosity cabinet to the public museum (and even the entertaining display that harkens back to the contamination populism of the fairground, in the case of Body World and its ilk), and its power to provoke wonder as a deeply embodied response in the beholder. The lion's share of the film's budget went toward research & development of new effects technologies, spurred in part by Verhoeven's insistence—explicitly spurred by the visual impact of the della Specola écorchés—that the titular "hollow man" be doubled with a spectacular flayed-yet living-body, created from "a three dimensional digital model of the *inside* of Bacon's body, with all his organs working and flexing as in real life."[136] In animation, the spectacular revelation of the flayed body achieved a provocative furthering of the ecorche tradition, giving abject life to the "pulsings and phantasms" through the invisibility of the skin. As a bioluminescent glimmer, the écorché suggested a throughline from the curiosity cabinet to the enveloping, unfolding mélange of the digital special effects body onscreen.

Verhoeven's initial concept made the theoretical leap between the écorché figure and the long history of the sfx-produced "hollow man" in the cinematic adaptations of H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. It is perhaps here that the hollow nature of such a being was worked out and became a visual obsession. In Universal Pictures' first adaptation of *The Invisible Man* (dir. James Whale, 1933, US), one can trace the same veil-like skinning over of the invisible protagonist that pervades *Hollow Man*, as Claude Rains' scientist is partially

[136] Keesey, *Verhoeven*, 169.

visibly mapped by his clothing, or the bandages that shield the invisibility of his exposed hands and face from public view. The spectacular "hollow" nature of this body is revealed when the dark goggles covering his bandage-swathed face are removed, revealing the fabric skin to be entirely eviscerated of any visible body parts. While negative mattes, made possible by Rains' donning of a tight black velvet suit between his skin and costume—a precursor to the now ubiquitous greenscreen suits of the digital age—were used to achieve these aforementioned "skinning" effects, the revelatory hollows around his eyes required painstaking hand-painting frame by frame.

Hollow Man's conceptual linking of the écorché and the invisible man was furthered by visual effects supervisor Scott Anderson's experience as part of the ILM effects team producing *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (dir. John Carpenter, 1992, US) ten years earlier. Anderson recalls distinctly feeling unsure of the possibility of getting the script onscreen while reading it, and was tasked with a lengthy (and expensive) R&D project in order to provide an effects proof of concept to the studio before *Hollow Man* could be greenlit.[137] Notably, this research was heavily weighted toward anatomical consultation, including working with two medical doctors and having the entire effects team observe a human dissection.[138] There was also a strong emphasis on the presence of the actor in the creation of the invisible man—the decision was made early on to privilege as much as possible the profilmic presence of Kevin Bacon, and to avoid utilizing wirework and puppetry as much as

[137] Ian Failes, "Behind the visual effects test that greenlit 'Hollow Man,'" *befores & afters*, 6 August 2020.
[138] Failes, "Behind the visual effects."

possible in the "invisibility gags" required by the script.[139] This emphasis, found in both interviews with the effects workers and extrafilmic "making of" documentaries, participates in a long lineage of justificatory discourse used to prop up special effects of all kinds against ambivalence on the part of the audience that what they are seeing is somehow too unreal, too divorced from the imagined action performed before the camera, as I've discussed previously. However, it becomes particularly interesting in the case of *Hollow Man*, together with the repeated appeals made to anatomical and medical fidelity, as a resurgence of the old debates around Wunderkammern and wonder itself. Does the anatomical correctness of the digitally produced Isabel's circulatory, musculatory, and skeletal system blooming out of invisibility sanitize the fact that in all other scenes, the captive gorilla is played by a man in a suit? Does the repetition of the vaguely sci-fi claim that Bacon was "entirely scanned" or even "cloned"—down to his genitalia, as Verhoeven often reminds interviewers[140]—in order to create the digital image of his flayed musculature going about his murderous mischief guard against charges that this central body lacks reality, or perhaps that the effects themselves don't seem "real" enough? I'd wager that the answer rests in the arresting power of the boundary figure of the écorché, even in its wax form, photographed and catalogued in the manner of a still life, to spark the embodied imagination.

IV. Alien and Animal Natures

[139] Ibid.
[140] Keesey, *Verhoeven*, 129.

The place of the animal within the production of special effects bodies seems explicitly relevant to *Hollow Man*, focusing as it does on the painful "journey" to invisibility of Isabel before reinventing Dr. Cane as digital écorché. Isabel's uneasy place within the narration, as both an extremely minor character and the central focus of the film's first spectacular bodily effects setpiece, is echoed in her material and visual instability. First "seen" in the film's opening shot of a rat snatched and eaten by an invisible force—in fact an animatronic claw then digitally removed in post-production[141] —Isabel then is alternatingly portrayed by digitally animated veins, organs, bones, and briefly skin and hair; and then by a man in a gorilla costume. In fact, only the initial shot of the rat pre-attack, as well as brief shots of chimps, orangutans, guinea pigs, and dogs occupying the lab set in cages, utilize any animal actors, whether pro-filmicly or through digital capture. Visually, the film seems to ruminate on the uncanny material traces of the captive experimental subject, at the same time that its plot seems eager to brush her aside in order to focus squarely on Cane's descent into madness. This uncertainty seems entirely appropriate in the context of the Wunderkammer and of the écorché, which heavily utilized the mediated images and the material bodies of animals throughout evolving attitudes and clashes over the place of animals and of humanism in the development of medicine and the natural sciences.

Fragonard's écorchés explicitly implicate the liminality and precarity of the division between human and animal, at the same time that they explode easy divisions between the stuff of bodies and technics. As both a veterinary and a human anatomist and surgeon,

[141] "Hollow Man, The," *The American Humane Society,* accessed 17 August 2022, https://old.humanehollywood.org/index.php/movie-archive/item/the-hollow-man.

Fragonard found himself at the center of the Age of Enlightenment's growing approach to the divisions between human and animal on the basis of scientific taxonomy, rather than on divine right. This "ideological whirlwind" correlated as well to a greater understanding of symmetry between the human animal and plant and animal biologies, giving "rise to a school of thought that erupted several decades later into Darwinian theory."[142] Of course, the same age's increasing codification of vision, the mind, and the rational as privileged in the creation of knowledge above the marked body, its senses, and any other modes of knowing or inquiry did much to increase these barriers at the same time that "scientific revolution pulled [man] down toward the lower beings."[143] Fragonard is credited with being one of the first to apply his human surgical knowledge to the morphology of animals, beginning with a study of the anatomy of domestic ruminants, inaugurating an enmeshment in France of the twin domains of veterinary and human surgery which led to revolutionary discoveries, including the work of Louis Pasteur.[144] Moreover, the eventual creation of the national anatomical cabinet of curiosity which housed Fragonard's most famous écorchés occurred under the auspices of the Veterinary School of Alfort,[145] where he served as anatomist, and where his collection is still housed today.[146] The combination of animal specimens of all sorts within this cabinet with human and animal écorchés was certainly nothing new under the combinatory logics of the Wunderkammer tradition, as we have seen, but the primary dedication of the cabinet to

[142] Degeuerce, *Fragonard*, 11.
[143] Ibid., 18.
[144] Ibid., 14.
[145] Previously to serving at Alfort, the 2nd veterinary school in France, as chief anatomist, he worked as a lecturer in the very first veterinary school at Lyon. Ibid., 60.
[146] Ibid.

animal anatomy, at the same time that it contained Fragonard's strikingly preserved human écorchés in all their unprecedented animacy and fullness, collapsed easy distinctions between man and animal within the realm of natural history and medicine. That Fragonard's most famous works, the flayed horse and rider tableaux, and the biblically-inspired man wielding a donkey's mandible, collapse these divisions even further into a single hybrid form is notable. In addition to these hybrid displays sculpted from the flayed forms of men and animals, Fragonard's cabinet included many animal écorchés, crafted with equal care and expressive animacy as his more famed human works.

Fragonard's process records the necessary use of animal products in the preservation of his artful ecorches—from the beeswax coated on the threads used to tie off arteries before their incision and, together with tallow, injected into his subjects' heart and veins, to the horsehair brushes used to paint red and blue pigments on various veins, horsehair sutures stabilizing interior organs, and the horsehair pads utilized in posing the body or organ as it dried following preservation and dissection. Moreover, the animal bodies which were prepared for display in the cabinet by Fragonard and by his colleagues—aside from Fragonard, they mostly dissected animals, presumably after killing them as their easiest specimens to locate were "horses nearing the end of their lives" as, until a popular market developed in France for horse meat in the 19th century, aged horses had "no commercial value"[147]—were far more numerous than the human écorchés, effectively framing the spectacularly displayed human specimens within an enfolding system of organic beings,

[147] Ibid., 71.

rather than displaying the human body as of a distinct order from the animal kingdom. The particular visual similarities of human and animal flayed flesh, bone, and organs would have only cemented this sense of connection. Fragonard's ecorche process is noted to include a trick for displaying the lymphatic system, notoriously difficult to figure for public view given the delicate size of the vessels and the transparent nature of their contents. Based on the fact that the intestinal lymphatic vessels take on a milky appearance when their owner has recently digested high-fat foods, Fragonard and his colleagues would "[give] the animal a meal of milk or fresh cream before it was sacrificed"[148]—presumably this trick was not a viable option for the human écorchés, who arrived as corpses. Horses and other domestic animals were certainly far easier to find than human anatomical specimens, which before the revolution necessitated surreptitious grave-robbing, or selection from the corpses of abandoned souls at local hospitals, [149] though the exotic animals Fragonard seems to have chosen most often to preserve himself would have offered at least some degree of difficulty and expenditure to source. In multiple ways, Fragonard's écorchés within the curiosity cabinet of Alfort's veterinary school were emphatically threshold beings, which aligned human and animal biomatter, mixed through with animal flesh and excretions processed as comestibles. This gustatory element was taken even further in the process of corrosion by which Fragonard made possible the display of the most delicate vascular systems. By injecting the desired branches of the vascular system with a resistant material, Fragonard then exposed the body to "a corrosive 'digestive'" which would then consume all but the

[148] Ibid., 142
[149] Ibid., 142.

protected system of veins. A similar connection between animals, comestibles, and the écorchés is found in the lengths their creators went to to protect them from devouring vermin and insects, who could and did decimate entire anatomical collections created from body parts rather than wax. Fragonard's preservation regimen required regular coats of alcohol or turpentine, "particularly where infestations had already started,"[150] while others relied on concoctions of wine, "corrosive sublimate," and even "excessive amounts of arsenic," the latter remaining a potent contaminant on most extant écorchés and taxidermies today.[151] Frederick Ruysch was said to have relied on a "balsamic" concoction of fermented fruit brandy, cereals, and white pepper.[152] Despite these varied seasonings, Fragonard's écorchés alone are remarkable for their evasion of devouring insects and mammals, given that the majority of fleshy anatomical displays of the era have not survived the ravages of time. It was not until 2003 that a heat wave affecting France caused melting wax to drip from Fragonard's écorchés at Alfort—though they had always "sweated wax" in the summers before, this volume was concerning—and a modern preservation effort began.[153]

Thus in the écorché, a materially hybrid body brings together animal and human flesh with technological processes in what is both an artistic and a scientific project, a special effects body that crackles with the bioluminescence and all the productive chaos of the curiosity. Lynn Thorndike has noted that among 16th and 17th c. scientists, skepticism and rationality were more quickly adopted as ideals by those whose chief concern were the

[150] Ibid., 79.
[151] Ibid., 80.
[152] Ibid., 96.
[153] Ibid., 98.

physical sciences, while thinkers who dwelled more in the domains of biology, medicine, and the natural sciences "persisted far longer and to a greater extent in their adherence to older occult and magic views."[154] This focus on the matter and energies of the body seemingly made the advancing norms of scientific empiricism harder to accept, perhaps due to the organicity of curiosity's bioluminescent glimmer. In any case, bodily based engagements and enmeshments with science and technology have long been troubled and troubling, and in this explosive potentiality I identify the kinship between the Wunderkammer and its écorchés, and the special effects body.

In what remains, I want to apply the écorché's "pulsings and phantoms" and attendant cultural tensions to another film which foregrounds spectacular effects bodies. *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, US, 2016) does not center flayed musculature, but its speculative and poetic approach to relationality and communication through the veils of our skins approaches the écorché figure from another angle. Moreover, it furthers the Wunderkammer's curious tangle of imagination, magic, art and science, and the relationship of these two human and animal material being.

Following the release of *Arrival* in 2016, the almost universally positive critical consensus hovered around terms like "cerebral," "sober," "thinking person's science fiction," above "settl[ing] for visceral thrills," and "the sort of movie that M. Night Shyamalan would bungle." Brian Lowry, in his review for CNN, cautioned viewers primed by the film's apparent broad sci-fi premise of aliens landing on earth to "[expect] a whiz-bang film should

[154] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media,* 65.

be prepared for a more cerebral and emotional experience," while others praised *Arrival* as a film which "casts aside almost every *Independence Day*, *E.T.* and *Contact* cliché" and scorns these genre films' attendant "box-office-friendly spectacle."[155] Such breathless takes on the film's supposed increased cultural and artistic importance as a result of sober abstinence from the "whiz-bang" orgies of digital-special-effects-powered spectacle expected by virtue of both the film's well-trodden sci-fi genre premise and major Hollywood studio production context ignore the simple fact that *Arrival* has, at its heart, spectacular special effects bodies produced through the same production chains of digital animation and rendering as the CGI-mounted spectacles these reviewers seek to emphatically define *Arrival* against. It is upon these central bodies that the film hinges its entire narrative and visual logics around their hybrid biotechnic materiality. I would argue that it is the film's enacting of a cyborg queering of affective time and affinitive communication, centered around transhuman skin-to-skin bodily contact, that rather than a denial of Hollywood logics of special effects bodily attractions comprises *Arrival*'s actual refreshing intervention into the genre of alien invasion films. An emphatically embodied affinitive and communicative interconnection across environmental bodies of all kinds becomes the basis for political action and ethical responsiveness, and is foregrounded through the transcorporeal entanglements between Louise and the visiting "heptapod" alien beings. Exploring these central special effects bodies, and their insistence upon the interface of the skin as a reinscription of the

[155] See Will Leitch, "*Arrival*: Can They Hear Us Now?" *New Republic*, November 11, 2016; *Atlantic*, November 11, 2016; Brian Lowry, "*Arrival* Takes Alien Landing Plot in Cerebral Direction," *CNN*, November 11, 2016. Peter Hartlaub, "Thoughtful *Arrival* Escapes Genre Filmmaking Orbit," *SF Gate*, November 10, 2016.

biotechnical materialities of digital and analogue bodies prompts us to consider what experiential and communicative connections and flows are possible between biological matter and digitally coded and rendered corporealities, and to consider the special effects body broadly as an imaginative queering of science, art, and biological matter.

Briefly, the plot of *Arrival* centers around Louise Banks, a successful linguist who, we are told through a series of flashbacks and narration, has lost her teenage daughter to illness. When twelve alien ships land across the globe, Louise is recruited by the US Army to attempt to translate the language spoken by the visiting "heptapods," (dubbed Abbot and Costello) who allow a small contingent of scientists and soldiers into their ship each day to attempt to communicate. Louise, together with scientist Ian Donelly, works to decode the written logograms of the heptapods, ultimately understanding that humanity is being offered a tool (or weapon, or gift), which she herself accepts—the full heptapod language, the knowledge of which rewires her brain to understand (or "open") time as they do. We realize that the supposed flashbacks were flashforwards to her life with the daughter she will eventually have with Ian. As global tensions mount, Louise uses her temporal insight to deliver a timely message to Chinese leader General Shang, inaugurating a peaceful coming together of every human nation around the new universal language of the heptapods, whose ships ultimately disintegrate as mysteriously as they appeared, and Louise is seen to make the choice to have her child, despite knowing what's to come.

Despite the narrative importance of technology at the highest moment of both human and an alien civilization's development, the film foregrounds physical presence and encounter whenever possible, and upholds skin-to-skin contact as the ultimate channel of

interrelationality and the transfer of both biological and technological matter. In *Arrival*'s adaptation from Ted Chiang's short work "Story of Your Life," one of several changes made in the screenplay was removing the mediating devices and physical distance implied by the "looking glass" technology used by the heptapods to contact Earth from a remote location. In the film, Louise and her entourage must literally enter the alien craft to access a chamber in which the aliens are separated (framed) by a glass-like barrier. Louise experiences her first breakthrough when she introduces writing into their encounter, holding up a dry-erase board with the word "human" written on it and indicating herself, after which one of the heptapods raises a limb and ejects ink onto the dividing screen, writing the first in a series of many logograms they produce over the course of the film. However, Louise progresses no further in her efforts at communication until, inspired by an unseen source, she denudes herself of her many layers of anti-radiation suits and physically approaches the barrier, to the horror of the soldiers around her. While she states "they need to see me," it is not her shedding of many protective skins alone that leads to a moment of true communication with the heptapods. It is not until one heptapod places a limb (reminiscent both of a human hand and a starfish) flat against the glass screen in response to her sloughing off of her Hazmat suit, and then Louise places her bare hand on the barrier, that the two share a relational connection, and each learns and recognizes the name of the other. That this moment of physical touch, across alien and human bare-skinned members, constitutes a material transfer of both biological and technological matter (as well as the basis for knowledge and the invocation to political action), is only made clear later in the film. Names and logograms are not the only thing transmitted here, or perhaps it is better to say that the channels by which they are

transmitted are emphatically not immaterial. The writing of the heptapods is organically produced through jets of ink which are ejected from their hand-like appendages, and which hover in their mist-filled atmosphere for a few moments before the ink, becoming mist like, dissipates slowly in dispersed tendrils into the fog. Louise's bare hand caresses both heptapod limb and the material wisps of their language in this moment, and repeatedly throughout the film. It is through this haptic, sensuous skin-to-skin touch (both skin of body, and skin of word) that she grasps the first, incomplete fragments of the heptapod's "gift" (or tool, or weapon, as its shifting translation throughout the film suggests)—immediately after this first tactile communication, Louise experiences her first future vision of her daughter. Full apprehension of the tool is granted when again, Louise is prompted by the heptapods to place a bare hand on the screen with theirs, and to touch a vast sea of inky logograms. Her complete mastery of time, and with it the understanding of the true nature of the technology she now wields and her political imperative to act, is likewise only achieved when she is bodily immersed in the heptapod's atmosphere, breathing their misty vapors into her lungs, and is shown in close-up to caress Costello's words with her hands, freed from the final barrier—itself a shed skin– that had until this point been erected between their bodies. It is this final experience, and the full knowledge of its implications, that leads Louise to defy military orders and to seek out a satellite phone to contact General Shang in order to halt an armed attack, an effort achieved simply by reminding him of his dead wife's final words.

While certainly any language can be considered technology, the heptapod's "tool," a full comprehension of their language and thereby their "open," sensuous (and expressly

haptic[156]) relationship to time seems a mixing of both biological matter and technics, a weapon which is as unified to their bodily matter as the rest of their alien technology appears to be. From the tantalizing aside early in the film from an Australian scientist that the heptapods played back audio recordings to their human interlocutors "from an unseen source," to their ships which emit no waste, foreign objects, nor perceptible communicative waves, and the suggestive lack of visible heptapod mediating technologies beyond the manipulation of their own bodies, it would seem that the heptapod body, like the cyborg, houses both biological and technical matter underneath the sheath of the skin.

Alongside this narrative and visual insistence upon bodily touch as communicative interface, *Arrival* foregrounds skins of many kinds as a folding, textural medium. In another significant change from Chiang's source material, the heptapods of *Arrival* are not endowed with "seven lidless eyes" lining the top of its sculptural body. The film's aliens are significantly sheathed in skin from top to bottom, with no seals of eyes, mouths, or other orifices to break this smooth surface—a terminal smoothness echoed in the shape of their ships. Their bodies, while both spider and giraffe like in appearance, ultimately resemble nothing so much as human hands, the broad wrists of which are initially taken for these being's "faces," yet are later revealed as a much lower part of their full anatomy. Skin's folding, wrinkled textures are also highly present in the film's human environments. The military tent structures in which much of the film takes place frame the majority of the film's

[156] It certainly seems significant that a majority of her flash-forwards to life with her daughter picture their tactile contact, or the daughter manipulating stones, water, toys, and other objects with her own hands. All of these flashes are presented in shallow depth of field, often in close-up, increasing the sense of haptic caress for both Louise and the viewer.

interior scenes with softly deflated, wrinkled textures which gently sag towards the center of the frame, commanding more space and visual attention than the sharp angles and lines of traditional walls. The wrinkled, ballooned out anatomy of the scientists and soldiers in their bright orange Hazmat suits is another emphatically textural skin which commands a large degree of attention and space within the frame throughout the film. At a more subterranean level, one can consider the many layers of veil-like skins necessary to the structuring of the film's bodily special effects sequences—the fabric "second skin" worn by human actors for motion capture work, the digital skins and textures applied to the skeletal rigs of the fully digitally rendered bodies of the heptapods, and the environmental skinning over of footage captured in front of a green screen.

The film's ruminative concern with biological and technological surfaces, material caress, and memory unmoored from time recalls Michel Serres' work on the textile-like role of skin. Serres' notion of the "mingled body" is constituted by our wrinkling and unfolding skin, which holds our identity, our memory, and our interrelational connections to other bodies around us. His model can also be positioned against Cartesian dualism, and its related claims for disembodied rationality and unexamined objectivity, and extractive, hierarchical sight. Skin's dynamic potential to shape and be shaped extends radically to other bodies—speaking of this autonomic caress, Serres writes "we caress each other along our contour lines, we leave each other with various knots, in embraces that have changed shape."[157]

[157] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 28.

However, *Arrival* widens this "we" to include the vast environment and bodies and forces of all kinds with which humans are always already entangled.

The bodies of *Arrival* draw not only on Serres but also, I would argue, on Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, which further extends Donna Haraway's conception of the affinitive relationships that flow between human and more-than-human bodies.[158] In exploring "the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures," as a means to developing an ethics of concern and wonder for the environment, Alaimo suggests that expanding ethical responsivity beyond the social into the material makes ethics responsible to "the emergent, ultimately unmappable landscapes of interacting biological, climatic, economic, and political forces."[159] To that end, she develops the concept of the transcorporeal—a view of human corporeality "in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world," making visible human bodily matter's radical inseparability from the environment. Ultimately, transcorporeality seeks to remind us that the environment is not some elsewhere, but is "always the very substance of ourselves."[160]

Like Haraway and Elizabeth Wilson, Alaimo contends with "the ghost of biology" in feminist thought, arguing that its historical use in establishing racist and sexist determinisms calls out for its rehabilitation through critical use, not abandonment[161]. Alaimo notes that

[158] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
[159] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.
[160] Ibid., 4.
[161] Ibid., 7.

while Haraway's cyborg offers a useful map of more-than-human biological and technological meldings, it has most often been taken up as an avatar of the "technological but not biological," as cyberhumanism vacated of fleshy weight. More useful for Alaimo is transcorporeality, which incorporates a wide variety of epistemologies, including disability and science studies, in order to insist "that the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world."[162] It is through this model of embodied collective experience that we become socially and politically responsible to the environment in which we are so deeply interconnected. Her work makes visible transcorporeal flows, in which the body is not closed off from the environment and the collective but constantly affected, remade, and reshaped by contact with biological forms (and industrial and socioeconomic flows) of all kinds. This embodied experience of openness, flows, and remaking—"of being bodily coextensive with the material world"—implies not just a relationality but also a responsibility of care.[163]

It is in this "mingled body" through which bodies may relate, communicate, and change that one can locate *Arrival*'s touch based, biotechnic material vision of the body, and extend Serres' vision to include transcorporeal relationality and tactility. In advocating for thinking, expressing, and communicating systems widely distributed throughout the soma, beyond simply the central nervous system, with its long baggage in masculinist projects of science as rational objectivity, this vision of the skin as interface which places bodies in alliance has much in common with Elizabeth Wilson's work, which takes up the enteric

[162] Ibid., 11.
[163] Ibid., 16.

nervous system, or the gut, as a means of reinscribing the biological into feminist conceptions of the body, while also pushing back against dualist models which locate cognition as the sole purview of the central nervous system. The concept of the "mingled body" also brings us to the figure of the cyborg, which may productively be thought alongside the figure of *Arrival*'s digitally produced heptapod.

Donna Haraway famously considered the cyborg as a generative melding of fiction and reality, a hybrid figure which embodies the collision between technological and organic matter, and between social reality and imagination.[164] As a cybernetic liminal figure, the cyborg embodies machines and technics, yet as Anne Balsamo reminds us, they also "never leave the meat behind," remaining a potent reinscription of the radical materiality of all bodies. For Balsamo, the cyborg body extends beyond even the inscriptive body, becoming body as media which is radically write-able (and read-able).[165] It is here that we can locate the body of the heptapod as cyborg, both within the narrative world of *Arrival*, as "radically material" biotechnical bodies which route and channel technological control and transfer through biomaterial interfaces of skin, inhalation, and even immersion. Their embodied experience of unmoored, non-linear time bound to the teaching of literacy also calls up "the originally literate mother" Malinche, something of a patron saint for Haraway's feminist cyborg similarly embodies a call to collective political and social action.[166] Beyond their

[164] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 120.
[165] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture," Technologies of the Gendered Body" in *Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 40.
[166] Haraway, *Simians*, 177.

narrative meaning, however, the heptapod figure as cyborg is suggestive of the ways in which both the heptapods and special effects bodies as a whole can be considered as queerings of science, tech, and the body.

In the context of *Arrival*, the heptapods' sensuous and technological alliance with Louise enacts a transhuman intersubjectivity, enacting an affinitive relationality identified by Haraway as necessary balm to the damaging search for unitarian identity.[167] Moreover, this transhuman connection, while ostensibly between alien and human corporealities, also implies the (perhaps haunted) participation of animal bodies. In discussing their work on *Arrival* in separate interviews, VFX artists Philippe Théroux and Louis Morin both make frequent mention of various animal bodies which went into the rigging and animation of the heptapods. In describing the texture of the digital skin devised, Morin indicates that the team "based our texture on whales, a mixture of whales and octopus and like an elephant."[168] Théroux notes that in creating the gait of the skeletal rig, their final product became "a giraffe on spider legs, with the weight of an elephant," and that throughout the entire animating process, they continuously strove to create movement that was "organic, fluid, and slower," envisioning throughout the process "the movements of whales."[169] Much like analogue bodily special effects are often materially inclusive of animal viscera, gelatin, and

[167] Ibid., 155.
[168] Ian Failes, "Arrival Effects Supe on Holding Back on VFX," *vfxblog*, 15 November 2016. Accessed 17 August 2022, https://vfxblog.com/2016/11/15/arrival-vfx-supe-louis-morin-breaks-down-the-films-key-shots/.
[169] Adriene Hurst, "Talking the Talk: Hybride Meets the Aliens on Arrival," *Digital Media World*. Accessed 17 August 2022, https://www.digitalmediaworld.tv/in-depth/1260-talking-the-talk-hybride-meets-the-aliens-on-arrival.

other biological byproducts, digital special effects bodies are often ghostwritten by animal as well as human bodies. If, as Haraway suggests, that the utopic potential of the cyborg is to figure "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints," then the heptapods' earth animal ancestry and gift of unifying human nations can be read as an ecocritical political intervention.[170] More broadly, it's clear that their bodies enact a cyborg liminality between technics and transhuman flesh, and that special effects bodies as cyborgs can be understood as an alternative vision of scientific and technological development, in which science blends social reality with imagination and dreams, and biomateriality and lived embodied experience does not fall out of the supposedly rational, objective equation. Just as, Haraway argues, "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion," the division between technology and the stories we tell about them is a porous boundary, like the alien heptapod screen through which communication, biological matter, and technics crackle between bodies—"myth and tool mutually constitute each other."[171] As an imaginative cyborg vision, the special effects body constitutes the nightside of science and technology, imagining (or dreaming) an embodied, sensuous space which implicates the entire soma in a tactile embrace.

[170] Haraway, *Simians*, 156.
[171] Ibid., 155.

Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!
Dove-feathered raven, wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despisèd substance of divinest show,
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st.

- Romeo and Juliet, Act 3 Scene 2

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits shall ye know them.

-Mathew 7:15

3. The Wolfman: Passages, Transmissions, and Shifting Shapes

In 1981, two films were released within 4 months of each other which both sought to advance the werewolf transformation scene through the use of pioneering strategies of practical special effects. In both films, the clear centerpiece is a lengthy scene of a man's transformation into a werewolf, within which in both cases the apparent morphing of the body and of the face, without recourse to stop motion animation of still images, functions as something of a virtuosic money shot, on the promise of which both films were funded. While both centerpiece sequences utilize manipulable, movable layering of prostheses animated through internal mechanical apparatuses and offscreen puppeteering, *An American Werewolf in London* achieves the motion of extension and elongation of its character's body through the manipulation of expandable skeletal structures, while *The Howling* displays rhythmic expansions and contractions of the body and its parts through the use of inflatable subcutaneous bladders, suggesting radical potentiality and a roiling biological fecundity.

Within the massively transnational genre of horror, it is the case that for subgenres which rely for their affective response on the discomposure and deformation of the inner

working of the human (or humanoid) body, including the werewolf film, disgust and the imagination are entwined in an intimate embrace at multiple levels. This is most readily apparent in the genre's privileging of visceral impact as the preferred mode of spectatorial engagement, the imbrication of fan pleasure with disgust in the consumption of gore, and in the pervasive display of human organs, bones, and excreta, a literal visceralness which is cultivated into an aesthetics of the opened and manipulated bodily interior. I have written previously on the sense of loss within fan discourse, and the resulting devaluing of digital VFX work in body horror, attached to the conversion from the destruction of practical special effects bodies to digitally-produced scenes of gore, and the resulting common discourse which associates the former with materiality and visceral connection, and the latter with the immaterial and the logic of the morph.[172] In order to move toward a better understanding of the materiality and logics of movement and transformation within both practical special effects and digital VFX traditions, in this chapter I aim to closely examine the stylistic and technical logics of the practical special effects body, and the ways in which the scenes of its manipulation, morphing, dismembering, and deconstruction within the gore sequence enact a logic of the fold, building upon the previous chapter's examination of this logic as a way of rematerializing digital effects work. I will focus this chapter on perhaps the most iconic sequence of what has been commonly thought of as the additive, static logic of the practical effects sequence, the werewolf transformation scene. In so doing, I will unpack the ways in which this supposedly static nature of practical effects, associated with the lap dissolve

[172] Rachael Ball, "Of Love and Death: De/Constructing the Special Effects Body at the Limits of Taste," *Monstrum* 3.1, September 2020.

effect, has been held up against the fluidity of digital morph logics, which this chapter will continue to problematize. By thinking through two instances of this sequence, I move to examine the practical special effects body as Wunderkammer, and the role of viscerality and embodied affective flows which, I will argue, are critical to this unfolding and enfolding mode of expressive representation, as well as examining the role of liminality, thresholds, and zones of indeterminacy which flow from destabilizing logics of the fold and the culturally potent figure of the wolf man himself.

As in the previous chapter focused on the écorché, three main threads will continue to be interwoven throughout this exploration of special effects bodies: limiting narratives of seamlessness, immateriality, and disembodiment will factor just as heavily into the cultural potency of the wolfman figure himself as they do in the case of his onscreen effects avatars; the matter and meaning of animal bodies will in this chapter take center stage, as the wolfman figure's destabilizing power is brought to bear on cultural divisions and in the corporeal construction of the profilmic potentiality of the cinematic human/wolf hybrid; and the role of the enteric nervous system continues its critical importance, whether in its imbrication in the destabilizing logics of the wolfman's embodiment of human, meat, animal, and meal, the theoretical and practical hyperpresence of comestibles and rituals of the table in the werewolf film, or the central role of gut-based affects in werewolf legend, myth, and cinematic representations. With these guiding notions in mind, this chapter's exploration of the portals, orifices, and passageways central to both will assert the critical connection between the wolfman figure and the special effects body. In their shared obsession with the reversal of interior and exterior zones, metaphorical and literal puncturings of protective and

constitutive skins both biologically and socially produced, and the visceral revelation of the hidden material natures beneath, the wolfman and the special effects body onscreen share the destabilizing power of bodily occupation of the threshold, across which subversive and unsettling fold logics preside.

Within the uneasy corpus of the special effects body, the wolfman exists not just as a frequent subject of shapeshifting cinematic effects, or as the epicenter of significant flashpoint in the history of transformative practical effects work, but also as a potent avatar for thinking through the liminal, mutable melding of the special effects body itself. Moreover, just as the wolfman figure ontologically blurs the definition between human and animal, forest and city, man and meal, it points up the role of animal products as integral elements of the biotechnical assemblage of the special effects body, and of cinema itself. But the lycanthrope offers us more than simply a pale imitation of Haraway's cyborg, once more applied to the case study of cinematic special effects—in its relentless orality and close kinship to the enteric nervous system, the werewolf figure makes us alive to the sensuous transcorporeal entanglements which stretch between special effect body and viewer.

The wolfman has long been an object of rumination for Western culture, a ritually regurgitated site where tensions are negotiated and worked through, boundary lines drawn, taxonomies defined. It is just this sticking in culture's proverbial craw, the refusal to go down quietly, that marks the wolfman as an object of such abjection and ambivalent fascination, and which gives it its revelatory power. I will begin this chapter with a close exploration of the werewolf transformation "arms race" which took place in Hollywood backlots and Van

Nuys outbuildings in the summer of 1981, then mounting a close examination of the sequences which were produced out of this moment. In looking closely at these two sequences, and the larger formal and aesthetic structures of which they are a part, I move to consider the ways in which their liminal play with threshold zones between fundamental cultural and biological oppositions—between inside and outside, city and wilderness, culture and nature, body and meat—and with the mediating technologies which regiment and make safe the liminal passages between these zones, are elaborated through the folding, unfolding, and enveloping natures of the practical special effects body. From these zones of opposition, I will extend my focus to the related processes of consumption and digestion, and the carnivorous orality which is the hallmark of the werewolf figure, and the locus of his power to disgust and terrify. The bio-horror of the riotous digestive system, localized to the ravening mouth of the indiscriminately cannibalistic werewolf—himself a mélange of man/animal/human/meat—offers a potent avatar for the special effects body as animal product offered for consumption, and points up the fact that special effects bodies are always partial, contingent, and expressly material, whether they are produced practically or digitally.

I. Gods and Monsters: Los Angeles, 1981

Rick Baker had his heart set on *An American Werewolf in London*, and had spent years trading wild ideas with John Landis on the sets of other films, fantasizing about new effects techniques which could bring the wolfman to more dynamic life. While *Werewolf of London* (dir. Stuart Walker, 1935) had been the earliest Hollywood werewolf film, *The Wolf Man* (dir. George Waggner, 1941) had become the lycanthrope's true cinematic ur-text,

surviving far longer in cultural memory and inaugurating decades of werewolf films which hewed close to its example—the trope of the cursed bite, the focus on the ill-fated male protagonist's psychological anguish[173], and the centerpiece transformation sequences powered primarily by optical lap dissolves. In *The Wolf Man*, Lon Chaney Jr.'s cursed protagonist literally sleeps through his monstrous transformation, the actor pinned into place to minimize any minute movements as layers of makeup and hair were applied and then filmed in separate segments, then overlaid in a dissolve effect. While werewolf films in the intervening decades had not relied on a sleeping figure in mounting their climactic scenes of supernatural biotransformation, they had nearly all kept to the technology of lap dissolves in making this transformation visible to the audience.

John Landis, who had long nurtured *An American Werewolf in London* as his pet project, expressly wanted to break with this tradition, and colluded with Baker throughout the 70s on innovative transformative effects processes. Rather than a sleeping lycanthrope, Landis longed for an agonized, pained performance which included profilmic extension and transformative bodily movement, a profilmic morphing which did not fundamentally rely on judicious cutaways for offscreen layered addition of makeup and careful editing. Initially, his vision demanded that this transformation be achieved in a single take.

In his work on the mathematical tesseract as fundamental logic of the digital cinematic morph, Kevin Fisher contrasts the potential, protean "being-without-thingness" he

[173] Chantal Bourgoult du Courdray, *Curse of the Werewolf: Fantasy, Horror, and the Beast Within*, (London: IB Taurus, 2006), 79.

identifies in the digital morph against the static, photographic "thing-without-beingness" of the analogue protomorph exemplified by *The Wolf Man*'s transformative lap dissolve.[174] While Fisher ignores a multitude of alternative morphing effects throughout "analogue" cinema (of which *American Werewolf* is an important part) in setting up this somewhat disingenuous dichotomy, the lifeless flattening he identifies with the lap dissolve is instructive. Made even more striking by its location in the body of a sleeping actor, *The Wolf Man*'s dissolve foregrounds two-dimensional space, breaking "the illusion of three-dimensionally extruded life that characterizes cinema" such that "at the crucial moment of organic transformation, the thing (the wolfman, in this case) suddenly appears robbed of volume, inorganic, flat."[175] In yoking liveliness to potentiality without comprehensible form, and a lack of life with bodily determinacy, Fisher too easily inscribes the digital "after"-effect with vivifying power. In fact, it was this same apparent listlessness of *The Wolf Man*'s central transformation that Landis and Baker explicitly railed against, though their solution was not towards further postproduction work which Fisher links to the algorithmic control of the digital morph,[176] but rather to lean into the perceptual liveness and liveliness of the transformative morph unfolding in its entirety before the camera. As part of a broader movement in the late 1970s through the 1990s, *American Werewolf* and *The Howling* turned

[174] Kevin Fisher, "Tracing the Tesseract," *Meta Morphing and the Culture of Quick Change*, Sobchack, Vivian, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 22.
[175] Fisher, "Tracing the Tesseract," 30.
[176] Of course, this was related at least partially to the expediency of accessing such effects in 1981 – Baker's *Metamorphosis* relates that Landis had spoken to early computer experts in the 1970s, and was told to "wait 10 years" before digital effects would be capable of enough processing power. J. W. Rinzler and Rick Baker. *Rick Baker: Metamorphosis*. (Petaluma, California: Cameron Company, 2020).

toward innovative effects processes which stressed the profilmic, rather than the seamless optical aesthetic increasingly popularized by Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) and its adherents, which as Lisa Purse argues elevated "perceptual realism" rather than photorealism as their metric of success. That is, the quality of a live body existing—twitching, breathing, trembling, blinking—"sustained in spite of its fantastical nature," before the camera and before the eyes of the viewer was stressed above replicating the "photographed-ness" of a composited frame.[177] It was to these imaginative ends that Landis and Baker strove, and the processes developed across *American Werewolf* and *The Howling* as a result that cemented this movement, and gave it legs beyond the genres of horror and sci-fi.

While Landis and Baker had spent years developing these ideas—furthering the use of subcutaneous bladders developed by Baker's mentor Dick Smith, crafting a dynamic series of "Change-o-heads" fitted with animatronics allowing them to stretch and move—Landis had been repeatedly unsuccessful in securing funding for the project. With these innovative werewolf effects burning a hole in his pocket, Baker met with Joe Dante in 1979 and was offered the role of special effects supervisor on the nascent *The Howling*. Figuring "a 'wolf' in the hand was better than none," he accepted—yet upon hearing he'd been scooped, Landis immediately put *American Werewolf* into production.[178] For a period, Baker attempted to work on both films, delivering (ultimately unused) sculpts and concept art for *The Howling* before recusing himself completely, and suggesting his teenage protégé Rob Bottin for the job. As both films had explicitly been funded on the promised money-shot of

[177] Lisa Purse, *Editing and Special/Visual Effects* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).
[178] Rinzler and Baker, *Metamorphosis*.

an innovative, fully profilmic transformation sequence, it seems that some level of paranoia and possessiveness began to foment between Baker and Bottin. It was due to a fear of an unacceptable similarity in processes between the two transformation sequences that Baker claims to have made the decision to leave *The Howling*, and began to fear he had been "cutting his own throat" by sharing ideas with Bottin, including the "change-o-heads" and the use of Dick Smith's skinned-over bladders to figure morphing effects on the body.[179] Moving ahead with *American Werewolf*, he abandoned the now-troublesome bladders completely, continuing to develop the change-o-heads into a series of interchangeable body prosthetics, the skeletal forms of which contained moveable animatronic components. Bottin, for his part, went all in on the bladder concept.

In 1981, both films were released within 4 months of each other. The first was Dante's *The Howling*, which focuses on television news anchor Karen White (Dee Wallace), who after a traumatic encounter with a serial killer in a coin-operated LA porno booth suffers amnesia and recurrent nightmares, and is advised by her doctor (Patrick Macnee) to spend a few weeks relaxing at his countryside "colony," a mental health retreat. Once there, her colleagues discover that the killer Eddie Quist (Robert Picardo), ostensibly killed during Karen's police rescue, has disappeared from the morgue, eventually leading them to his home at the colony. Karen discovers that the entire colony are secretly werewolves, and escapes with one of her fellow reporters after receiving a cursed bite herself. Determined to expose their existence, she goes on the air upon returning to LA, transforms into a wolf on

[179] Rinzler and Baker, *Metamorphosis*; Jeff Gelb, "Rick Baker and *An American Werewolf in London*," *Fangoria* 14 (1981), 11-13.

live television, and is summarily shot by her colleague with a silver bullet. The film then ends after we see one of the colony members picking up an unsuspecting trucker in a dive bar, pausing to hungrily order a rare hamburger.

The second to be released was John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London*. While *The Howling* received a flurry of attention, particularly in fan circles, for its innovative transformation effects, the response would be far greater and broader for *American Werewolf*, and Baker would be awarded the inaugural Academy Award for Best Makeup and Hairstyling for his work on the film the following year. Briefly, the narrative concerns two backpackers in England who are mauled on the moors by a werewolf—David (David Naughton) survives, while his friend Jack (Griffin Dunne) is killed. As David convalesces in a London hospital and begins to transform nightly into a wolf himself, he receives increasingly urgent visitations from a progressively rotting Jack, later joined by David's victims, who urge him to kill himself and release them all from the curse. David transforms for a final time and rampages through Piccadilly Circus, where he is ultimately gunned down by the police.

American Werewolf partakes in the classic narrative of the werewolf film since *The Wolf Man* (and partially crafted by *Werewolf of London*)—the psychological struggle of the male victim, cursed with lycanthropy early in the film, is the source of the lion's share of the drama, horror, and ultimate resolution of the narrative.[180] *The Howling* is somewhat different in its structure—Karen is our clear protagonist, yet she does not become a werewolf

[180] Du courdray, *Curse of the Werewolf*, 5.

herself—or even receive the cursed bite—until the final 20 minutes of the film. Her husband becomes a proxy for this mysterious and fraught drawn-out transformation, though this happens largely as a subplot in the second half of *The Howling*'s running time. It instead unfolds as something of a folk horror film, in which the urban outsider is accepted into a rural commune's society for a time, slowly discovers with growing suspicion that the strange inhabitants are both evil, dangerous, and unforgivably, fundamentally different from herself and society at large. Substitute lycanthropy for pagan worship and human sacrifice, and the good doctor's woodland commune makes a neat corollary to *The Wicker Man*'s (1973, dir. Robin Hardy, UK) Summerisle. And yet, the backwoods commune in the hills somewhere outside Los Angeles is also something of a corporate, New Age health retreat, whose members freely leave to wreak havoc on the nearby metropole, as Eddie Quist's prolific West Hollywood serial killings suggest. Unlike the heart of darkness shepherded by the separatist denizens of Summerisle, the threat contained within the folk-horrific Eden of *The Howling* has legs.

II. Thresholds

Before unpacking the centerpiece transformation sequences in *The Howling* and *American Werewolf*, it's necessary to explore this threatening mobility of the lycanthrope further. Unlike the human pagans of Summerisle, it is this being torn between two bodies that is paradoxically disembodied, representing a violent and infectious horror which moves freely beyond the boundaries of corporeal entanglements, and further disregards larger

cultural divides. Importantly, it is this disembodied flight enabled by a paradoxical possession of 2 or more corporeal forms that marks the sublime and abject morph, strongly identified with digitally-produced special effects bodies.

As I've noted in previous chapters, the morph has been the locus of utopian, cyberpunk, and posthuman exuberance centered around discourses of immateriality and weightless freedom from embodiment, as well as the site of ongoing anxieties and ambivalence towards the unmooring and unhinging of digital embodiment. Despite its close association with early digital effects, the logics and desire for the morph have long been bound up in special effects work and in cinema more broadly, as Fisher and others have argued.[181] While he suggests that the digital morph presents the truest incarnation of the tesseract, Fisher locates cinema's illusionistic properties since its inception as a realization of the tesseract's spectacular "being-without-thingness": "the operationalization of the tesseract within the apparatus created plastic possibilities for the medium that not only recapitulated the feats of magicians and the parlor tricks of pseudospiritualists but also suggested possibilities of transformation hitherto unseen in other media."[182] As a non-Euclidian meta-object which understands 3D space as enmeshed and bound up with an unseen 4th dimension, the tesseract comes out of Georg Bernard Riemann's suggestion that our physical and temporal reality is more akin to a crumpled sheet of paper than the absolute uniformity of Euclidean geometry or Newtonian physics. It was upon this foundation, and the attempts to visualize 4th dimensional space undertaken by Charles Howard Hinton, that the cubist

[181] Fisher, "Tracing the Tesseract."
[182] Ibid., 110.

movement sprang, and by which Edward Muybridge, a figure intimately intertwined with the birth of cinema itself, was partially inspired.[183]

Fisher argues that while cinematic illusion depends upon the logic of the tesseract, the digital morph is its purest, most paradoxical expression: the moment in which, morphing from source to target image, there is visualized at the midpoint a figure which is "minimally recognizable" as either—it is at this moment that "the morph lapses from the order of known things…the paradoxical presence of *being-without-thing-ness* blinks at us like some denuded metasubstance stripped of the overdetermined trappings of symbolic designation and fixity."[184] Holding this protean vision up against *The Wolf Man*'s transformative lap dissolve, it's easy to see why Fisher argues that analogue transformation inevitably "collapses" into the two-dimensional photographic space of "thing-ness-without-being," never figuring the plastic metasubstance of the morph, relying upon stillness and minimization of difference and movement between frames in achieving its superimposition trick. Yet this ignores completely the flashpoint of the 80s practical special effect boom, in which animatronics, prosthetics, puppetry, make-up, and other processes emphasized this protean metasubstance that is the midpoint of transformation from source to target body, to say nothing of the variety of other effects techniques developed in the intervening years between *The Wolf Man* and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. One would struggle to find a better figuring of this paradoxical presence than in *The Thing* (dir. John Carpenter, US, 1981), a practically-produced assemblage of alien biological material, completely unmoored from our

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., 120, emphasis original.

taxonomies of race, gender, and species, also developed by Rob Bottin. The tantalizingly indeterminacy of its title is drawn through the protean figure of *The Thing*'s central antagonist, a unknown (and ultimately, unknowable) predatory shapeshifter, who explicitly shifts form through bodily addition—primarily of the human scientists and their dogs, an emphatically organic process of absorption which painfully kills its victims—and in moments of stress reveals itself to be a biohorrific mélange of all of these stolen terrestrial bodies, as well as of inscrutable organs and viscera, perhaps of its original alien nature, perhaps of other alien bodies than its own that it has previously absorbed into itself, or perhaps these organic insides only appear alien by virtue of their process of becoming, as unfinished works revealed before they were ready to fool the eye.

Both *The Howling* and *American Werewolf* are an important part of this moment, and their visual figuring of being-ness that "lapses from the order of known things" is a significant basis of our discussion. However, the figure of the lycanthrope's special kinship to the radically unmoored and out of place corporeality of the morphing body suggests a further connection between the wolfman and special effects and cinema itself. In its fundamental resistance to and perversion of fixity, boundedness, and boundaries, the wolfman has long prowled at the liminal edge of human politics and culture, provoking both desire and fear in the humans that encounter and imagine them. As a threshold figure which both troubles and traverses cultural divisions and definitions, while also serving to strengthen them through their very existence as a limit case, the wolfman is a semiotically rich and overdetermined figure, which allows us to consider in all their fullness the material, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of special effects bodies broadly conceived.

Giorgio Agamben's work on the figure of the exile provides a useful ground from which to approach the wolfman as cultural figure. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* Agamben relentlessly teases out a series of apparent contradictions and elusive meanings within the logic and structure of sovereignty, and by extension Western politics. His provocative concept of bare life, as embodied in the book's "protagonist," the figure of the homo sacer, provides for Agamben the key with which to approach the multilayered aporias and paradoxes of the sovereign power and the state of exception.[185] This liminal figure, at once excluded from and included under sovereign power, provides an endlessly potent starting point from which Agamben sketches a series of generative connections—to the doubled life of the sovereign himself, here facilitated by the sculpted double of the *funus imaginarium,* to the surviving devotee who must sacrifice this promised life in the form of a colossus in order to remain among the living, and later to the liminal 'wolf man' of Germanic legal tradition who is torn between the forest and the city. It is this liminal existence that Agamben argues must "remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal...is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city" (105). The wolf man straddles the boundary between man and animal, but also inside and outside, in his paradoxical state of exception from and life directly under the rule of the sovereign, as well as the divisions between home and city, as his ability in the legends Agamben describes to return in some sense to his home and family, but never to fully return to the city. As described in these legends, the wolf man figure is also regimented and

[185] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

bounded by multiple rituals and techniques (to borrow Bernhard Siegert's terminology), which are created to attempt to make safe the threat implied by this marginal threshold figure, but also serve to constitute the figure at the same time.

The majority of these regimenting technologies Agamben describes fall under the categories of the door and of the skin. In the first case, the transformation of the werewolf back into human form necessitates the mediating technology of a door, specifically the doorway into his home:

> "When they knock on the door the first time, the wife must not answer. If she did, she would see her husband still entirely as a wolf, and he would eat her and then run away into the forest forever. When they knock on the door the second time, the woman must still not answer: she would see him with a man's body and a wolf's head. Only when they knock on the door the third time can the door be opened: for only then are they completely transformed, only then has the wolf completely disappeared and has the man of before reappeared."[186]

Here, the transformation scene's occurrence across the threshold of a doorway makes literal the wolf man's underpinning logics of enfoldings and unfolding passages across liminal zones, while also overwhelmingly threatening the wife (2 out of 3 of the door's potential openings end either in horrific sights or her bodily devouring at the hands of her lover) at the same time that the door's presence makes safe this otherwise indeterminate zone of becoming for both wolf and wife. In some sense as well, the wife's fearful listening across the threshold to the temporally bounded shapeshifting of her husband on the other side suggests a sympathy with the viewer of the werewolf transformation sequence, who senses across a different sort of architectural opening the morphing of a spectacular body, which is

[186] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 108.

made safe by its ritually bounded and temporally delimited construction—in this tableau, the door erects another kind of architectural medium, that of the frame.

Agamben's examination of werewolf legend also leaves us with the tale of Bisclavret, whose transformation is regimented not by the fold of the door but the folds of his clothes, a societal skin of a certain kind, which he must remove and conceal in order to assume the skin of a wolf, and the discovery of which leaves him unable to cross the threshold back into the land of the human and the hearth of home.[187] Sabine Baring-Gould's 1865 compendium of werewolf lore and lycanthropic criminal prosecutions likewise records several tales in which both actual epidermis and layers of clothing which serve as regimenting cultural techniques around the passage between wolf and man. He notes that across Europe, belts or girdles were often seen as a diabolic mechanism for effecting a lycanthrope's transformation—in Denmark, such belts were reportedly "made of human skin, and to be three finger-breadths wide"—while in numerous other tales, cloaks or mantles of wolfskin are used by the lycanthrope, often after being gifted to them by the devil himself, to effect this change.[188] These descriptions populate both his recounting of folk tales and legends, as well as were made matters of official record in werewolf criminal trials. For example, the records of the 17th c. trial of a teenaged Jean Granier in France, accused and ultimately convicted of rampaging through the countryside in the shape of a wolf and murdering several dogs and young girls for his own consumption, record his testimony that he received a wolfskin cape

[187] Ibid., 107.
[188] Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition*, (1865).

from “the Lord of the Forest.” He was thus obliged to hide his clothes, also applying a mysterious salve from his diabolic benefactor, before donning the cape and transforming into a bloodthirsty wolf.[189] These same details are recorded in several other of the French criminal trials of the period,[190] and bear a great resemblance to the confessions extracted in witchcraft prosecutions more broadly. The nocturnal sabbath, occulted far from god-fearing eyes in the forest, at which confessed witches fraternized with the devil, and received supernatural powers as gifts in return for pledging their service are all common motifs, and likely informed more by the expectations of their accusers than by the confessor’s actual recollection. However, the connection of skins and garments to lycanthropy predates and extends farther than this primal scene of the medieval witchcraft trial.

Much like Marie de France’s “Bisclavret,” Baring Gould reports numerous tales from throughout Europe in which the civilizing skin of clothing is an important hinge between humanity and the werewolf. There are overwhelming instances of reference to clothing being removed and hidden in order to begin a lycanthropic transformation, as well as the necessity of donning these clothes again to reenter human society. Even further, there are some cases in which clothing itself is more explicitly used to repulse or defend against the threat of the werewolf. A Slovakian tale describes a predatory father, who having already devoured eight of his nine daughters as a werewolf, lays in wait in the forest for the youngest child. She fends him off by throwing her garments behind her as she runs, first her apron, her gown, her

[189] Baring Gould, *Book of Werewolves*
[190] Ibid.

petticoat, and then her shift, "and at last runs much in the condition in which he was born."[191] Each cast-behind garment, apparently, her wolf-father is obliged to catch and shred with his teeth before he can continue the pursuit. This delay enables her to hide a haystack until she can be rescued. A similar tale from Denmark involves a lycanthropic werewolf who warns his wife to defend herself with only her apron should a wolf attack her. This defense not only works at repelling him, but her recognition of his lycanthropy when he returns to her in human form with a piece of apron in his teeth breaks the curse and returns him to human society.[192]

The skin of the wolfman is a multilayered and mercurial thing indeed, and is often more than metaphorically bound up with the societal skin of human clothing—in the many belts, pelts, and even gloves of both human and wolf skin which crop up in werewolf lore.[193] As Baring-Gould notes, there are many strains of werewolf legend which purport the afflicted's skin to be turned inside-out, such that the animalistic fur is always present on the body, even in one's human form. It is merely hidden—the hair grows inward, rather than out. The ancient term *versipellis*, which "occurs as a name of reproach in Petronius, Lucilius, and Plautus" speaks to the long history of this concept.[194] Yet there appears to be a matryoshka's worth of layerings and enfoldings implicated by this notion. On the one hand, many tales are recorded in which townsfolk seek to flay or pierce the skin of a suspected werewolf, to see if

[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., 48.
[193] For example, Baring Gould relates a tale in ancient Norway in which a slap with a wolf-skin glove identifies a werewolf, another in which a witch lays a belt made of human skin on a pair of newlyweds' threshold, thereby cursing them with lycanthropy, and then covering them with animal skins with the hair turned outward to transform them back. Baring Gould, *Book of Werewolves.*
[194] Ibid.

bushy fur grows inward underneath the concealing veil of human skin.[195] On the other, a tale from Baring-Gould relates the account of a reverend who encounters the strange sight of two wolves seated round a fire—they speak to him in human voices, and say that they are cursed to spend seven years in wolves' forms before they may return home as humans. The reverend is unconvinced until the female beast "peel[s] off her wolf-skin from her head to her navel**,** exhibiting the features of an aged woman."[196] One reversed skin covers another in one form, the reverse in the other, and in both cases a true transformation seems to be less at hand than a gradual denuding, which seemingly reveals the true nature. Yet the confusion over which is the true core, and which "nature" is at its hybrid heart, speaks to the liminality central to the wolfman figure.

Interestingly, the skin and the garment are both implicated in broader historical projects of sanitizing and making acceptable the lycanthrope—Baring-Gould and later authors subscribe to the "disease of language" theory, first applied by Max Muller to Hindu mythology. By this view, mythologies crop up around misunderstandings and misrecognitions of words over time—Baring-Gould suggests that it is the word *hamr*, "a skin or habit," and confusion around the berserkers of Scandinavia which produced legends of actual material transformation into wolves and back again. Instead, it was the more likely donning of animal skins and the resulting rage in battle on the part of these iconic warriors that gave rise to the language of werewolves, alongside early Anglo Saxon laws which describe the outlaw as a Warg. This line of thinking works to collapse the wolfman figure

[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 28.

into a fundamental misapprehension of human use of animal skins. In Baring-Gould's werewolf compendium, it works alongside another explanatory tactic—that of pathologizing as psychologically disturbed those who have claimed to be werewolves, and thereby bringing the light of science and reason to the dark forest of superstition and myth. And yet, as others have noted, the floridly excessive nature of Baring-Gould's book, and the care and delight with which he chases down and relates the sordid details of the tales he shepherds within, seem in clear opposition to this totalizing, sanitizing feint.[197]

In his work on the senses Michel Serres identifies the skin, in its folding over of the bodily exterior onto itself, as the seat of cognition, and even of the soul. Asserting that the mobius strip-like non-orientable object of the Klein bottle models identity, he holds up the skin and its many folding and unfolding layers as constitutive of the self, and an organ through which memory and identity is inscribed.[198] Like the tesseract, the Klein bottle is drawn through mathematics, specifically topology, and presents an object that is all surface, without boundary or end, where exterior and interior zones cannot be distinguished from each other. And, unlike the mobius strip, Klein bottles offer a similarly non-Euclidian companion to the tesseract. If dualism can only "reveal a ghost facing a skeleton," Serres' topological model of enfolding, liquid, labyrinthine skin/touch feedbacks offers a much more dynamic model. Skin in this "mingled body" offer radical potentiality to touch and shape the bodily natures of ourselves and of those around us—speaking of this autonomic caress, Serres writes "we caress each other along our contour lines, we leave each other with various

[197] Du courdray, *The Curse of the Werewolf*; Baring Gould, *Book of Werewolves.*
[198] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 22.

knots, in embraces that have changed shape" (28). While the veil is a foundational metaphor for this mingled body, Serres insists that the body is not simply a sheath for a completely separate self, but rather than the enfolding layers of skin are themselves the self. Tantalizingly, however, he later suggests the human body is a nestled series of black boxes, similar to the prison as well as the house, down to the internestled series of pocket-like textile layers of the bed, within which we tuck ourselves. Here again the veil and the skin Serres describes the bed as box, then the bed linens, then the bed-clothes, accounting for the multitude of "skins until we reach our real skin" (148). This return to the veil and the skin is apt, because the metaphor of the house as nested box is extended to the body, a sensorium and "little portable house," a "fragile vessel" which softens the hard environment in which we find ourselves into a protected, sovereign space. The soul, the "white doll" within a multitude of nested black boxes, is for Serres perpetually in flight, and always willing to shed a layer of skin and run, like Harlequin shedding a costume, until it sheds its final possible skin, thus imagining death as a sort of flaying (and thereby freeing) of the soul. But rather than shearing off her outer false layer of animal fur to reveal the true human woman beneath, Serres' model would have us recognize that Baring-Gould's lycanthropic old woman simply peeled off one layer of many which constitutes her paradoxical, multi-faceted as well as multi-layered, corporeality. It's in the donning as much as removal, and in the interfolding, pleating, wrinkling together of skins, that the lycanthrope is constituted, and through which she challenges dualistic models of the body and the self.

As Katie L. Walter notes, Serres' poetic imagery of skin as fundamentally enfolded, enmeshed, and to some degree mutually constitutive of the soul is an apt metaphor for

widespread views of the body in Medieval Europe,[199] the same time in which werewolf lore was most keenly developed. This view of the soul as "entelechy of the body"- that which actualizes and materializes the previously potential—produces the skin as a readable text, as legible for signs of moral failure as it is for the deduction of medical diagnoses from visible epidermal symptoms on its surface. Moreover, this imbrication of body and soul literalized in "the figurations and disfigurations of the skin" makes possible meaning-making and discourse.[200] In her exploration of French and Latin medieval werewolf texts, Susan Small unites an understanding of the continuity of skin and garment in the wolfman's metamorphosis with an understanding of the wolfman as itself a legible text, written on the surface of its skin. The very reversibility of the shapeshifter, as well as the common Medieval notion that werewolves are simply cloaked in a reversed animal skin, in which the hair grows inward, directly connects the figure to the production of parchment and vellum from animal skins which were described even when finished as having a "flesh side" and a "hair side": recto and verso.[201] These terms, she notes, are couched in the noun *versipellis*—werewolf—and constitute the wolfman as revolving between writable parchment on one surface, and "darker, hairy underbelly" on its reverse.[202] Small articulates a difference in the Medieval werewolf literature she examines between narratives of overlay and narratives of fusion—the latter including the necessity of nakedness as a precursor to the human

[199] Katie L. Walter, Introduction to *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture,* Katie L. Walter, ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.
[200] Walter, "Introduction," 4.
[201] Susan Small, "The Medieval Werewolf Model of Reading Skin," *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture,* Katie L. Walter, ed., 83.
[202] Small, "Werewolf Model," 83.

lycanthrope's shapeshifting. While overlay narratives leave open the possibility that the donning of animal skin creates a more psychological rather than material transformation for the werewolf, fusion narratives insist on a physical "metamorphic process by means of which the threshold between human and animal skin is breached and overturned."[203] Such a process is mediated by the meaning-and-subject-making power of both skin and clothing, and relies upon a destabilizing breach in them as containers for Man and Wolf. It is significant that the destabilizing, liminal power of the werewolf figure is located not only in the interplay of multiple surfaces, inside and outside, recto and verso, but also in the breaching of these surfaces—the doorway, the wound, the fold. Small hints at this by closing her article not with her primary metaphors of skin as parchment or Freud's mystic writing pad, but rather with apertures violently bored into the skin: the flaying of Marsyas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a werewolf either "sewn into" a skin or "slashed out of it," and the resulting textual "strips of skin, hair, and fiber that bind him to himself."[204] This importance not only of the layered skins and membranes in constituting the werewolf and his passages between form and meaning, but also of the puncturing, disfiguration, or removal of these bodily layers is present throughout werewolf tales and histories beyond the narratives Small describes: Baring-Gould records numerous tales and testimonies in which a severed limb or grievous wound speaks the lie of a disguised werewolf's identity,[205] and as we shall see, this notion remains strong in the narrative and aesthetic turns of werewolf film cycle of the 1980s. More

[203] Ibid., 88.
[204] Ibid., 93.
[205]Baring Gould., "Book of Werewolves."

broadly, this violence worked upon the skin, particularly in the creation of apertures, passageways, and portals in its multi-layered surfaces, even further unites the werewolf figure with its liminal progeny, the special effects body broadly conceived. For in its obsession with reversal of inner and outer zones, profaning punctures in the protective and constitutive seal offered by biological and social sheathes and wrappings, and above all the making visible, visceral, and vulnerable to the viewer the body's innermost zones, the special effects body constructs itself as subversive threshold across which unsettling and reversing folding (and enfolding) logics preside.

Skins as a folding medium and transformative technology are clear narrative and visual preoccupations across the werewolf film cycle of the 1980s, and figure significantly in the special effect technologies selected to figure their centerpiece transformation sequences. This is clear in the aforementioned dueling werewolf effects films *The Howling* and *American Werewolf*, but also in the unorthodox *The Company of Wolves* (dir. Neil Jordan, UK, 1984) which breaks in many ways with the dominant cinematic topos established by the Universal wolfman cycle, and perhaps most clearly foregrounds textual skins of all kinds.

In the centerpiece transformation sequences of both *The Howling* and *American Werewolf*, multiple layers of makeup appliances, latex skins and faces, prosthetic limbs, organs, and even entire bodies are grafted onto the performer body to elaborate a gradual scene of a morph from a humanoid form to that of a hybridized, giant wolfman. Both Dante and Landis's expressed desire for the transformation money shot was to prioritize new logics and techniques in representing a cinematic monstrous morph—Dante explicitly describes planning to break with previous cinematic reliance on lap dissolves and stop motion

animation, which could approximate transformative motions while stopping short of a liquid morph presented within a single take.[206] It is in these transformation scenes that the logics of folding, unfolding, and enfolding are clearly articulated, as multiple different object materialities are folded together and enmeshed—in the grafting of biological structures and membranes sculpted from latex, plasticized rubber, synthetic fibers, and clay press skeletal forms, blood and viscera created from animal entrails, gelatin, and corn syrup, together with human skin, sweat, and tears—in which the performer's appendages must be folded and bound down to allow for the attachment of prosthetic limbs, and wide swaths of the body become enfolded and enveloped by applications of delusory skins, exposed organs, and even simulated recessions into the body itself. The logic of the fold in these scenes is also a folding into themselves of exterior and interior surfaces, as the exterior edge of human skin becomes interior, for example, and the expelled breath of a special effects crew enacts a physical distension beneath the skin of the special effects body, enacting a collapsing of divisions between inside and outside and inaugurating a playful engagement with and transgression of liminal zones and boundaries.

In both cases, special effects designers Bottin and Baker turned to skeletal mechanical structures which could be skinned over both by latex approximations of the performers' dermis, and be prosthetically grafted onto the body of the performer itself. These mechanical structures stopped short of animatronic autonomous motion, requiring not only the bodily participation of the actor, but the physical labor of entire special effects crews to manipulate.

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[206] "Unleashing the Beast: The Making of *The Howling*." *The Howling*, collector's ed. DVD. Dir. Joe Dante. MGM, 2004.

For *The Howling's* pivotal scene of serial killer Eddie Quist's assumption of his werewolf form, Bottin designed a series of bladders (ultimately employing dozens of condoms and a large hot water bottle) to be layered around the performer's body and sculpted prosthetic forms, and then covered over by latex skin. These were connected by a series of wires and tubes to the mouths of the offscreen production assistants, who would rapidly inhale and exhale to inflate and deflate these subcutaneous balloon shapes, stretching Quist's skin and limbs to create the disquieting effect of a body wracked by bubbling, festering, suppurating flux, the shapeshifting potentiality of which could extend in any direction. This roiling potentiality which stretched the body's shape within single takes was supplemented with the swapping in and out, masked by cutaways, of multiple prosthetic molded heads and limbs, which depicted Quist in a gradual progression of transformation into the bipedal werewolf. Actor Robert Picardo recalls discovering only at the moment of filming this pivotal scene that the huffing and puffing crew's forcible inflation of the largest bladder, a commercial hot water bottle, strapped against the skin across the majority of his throat would have the unintended aftereffect of cutting off his own air supply. Within the large biotechnical assemblage body that represents the transforming wolfman Quist, the lungs of many prosthetically enmesh and jockey for position, pushing against and distending both the actor's own skin, the cold surfaces of skeletal steel rods, the rubber skins of the various bladders foraged from household materials, and the layers of synthetic dermis which blanket and enclose all of these previous surfaces. As a curious cinematic mishmash of painfully extracted breath and sweat, produced as an artisanal handmade latex dermis captured in the manner of a death cast and hand-laid animal hair together with repurposed found objects,

Eddie Quist, Wolfman is an uncanny creature indeed. Further, this transformation is triggered not by a reference to a cursed bite or a full moon, but rather to a puncturing of Quist's apparently human skin. Quist's first (largely offscreen) transformation is seemingly triggered by his being shot in the face by Karen's colleague, and his subsequent spectacular onscreen transformation is preceded by having corrosive acid thrown onto his face by Karen. It is the puncturing or profaning of the sheaths of his multilayered and multi-sided skin that precedes his "turning" of skin, the revelation of which leads to the turning of skin (and turning of coats, metaphorically speaking) of the entire colony, as Karen is betrayed and attacked by her trusted psychiatrist and her husband as part of the murderous werewolf pack.

While *American Werewolf* does not literally trigger either the mysterious original werewolf of the moors or David's transformation with a piercing of the skin, its destruction factors in to a larger preoccupation with epidermis as text and textile, critically implicated in the liminal potentiality of the werewolf figure. As with *The Howling*, this preoccupation extends to the logics of its centerpiece transformation sequence. For the scene in which David first transforms into a massive four-legged beast in *American Werewolf*, Baker constructed a different set of skeletal technics than Bottin, pressing long syringes into service underneath the latex skins of the makeup appliances and prosthetic members attached to the actor's body, which through concealed mechanics allowed offscreen assistants to press the plungers of the syringes down, extending the wire forms to create a slow stretching and elongation effect. Through these devices David's body and face are displayed extending into

bizarre shapes within single takes, and again a progressive series of "change-o-heads,"[207] limbs, and hair and skin textures are grafted onto the human body to link together this stretching motion into the full elaboration of a werewolf morph. While Baker's syringe devices are different than the bladders employed by Bottin, both rely upon pneumatic devices powered by offscreen collaborative bodies, which are entangled with (and enfolded within) layers of human and animal skin, both actual and constructed. Baker's sequence also includes, like Bottin's, an amalgamation of (multiple) bodily excretions and exhalations, primarily Naughton's sweat, tears, and anguished cries and pleas.[208] Here we can see the constitutive and potential power of the werewolf's "strips of skin, hair, and fiber that bind him to himself." Moreover, Baker's effects regime for *American Werewolf*'s transformation sequence enacts an even more accelerated dismembering, doubling, and enfolding logic than did even *The Howling*: having shown his hands, feet, and face distending into a more canine hybrid shape in closeup, the final portion of the *American Werewolf* transformation required actor David Naughton to crouch into a small recession in the floor with only his head exposed, which was then attached to a massively stretched, pre-sculpted full body prosthetic which continued to be puppeted offscreen.[209] Significantly, this show-stopping sequence did not entirely abandon the previous standby of transformation through lap dissolve. Baker first hand-laid thick tufts of animal hair onto Naughton's sheath of latex "skin," then removed

[207] "The Making of *An American Werewolf in London*," *An American Werewolf in London*, collector's ed. DVD. Dir. John Landis. Universal Studios, 2001.
[208] Unlike the transformations undergone by *The Howling*'s werewolves, and against popular cinematic convention until this point, *American Werewolf* stresses the transformation as an agonizingly painful process. We hear bones snap and sickeningly crackle into new formations, watch wolf claws painfully erupt through human nail beds, as David screams and cries throughout.
[209] "The Making of *An American Werewolf in London*."

some thickness at a time. Reversing the footage of this process in close-up presented them with an easy lap dissolve which figured the sudden growth of wolf fur on David's previously bare skin.

While it does not initiate this transformation, the puncturing of skin is foregrounded throughout *American Werewolf*: David's friend Jack first appears to him in exactly the state in which he died, with flesh torn from his throat and face, providing a large point of view into his bloodied musculature and skeletal structure. As David's minimal lacerations from the attack progressively are shown to heal over the course of the film, leaving a perfect naked skin on which the camera dwells throughout, Jack's wounds fester and rot as his body decomposes. The increased corruption of his body coincides with the increasing urgency of his visitations to David, until in his final appearance in a Piccadilly Circus porno theater he is little more than a desiccated skeleton loosely sheathed in a few scraps of leathery skin. This advancement of decomposition is figured in an increased recession of his outer layers of skin and musculature, and the greater revelation of his skeleton—however, the necessities of practical makeup and prosthetic effects required an addition of layers to simulate their removal. This paradoxical additive flaying can only go so far with a human actor, so by the third visitation Jack is portrayed not by Griffin Dunne but by an animatronic figure. Dunne's keen resentment of this replacement is described across several making-of featurettes and in Baker's memoirs, as is the note that he was somewhat mollified by being allowed to puppet the apparatus himself. Certainly, tales of this fear of human actors being "replaced" by effects bodies stretch back to the days of Lon Chaney and were accelerated by the

introduction and proliferation of digital effects, as Lisa Bode has sensitively examined.[210] But Dunne's discomfort at his bodily removal from the biotechnical assemblage that is Jack's special effects body, rather than continuing to be sewed up in enveloping layers of latex, corn syrup, and make up, suggest an investment in the futuristic promise of accelerating layered becoming represented by *American Werewolf*'s revolutionary transformation sequence, which relies on having some biological skin in the game for its perceptual reality and visceral force.[211]

This insistence on the liveness of bared flesh extends elsewhere in *American Werewolf*, perhaps most noticeably in its flamboyant motif of eroticized human bodies onscreen. The camera dwells on the screen as David a salacious television ad for "The Naked Truth About Naughty Nina," and the climax of the film occurs in "Eros Cinema," a porn-centered grindhouse theater papered in advertisements for *See You Next Wednesday*.[212] Inside the theater, we see several short scenes of the film which feature naked lovers in flagrante, Jack and David share a joke about its stilted dialogue, and a distracting soundtrack of orgasmic moans is overlaid over the entire scene, even as David is soberingly confronted not

[210] Lisa Bode, "Fleshing it Out." *Special Effects*. North, Dan, Bob Rehak and Michael S. Duffy, eds. (London: British Film Institute, 2015).
[211] For what it's worth, Jack's puppeted final appearance does strike me as remarkably stilted and static when compared to the effects bodies on display in the remainder of the film. The Jack figure is capable seemingly of blinking and jaw movement alone, and its arms are waved about for emphasis as we hear Dunne's voice performing Jack's dialogue. This scene seems to flout the metric of perceptual realism Purse identifies in *American Werewolf*'s effects at large, where breathing, twitching, pulsing liveness, even of a supernatural or monstrous body, is privileged.
[212] A Landis in-joke, this fictional film pops up in the mise-en-scene of the majority of his films, as a wide variety of genres and with different stars attached. Here, it is unquestionably a British porn film, though in *Thriller* it appears to be the werewolf film that Michael Jackson and his date are watching in the theater.

only with a skeletal Jack but his own recent victims who exhort him to kill himself before he can transform again. These increasingly hysterical moans continue on the soundtrack as David unwillingly transforms and kills several patrons, and as their mutilated bodies are later discovered in the theater by police. This repeated suturing in of erotica could be understood simply as part of *American Werewolf*'s larger commitment to puncturing horror with comedic relief, as when David's sudden onset of a painful transformation is humorously similar to an extremely vocal achieving of climax in the middle of the populated porno theater, and leads a jaded theater employee to wearily attempt to kick him out. However, the casting of the werewolf transformation sequence as a literal "frenzy of the visible" in the Piccadilly porno theater can also be understood as part of a greater engagement with the revelatory power of the body, the denuding of the human form as presentation of hidden truth or matter of fact. Of course, the film plays with the truth that the body "speaks"—David's apparent identity as a man psychologically damaged by a near escape from a human attacker is only skin deep. The misleading text of David's body only tells the truth of either recto or verso, and the liminal state of the wolfman figure is literalized in the moebius strip of reversible layered skins. This is echoed in the death scenes of both David and his werewolf sire—in contrast to the excruciatingly gradual spectacle of the transformation scenes, after being shot each is almost instantaneously reverted from wolf to human form, as if the puncturing of these textual skins immediately dispels the lycanthrope's illusory power.

The reverse of this rupturing of skin as text appears in *The Company of Wolves* (dir. Neil Jordan, UK, 1984), a film which further innovated the craft of werewolf transformations onscreen while accelerating the liminal play with skin as readable, protean text. The film

begins with preteen Rosaleen in a fitful sleep being ordered to unlock her bedroom door and come downstairs by her older sister. The film then moves into Rosaleen's dreamworld, interwoven with multiple interlayered fairy tale narratives and set in a vaguely Medieval pastoral past. Dream Rosaleen is told multiple cautionary tales of werewolf legend by her grandmother (Angela Lansbury), before eventually being seduced by a lycanthropic huntsman herself. After transforming and joining his wolf pack in the woods, the dream world becomes unstable and its wolves break into Rosaleen's bedroom, who awakens and screams.

In the first cautionary tale related by the grandmother, a young wife marries a "travelling man," who seems to be devoured by wolves in the forest on their wedding night. He returns years later, bedraggled and in tattered clothing, and flies into a rage at finding her remarried and with children around her. It is not until the terrified wife strikes him with a hot poker across his face, however, that a lycanthropic transformation is triggered, beginning with him flaying layers of skin from his face with his hands. Shearing off more and more skin until the musculature is revealed, his skull then profilmically extends into a more canine shape. Gradually a fully canine form flayed of skin is revealed as an animatronic, and then following a cutaway to the wife's new husband entering the home, the "travelling man" is revealed fully covered in wolf fur. As with *American Werewolf*, the piercing of the reversible skin disturbs its meaning making and triggers a transformation, yet here the sheltering societal skin of the human is troubled, revealing the wolfskin beneath. The reverse is also achieved when the wife's current husband beheads the wolf, whose distinctly canine head

tumbles into a pail of milk. As soon as it bobs back up to the surface, the travelling man's fully human face is revealed.

A similar logic is followed in the climactic scene in which Rosaleen confronts the huntsman, a man she had met and flirted with on the path to her grandmother's house who is now revealed to be a lycanthrope. Finding him alone in her grandmother's cottage and spying her grandmother's hair sizzling in the fire, she continues their guarded flirtation until a kiss reveals the size of his predatory teeth ("Jesus what big teeth you have!"/ "The better to eat you with, my dear") and she shoots him. This penetration of the human surface of his skin(s) triggers the film's second spectacular transformation scene: a fully formed wolf head forces itself painfully out of his human mouth, and his back skin is shown to rip away to reveal the exterior of a furry wolf's trunk beneath. Curiously, his writhing back is shown to spontaneously grow layers of dark, course hair before being fully ripped away to reveal his wolf form. Unlike the travelling man, who must strip himself of both his clothes and human skin so that the transformation may be worked at the level of his freed musculature and skeletal structure, which is ultimately sheathed in the verso of his wolf skin, the huntsman very nearly leaps fully formed as a wolf from the vacated sheathe of his human skin. Both wolfmen enact a liminal identity through mobile and protean enfoldings and enmeshings of their multiple skins, but it is the huntsman who most fully enacts traditional European folkore's versipellis. As Rosaleen grandmother warns her: "A wolf may be more than he seems, he may come in many disguises. The wolf that ate your sister was hairy on the outside, but when she died she went straight to heaven. The worst kind of wolves are hairy on the inside, and when they bite you, they drag you with them to hell."

The identifying bodily text of wolfman as wolf turned inside out is not the only way in which the dangerous lycanthrope is made legible in Rosaleen's dream world. Her grandmother warns her similarly to never trust a man whose eyebrows "meet in the middle," a feature clearly visible on both the travelling man and the huntsman. She has also imparted the importance of clothing as a technology which holds sway over the wolfman's transformation: Rosaleen asks the huntsman, "Are you only a man when you dress like one, like granny said?" Clothing and animal skins loom large throughout *The Company of Wolves*, not least in this climactic détente between girl and wolf. The huntsman bids Rosaleen to throw her red shawl into the fire before kissing her ("your kind can't stand clothes," she notes). In Angela Carter's original story from which the film was adapted, Rosaleen casts all of her clothes into the fire before falling asleep in her dead grandmother's bed, "safe between the wolf's paws," nestled in the bedclothes which recall Serres' account of the mingled, textile-like body. Even in this less salacious adaptation, Rosaleen's passage between the village and the forest is clearly inaugurated in part by her destruction of her cherished human clothing. Animal skins throughout the film also seem charged with a strange power, most clearly in the grandmother's fox fur stole, paws and head still attached, which mysteriously reanimates to look around the room after its owner falls asleep, or briefly unfolds from granny's neck to hiss at a snake she encounters on the path to the village. It even attempts to defend its owner from its perch on the coat rack when the huntsman enters grandmother's cottage to devour her.

Along with the integral role of skin and textile, the lycanthropes of *The Company of Wolves* are legible as uncanny threshold beings in other ways. Grandmother's repeated

refrain to keep to the path when passing through the woods butts up against both the kinship of these being to the woods and their hypermobility, each of which marks them as fundamentally unsafe beings under this matrix. (Of course, Rosaleen's empathy for the huntsman-wolf she wounds and her sexual awakening lead her to question the value and utility of this safety.) The huntsman proudly shows Rosaleen his compass which helps him range far "from the dreary path." The werewolf groom is likewise described only as a "travelling man," while his Irish brogue and the huntsman's Eastern European accent further mark them as other from the denizens of Rosaleen's solidly English village. Of course, the lycanthropes are not completely other, fully denizens of the dark wood: the huntsman covers the woodlands with the aid of human technology as well as his canid nose, while the erstwhile groom jealously defends the relationships he forges and casts within a human patriarchal matrix—"better a wolf than a whore" he spits at his wife after discovering she has borne children with another man. Their liminal existence—when asked if he lives with humans or with wolves, the huntsman replies "neither, both—I come and go between them, my home is nowhere"- exemplifies the exile and the uncanny threshold nature of Agamben's homo sacer, while their mobility and flexibility's subversive power to collapse dualisms and divisions is taken perhaps the most seriously in *The Company of Wolves*. While the film is readily legible as a tale of sexual coming-of-age and feminist self-actualization filtered through the lens of werewolf transformation and folk tale, the decapitation of the proscriptive, rule creating grandmother—her head shatters into porcelain pieces rather than organic gore after the huntsman swats it off of her neck—reflects the power of the wolfman figure to exceed and trouble cultural dualisms which, in the same manner as the "dreary

path," strive to make safe the dark forest. As du Courdray notes, the werewolf fits squarely within Slavoj Žižek's notion of the monstrous as the "'fantasmatic appearance of the 'missing link' between nature and culture," which both arises from the failure of dualism to account for the category of the supernatural and as well as threatens defining cultural dualisms.[213] Rosaleen's embrace and ultimate embodiment of this power—unlike *The Howling*'s Karen and *American Werewolf*'s David, who resist and ultimately are destroyed by their lycanthropy—shatters the dream world in which the majority of the narrative has taken place, and ultimately shatter the world of the film itself, as a dream wolf's leap through the glass of Rosaleen's bedroom window arrests and ends the film on a freeze frame. Rather than a tragedy of an innocent torn between culture and nature by an afflicted animalistic curse, *The Company of Wolves* introduces agency into the wolfman cycle, while elevating the uncanny lycanthrope in the manner of Haraway's cyborg. Rosaleen's affinity for the threshold being allows her to invest in its disruptive power by removing her societal skins and dressing herself in a new, multi-textual sheath of many beguiling layers.

Alongside the enveloping and folding of layers of skin, is the localization of the boundary figure of the wolfman to the threshold of the door that seems most critical to the special effects body. The transformation sequences in both *The Howling* and *American Werewolf* rely on both literal and metaphorical folds, and fundamentally involve a combination of interiorities and exteriorities. It is the grafting and revelatory hinge of the fold that underlies these sequences, as well as their cultural patron, the lycanthrope, who presides

[213] du Courdray, *Curse of the Werewolf*, 3.

over liminal threshold spaces between fundamental cultural divides. Much like the framing of the special effects body as Wunderkammer I asserted in the previous chapter, the architectural technology of the door is critical the wolfman's interaction with multiple thresholds and border zones—occupying (and passing between) the liminal spaces which exist between inside/outside, bio/technics, human/animal, home/city, and city/forest. As Bernhard Siegert's work on cultural techniques makes clear, the dangerously liminal zone of the threshold is mediated by a myriad of cultural strategies and technologies which seek to make safe this uncanny and eerie site of indeterminacy, the most foundational of which is perhaps the logic of the door. Doors can be understood as "architectural media that function as cultural techniques because they operate the primordial difference of architecture—that between inside and outside."[214] Critically, these doors are fundamentally a folding media, which Siegert identifies as evolving from the fold of the gate, which historically separated human development from that of animals, thereby making impossible the "human-animal metamorphoses that Paleolithic cave paintings attest to," and which the werewolf figure represents (193).

It is also the case that the fold of the gate does more than simply protect against human and animal bodily entanglements—in his move to reaffirm animals as subjects and to reverse the exploitation of animals as a direct result of their cultural use in upholding "the poverty of humanism,"[215] Cary Wolfe identifies the foundational role of animals in

[214] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 194.
[215] Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xii.

upholding the category of human, predicated on a privileging of language and sight over scent, and a disavowal of the animal alongside the bodily, the low, and the material. It is to this cultural entanglement between human and animal that I will now turn, in asserting that not only is the wolfman a figure which slips between the dividing line of animal and human, its literal voracious viscerality foregrounds biological materiality and embodied experience.

III. Portals

In this section I move to foreground the role of this interstitial zone and bodily boundary, while exploring a remaining set of cultural techniques and strategies which seek to mediate the threat of interstitial slippages represented by the threshold figure of the wolf man. Beyond its central importance in the reception of and embodied engagement with the body horror gore sequence, the gut is centrally located within the logics of the existence and contaminating spread of the werewolf figure. The ravenous wolf is threatening precisely because he is likely to indiscriminately devour and digest living human tissue, embodying not just the possibility of a violent death, or a contaminating or cursed bite, but also of the potential for cannibalistic consumption. Just as, for Agamben, the homo sacer and sovereign are symmetrical, correlative figures because "the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially homines sacri, and homo sacer is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns,"[216] the wolf man understands all men not just as prey but as

[216]Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 84.

sustenance. Paradoxically, moreover, by virtue of his ability (or imperative, depending upon the legend) to shapeshift into animal form, a reversal of this cannibalistic meal is also disquietingly possible. This swirl of nauseating possible anthropophagic transgressions become localized to the image of the wolf man's ravenous, cavernous mouth. As Miller notes, the body's orifices are always already breeding grounds for disgusting imagery, as unavoidable breaks in the protective seal of the body, as well as "holes that allow contaminants in to pollute the soul...the passageways through which substances pass that can defile ourselves and others too," and their association in the werewolf's case with a virus-like curse, which threatens to mutilate not just the body but the eternal soul, makes them all the more eerie as passageways.[217]

Like the doorway, the threshold of the mouth (and by extension the gut) is also culturally mediated by ritual, practice, and technology in an effort to divest it as much as possible of its mysterious destructive powers. Siegert examines at length the role of the Christian communion in inaugurating a massive tangle of cannibalistic possibilities centered around the collective consumption of the meal, which are exacerbated by the profoundly disgusting and contaminating potentialities that arise from the space of the table.[218] The technologies of the tablecloth, the spoon, fork, knife, as well as a multitude of regulations governing the etiquette of shared vessels, like the fold of the gate or the door, are erected against the inevitable possibility that a meal might "descend into a partial cannibalism in which everybody eats everybody" (45-6). As we have seen, the figure of the wolf man

[217] Miller, *Disgust,* 58-9.
[218] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 39.

represents the threat of perversion of the boundaries between man and meal, through his own liminal coexistence on both sides of this divide, and his animalistic rejection of the cultural technologies which ensure communal safety from cannibalistic contamination.[219]

In *The Howling*, the profoundly disgusting and unsettling potentialities of the transgression of these boundaries manifests in a diegetic obsession with meat which exceeds or escapes the protective power of technologies and rituals of the table. Karen's first image of the colony is the disgusting sight of a mysterious spit-roasted creature, of which little is said beyond her husband's reproachful exclamation, "That *meat*!" the disapproval in his voice linking his judgement of their inappropriate sustenance to his and Karen's class-based judgement of the colony's boorish backwoods inhabitants. Karen's colleagues, when visiting the morgue, are confronted by the combination of exposed brain matter and bloody autopsy tools occupying the same grimy counter as the coroner's casually unwrapped hamburger and opened styrofoam cup of coffee. The coroner then refers to the bodies under his charge as simply "the meat." Karen's husband is forcibly kissed by the local siren, who bites his lip lustily, moments before he is mauled by her brother and turned into a werewolf, leaving unclear which sibling's bite caused the contamination. Later, immediately after Karen's head is blown off with a shotgun following her televised transformation, panicked network employees switch from the live feed to a dog food commercial, which matches the previous image of her fatal wounding to the sickening, sloppy plop of unidentified chunks of meat into

[219] This aversion to cannibalism is, of course, a culturally dependent attitude, and moreover has a long history in Western Imperialism's cultural, visual, and even spatial construction of the racialized other, whether actually from a community which practices cannibalism or not. This thread will be examined at length in Chapter 4.

a dog's bowl in close-up. Finally, the film ends on a slow zoom into sizzling hamburger meat on a fry cook's griddle, as the credits roll. *The Howling* extracts all of the disgusting thrills embodied in the cannibalistic threat of the werewolf's gaping mouth, suggesting the futility of such table practices and techniques, while also linking the viewer's consumption of the tortured and eviscerated special effects body to another type of cannibalistic consumption. *The Howling* foregrounds the subversive power of both the gut and its affinitive emotional feedback, disgust, in both the production and consumption of these decomposed, destroyed, and dismembered special effects bodies—so often created with the aid of animal flesh and other comestibles, like corn syrup and gelatin—a literal feast for the eyes.

The terror of the wolfman's ravening mouth literalizes the fundamental importance of the enteric imaginary to special effects bodies more broadly, bringing to the forefront this literally visceral engagement between viewer and effects body necessary for the latter's function. Both the nature of the wolfman figure and the narratives (whether folkloric or literary) within which he is most commonly placed locate both the terror and the subversive power of the figure not simply to his marvelously mobile and multi-faceted skins, but to his explosion of the categories of man, meat, cannibal, and animal. The portal of the mouth and the passage of the gut are thus fundamental to the wolfman's identity and representation, and represent a further border zone among the wolfman's many threshold identities, liminal states, and interstitial boundary surfaces. The enteric nervous system, as a feeling and even thinking system which stretched from the mouth to the anus, is uniquely relevant to the horror film writ large, and especially special effects gore scene. Its most obvious affective feedback is that of disgust, the hallmark affective response of the genre. Disgust is a primary

pleasurable feedback by which fans derive enjoyment from the destruction of the filmed body, while disgust has also historically marked the special effects heavy film as deserving of moral (and even legal) disdain. In its ability to conjure up viscerally affecting imagery, disgust is uniquely able to drive moral, social, and political decisions.[220] Judgements provoked by disgust are both culturally vital, as in the case of class distinctions per Bourdieu, and have historically been utilized in the application of institutional and state power, as will be excavated in the next chapter. This curious power of disgust to both dwell intensely within the body and its orifices, as well as travel far beyond it, is conceptualized by William Ian Miller as an "[explosive] world of meaning, coloring, vivifying, and contaminating political, social, and moral orderings."[221]

This curious interior and exterior mobility and vitality of the affect of disgust calls to mind Elizabeth Wilson's exploration of the digestive system as interstitial boundary, which like the skin separates us from the exterior world, yet which is unique in that it itself contains an exterior zone, in which digestion necessitates a tunnel within us that "allows the outside world to pass through us."[222] Given this unique connection and interaction with the outside world, the gut is vitally implicated in our relationality to others and the environment—rather than simply metaphors for internalization, Wilson suggests ingestion and digestion are themselves literal mechanisms of relation and intersubjectivity (44). It is this mechanism of relationality and lived emotional experience rooted in the enteric nervous system that

[220] Miller, *Disgust,* 11.
[221] Miller, *Disgust,* xii.
[222] Wilson, *Psychosomatic,* 44.

beckons us to consider what types of bodily 'cognition' might be implicated in literally visceral affective relationships with media, and how we might more broadly conceive of the biological realities of embodied media experience. Given the visceral subject matter and affective appeal produced by the layered foldings and enmeshing of the practical effects body and the werewolf transformation sequence, the inside/outside liminality of the intersubjective, interstitial border zone of the human gut, itself a series of nestled interior folds, seems an imperative element to conceptualizing such modes of cinematic address.

The digestive horror represented by the wolfman depends upon a fundamental fear not only of cannibalistic consumption, but of the animal reversing their definition as meat subject to human consumption. A large part of the ambivalence provoked by the wolfman figure can be ascribed to its broader unhinging of the fold logics which subtend animal husbandry and exploitation, but its most poignant expression seems to be in its consumptive threat. In so doing it subverts what Jacques Derrida has called the carnophallogocentrism of culture, a sacrificial logic in which animal death sustains and creates the notion of humanity, the state, and the enshrining of language.[223] As Wolfe has noted,[224] animal sacrifice of old no longer holds cultural sway, but animal bodies continue to be materially present under capitalism: "they are everywhere: literally as visible and invisible ingredients in commodities, and figuratively as specters of sacrifice." Similarly, human flesh seemingly disappears from the sacrificial economy but a taste remains within commodities and labor,

[223] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, Volume 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[224] Wolfe, *Animal Rites*; See also Katherine E. Young, "Beastly Politics: Derrida, Animals, and the Political Economy of Meat," *Spectra* 4:2 (2015).

much like the contaminating trace of human flesh mixed with meat for which Lycaon was cursed with lycanthropy for serving to Zeus.[225] Threatening the logic of meat necessarily destabilizes the category of human, the state, and culture—the wolfman's ravening mouth reverses the sacrifice which "allows the transcendence of the human, of what Heidegger calls "spirit," by the killing off and disavowal of the animal, the bodily, the materially heterogeneous, the contingent—in short, of différance."[226] Just as the wolfman reroutes carnophallogocentrism through digestion, the enteric imaginary returns the bodily, the material, the animal to the realm of special effects.

The wolfman's profaning mouth further relies upon a longstanding fear of rabies, the virus which relies upon the foaming, infectious mouth of a stricken mammal for its transmission and survival. Recorded since Roman times, rabies was long associated with dogs and other domesticated animals and especially feared for its ability to return man to a kind of ravenous state of nature. Its name across many languages is synonymic with human rage or fury, and beyond the metaphoric realm rabies in humans was for centuries "identical with a visitation of animal rage."[227] As a virus which bored an uncanny passageway between man and animal, city and nature, rabies inspired a collection of rituals and techniques to legislate this passage, many of which depended upon animal bodies.[228] Further, rabies centers upon the wolfman figure in two senses (and, as we shall see, had a hand in the development

[225] Wolfe, *Animal Rites*.
[226] Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 66.
[227] Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2012).
[228] Wasik and Murphy, *Rabid*.

of the wolfman as a cinematic monster)—first, in its orally-fixated thinning of the barrier between human and animal, and secondly, in its location on the figure of the dog.

Dogs can be understood as wolfmen of a kind—civilized wolves who hold a peculiar position in human society and culture, and who trouble distinctions between beings whose flesh is meat or who eat flesh. In the case of rabies, the dog becomes a wolf in sheep's clothing, an easy vector to shepherd the zoonotic infection from smaller prey to its human masters. While humans are in fact merely "accidental" hosts of the rabies virus given their dull teeth and weak jaws, dogs spread it easily through their saliva, and their intimate proximity in human spaces and lifeways mark them as uniquely identified with, and terrifying because of, rabies. Even in the millennia in which rabies remained a terrifying threat to humans, dogs were the focus of intense anxiety as disease vectors. As human cases became relatively less threatening in the 1800's, this ambivalent focus on the dog as both faithful helpmeet and terrifying rabies sufferer strengthened. Working dogs had long been viewed in this way—bizarre techniques for repelling the virus from hunting hounds proliferated for centuries, including severing the parasitic worm (in truth, a completely natural ligament) under the tongue, or proactively ensuring that they are not sexually frustrated enough to erupt into a rabid rage.[229] However, the intimate and feminized practice of companion dogs within the home came under particular fire even as human rabies infection became a less pervasive threat in the Victorian period. The case of Maria Caroline Duff, countess of Fife, who died of rabies in 1805 led many doctors and scientists to attribute

[229] Ibid.

her death to her lapdog, a poodle named Pompey. Following an attack on the family dogs by a rabid animal, according to an account by an English evangelist, the Earl's affected hunting dogs were immediately euthanized, but Maria would not allow Pompey to be destroyed.[230] Initial discussion focused on a supposed infectious nip of her nose from Pompey, but an article in *The Lancet* in 1830 proposed that the lapdog's friendly licks had infected a pimple on her face. Following medical discussions of the case cast such licking between dog and master, as well as lapdoggery as a whole, as "not only a most disgusting, but a dangerous practice," and stridently warned of the dangers of "an indiscriminate attachment to or imprudent fondling of dogs."[231]

That this "imprudent fondling of dogs" was seen as a problematic feminine excess affected the course of public health legislation in Britain, as critics of both vivisection and the widespread muzzling of dogs in public were caricatured as irresponsible women blinded by—if not rabid with—a naïve "fancy" for their dog companions.[232] But it also highlights the eerie proximity of the dog as a major source of their potential to terrify, disgust, and destroy. Dogs symbiotically evolved alongside humans such that for most of our history, dogs have been present as civilized wolves who trot between the boundary lines of city and forest. Before the Victorian period in England, rabies could find easy repositories in working dogs as well as ubiquitous strays and feral canines, and rabies outbreaks could upend entire towns

[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

and villages.[233] Yet it seems that at the same time that human rabies incidence was rapidly declining and ever stricter measures began to mitigate the threat of feral dogs, the figure of the "mad dog" was growing as an obsession of the British public, such that doctors distinguished between actual rabies infection in humans and "spurious hydrophobia," a second "hysterical condition brought on by fear of the consequences of a dog bite," so named in reference to rabies' primary symptom.[234] That this rise in cynophobia occurred alongside the rise in dog-fancying: ownership for the primary purposes of "pleasure and display," whether of sporting or lapdogs,[235] is significant. These dogs lived in increasingly enmeshed proximity with their owners, and a large industry of new consumer goods—fine clothing and accessories, dog biscuits and patent medicines—and cultural institutions directed at their care drew them ever closer to the level of cherished family member.

The dog as wolfman seems a fitting corollary, a liminal figure who provokes increasingly ambivalent reactions as he becomes increasingly close to the privileged Victorian domestic sphere while harboring the contagious threat of the ravening wild beast. Even before they grew increasingly eerie as clothed, accessorized lapdogs—Walton describes the Byzantine fashion rules which dictated a lapdog's multiple outfits throughout the day, including at breakfast, the "morning constitutional," and the "afternoon drive"[236] —

[233] Pemberton and Worboys, *Mad Dogs*, 9.
[234] Ibid., 11.
[235] John K. Walton, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: The Conflict over Rabies in Late Victorian England," *Journal of Social History* (1979), 221.
[236] Walton reproduces this passage from a society journal: "At breakfast only a simple garment of blue or white flannel should be worn, and at this period a collar of any kind is considered vulgar. For the morning 'constitutional*' a close fitting coat of striped or spotted English cheviot, with a mantle well covering the chest, is essential, and the leading-chain and collar must be of antique silver. The

the dog's liminality as a figure has led to countless cultural expressions of ambivalence and even demonic influence. Baring-Gould notes the similarity between lycanthropic lore and the spectral dogs said to haunt literal crossroads and threshold zones between death and life—barghests, cemetery dogs, black dogs, wishthounds, and even Cerberus.[237] Wasik notes the prevalence of demonic dog familiars in the confessions of many European witch trials and the preponderance of tales in European oral culture which describe dogs as avatars of the devil: "Indeed, what makes the demon dog such a powerful source of dread is precisely how familiar, in all senses of that word, the canine presence can be."[238]

As a hybrid being straddling the human/animal, culture/nature divide, the dog also holds special importance to the defining lines drawn around the concept of humanity and the privileging of language. Cary Wolfe traces Levinas's extended rumination on the subject of the dog Bobby, "the last Kantian in Nazi Germany," within his larger deconstruction of Western philosophy's inability to account for or ethically respond to the lives of animals.[239] While Levinas ultimately decides that Bobby is deprived of will and thus "faceless," his repeated return to the memory of the dog who seemingly hailed him as a human despite his internment in a Nazi labor camp reveals, for Wolfe, "the clearest picture of a humanism that is otherwise sometimes hard to see…the animal is that Kantian outside that reveals our

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costume for the afternoon drive . . . must be of fine cloth or plush and the colour either blue, mouse or fawn. With this a collar of velvet hung with tiny medallions is de rigueur, unless one of fur be considered more becoming. Finally, for evening dress, the pet is arrayed in a wadded gown of cashmere or velvet, ornamented richly with beads and emblazoned with the arms of the happy owner on the collar." Walton, "Mad Dogs," 222.

[237] Baring Gould, *Book of Werewolves.*

[238] Wasik and Murphy, *Rabid*.

[239] Wolfe, *Animal Rites,* 60.

traditional pictures of the ontological fullness of the human to have been fantasies all along, built on the sands of disavowal of our own contingency, our own materiality, our own 'spokenness.' But once that work is done, the animal is returned to its exile."[240] Moreover, he argues, the pet dog's (uncannily) privileged societal position upholds the sacrificial logic of Derridean carnophallogocentrism, under which the legal killing of animals and exploitation of all manner of laboring bodies is permitted.[241] It's precisely in Bobby's uncanny humanity, or the Victorian shih tzu's anomalous fine-cloth driving costume, that the entire project of dualism relies, yet their eeriness as threshold figures remain both a deep well of ambivalence and a line of flight away from the entire limiting system.

It's fitting that, given all of the cross-pollination between the wolfman figure and that of the dog, a reappearance of rabies in the Western cultural zeitgeist coincides and is intertwined with both the cinematic beginnings of werewolves as well as their resurgence in the 1980s. Following *Werewolf of London* in 1935, which established the distinctly rabies-like notion that a bite from a werewolf passes on the curse of lycanthropy to a living victim,[242] the unexpectedly popular *The Story of Louis Pasteur,* dramatizing Pasteur's development of a rabies vaccine, is released in 1936. The following year, Zora Neale Houston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* interweaves its portrait of Black southern femininity with a major rabies plotline in its third act.[243] Moreover, following several

[240] Wolfe, *Animal Rites,* 63.
[241] Ibid., 99.
[242] Du courdray notes that this element of lycanthropy is absent in all of the preceding folklore and literature. *Curse of the Werewolf,* 77.
[243] Wasik and Murphy suggest she likely had watched the Pasteur biopic, but this seems a bit tenuous to claim. *Rabid.*

decades in which werewolf tales remained more or less a fallow field for cinema, the renewal of werewolf films in the 1980s followed a cycle of popular British pulp novels focusing on rabies in 1970s,[244] and a film adaptation of Stephen King's *Cujo* (itself published in 1981) was released in 1983. I don't mean to suggest a clear line of authorial inspiration, but rather that tales of rabies and of werewolves tend to occupy a similar recurrent space in the cultural zeitgeist. As a uniquely deadly—as of 2016, there have only been 14 recorded cases of survival in humans—and dramatically zoonotic disease, rabies and its particular association with dogs seems to fire the monstrous imagination in a similar mode to the wolfman, and relies upon a shared repertoire of horrific and disgusting imagery: the threatening voracity of the mouth and gut, as well as the monstrous possibility of a return for the civilized subject to the dark woods of its own true nature, both freeing and inescapably self-destructive as a mortal curse. That the animalistic transformation sequence of the werewolf film betokens death is only temporarily sidestepped by the reversibility of the lycanthropes multitextual skin(s) in the classical werewolf film—the lycanthropic protagonists and their villainous sires in *American Werewolf* and *The Howling* are ultimately violently destroyed, like in the Universal werewolf cycle before them. *The Company of Wolves* is unique in its celebration of the wolfman figure as both tenable as a threshold identity and a powerful rerouting of limiting cultural constructs, a position which coincides with its visual unity between dog and werewolf.

[244] Ibid.

Unlike the vast majority of werewolf films, including *American Werewolf* and *The Howling*, *The Company of Wolves* does not create a hybrid wolf/man body as the endpoint of its multiple transformation sequences. Rather, it conspicuously employs Belgian shepherd dogs, intermixed in crowd scenes with some actual wolves, as the final avatar of the transformed lycanthrope. Moreover, the hinge between these two states of being is less clearly regimented by a cursed bite—the ultimate mechanic of transmission for the lycanthropic "virus" is left vague, though associated clearly with devouring, if not simply biting. Grandmother mentions at several points the heritability of lycanthropy, as in her tale of the priest's bastard being destined to meet the devil in the woods and transform into a wolf, but also directly cautions Rosaleen that being devoured by a lycanthrope will lead to her damnation. In Rosaleen's own tale to soothe the wounded huntsman/wolf, she describes a lycanthropic woman as simply coming from "the world below," while her own "infection" and transformation occurs offscreen and through uncertain means, though clearly inaugurated by her choice to burn her clothing and her empathy and desire for the wolf. By figuring the lycanthrope as dog, the film loses none of its threshold hybridity given the richness of the dog as liminal figure as we've explored, but it does remove some of the spectacular "being-without-thingness" showcased in the special effects-powered bodily transformation scene. However, in so doing it more clearly embodies the textual shifting skins of the wolfman figure, and clearest of all unites them with the enteric nervous system. It is perhaps this fully-fleshed out configuration, which embraces viscerality, materiality, and biological threshold zones, that allows *The Company of Wolves* to so fully embrace the wolfman figure's mobility

and deconstructive power. It also most clearly acknowledges its own enmeshment with the animal world, and its existence as a cinematic animal product.

Special effects bodies in film rarely highlight their reliance on animal biomaterial, whether through practical effects' use of gelatin, animal offal, blood and bones, or digital effects' capturing and scanning of animal bodies, gestures, or vocalizations, yet the liminal body-based passages of the wolfman call us to account, like Haraway's cyborg, for our denial of the animal, the bodily, the material in our consumption of these bodies. In what remains of this chapter, I move to link the importance of viscera and voracity in our consumption of special effects bodies to the larger questions raised by the wolfman around bodily special effects' reliance on (and re-membering of) animal bodies.

Much of what has been written about the transformative bodily use of animals in film focuses on indexical animal death onscreen. Very little has been written about the use of animal biomatter in figuring the non-indexical violence visited upon human bodies onscreen, even when both types of violence populate a single film, as in the cycle of Italian cannibal films of the 1980s I will explore in the next chapter. I argue that even outside of limit-case films like *Cannibal Holocaust*, which make clear the materialities of the profilmic bodies of animals, humans, and bio-technical assemblages that make up the film's special effects bodies, a close attention to the preservation of animal materiality in cinema can open us up to the expressly material nature of the affective and phenomenological engagements bodily special effects make possible with the viewing bodies *before* the screen, and to the connective tissues between actual animal biological material and the practical effects work

which makes possible the figuration of simulated human gore and transformation, as well as between these corporeal products and the stuff of cinema itself.

Akira Lippit defines animetaphor as closely related to the *animot*, a term which for him speaks to the ties between "image and sound, flesh and word, language and its wild side" inherent in the cinematic figuration and spectral presence constituted by the on-screen death of the animal, whether simulated or indexical.[245] American film's now commonplace disclaimer that "no animals were harmed" is an *animot* in the sense that it "legislates the fantasy of animal death" while also taking place at the boundary between animal and non-animal, language and the extra-linguistic. At the same time, both this disclaimer and the concept of *animot* itself function as animetaphors—what Lippit defines as "a trope of animality that is itself profoundly anti-metaphoric and anatropic; that exposes the impossibility of a rhetorical relation between animality and language."[246] Within this framework, in which the animal resists the very language of cinema in rupturing its rhetorical possibility for metaphorization, we can see a great deal of sympathy with Vivian Sobchack's work on indexical (human or animal) death in cinema, which when inserted into narrative film punctures it with a moment of documentary space, what Sobchack refers to as an ethical and bodily felt "charge of the real."[247] The viewer relies on a certain measure of extratextual knowledge to determine that a certain moment of violence is out of place due to its unsimulated nature—this is perhaps easiest to track in the case of animals, which she notes

[245] Akira Mizuta Lippit, "The Death of an Animal," *Film Quarterly* 56:1 (2002), 10.
[246] Lippit, "The Death of an Animal," 11.
[247] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 268.

are fundamentally "bad actors" which barring the application of digital effects can be assumed to be bound to a certain sense of ontological truth value in their bodily performance.

Beyond the rupturing of narrative with documentary space as identified by Sobchack, however, as Lippit would have it, there is a second "specter" which makes so explosive the animetaphor of the cinematic animal death, and, I would argue, the use of animal body parts to simulate human death, mutilation, or transformation. There is an inherent melancholia or mourning to the haunting violence perpetrated against the animal in film, which arises out of assumption "peculiar to Western thought" that animals are in some sense unable to experience death, because they are unable to "know" it, as they lack the language with which to do so. Thus cinematic representations of this death are especially fraught, as they preserve the living animal in some sense, as in taxidermy, in the animating temporal loops of the medium, "reproducing each individual animal death in a fantastic crypt."[248] Just as the animating loops of cinematic representation encase the destruction and dismembering of these bodies, as Lippit suggests, so too do they preserve and knit together what has been made separate—*re*-membering these bodies in both senses of the term.[249]As a "technology of animation," cinema also enables the reanimation and preservation of the dead animal, resisting its "impossible" death at the same time that it figures it—a curious tangle of incommensurabilities and doublings that constitutes the crisis of the animetaphor, which the

[248] Lippit, "The Death of an Animal," 12.
[249] George Ioannides makes use of this dual term in his Lippit-influenced analysis of Stan Brakhage's *Sirius Remembered*. George Ioannides, "Re-membering Sirius: Animal Death, Rites of Mourning, and the (Material) Cinema of Spectrality," *Animal Death*, eds. J Johnston and F Probyn-Rapsey. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013).

aforementioned parergonal disclaimer directly addresses but cannot ever solve. Producing a doubling effect,[250] this fundamental cinematic crisis decrees that the animal in film must always live two lives and die two deaths, the first of the animal, and the second of the machine. Lippit argues that both staged and actual scenes of animal death in film enact the same affective and ethical logics in parergonal animetaphors, which constitute cinema as animal, and animal as technology.

In using the animetaphor framework, Lippit suggests that it is in some sense the haunting presence of the animal "in the shadows of the [cinematic] machine" which makes film's figuration of life and death possible, and which shapes its presence in our lives.[251] Eugene Thacker's concept of biohorror, as that which makes thinkable the concept of life itself, as well as his concept of excommunication and dark media, suggest a similar process through negative ontology, in which guiding paradoxes and incommensurabilities make larger systems possible, and a space is made for the consideration of "weird" life and death, impossible to name or represent, and able to be witnessed only through the fleeting glimpse. In *After Life,* Thacker draws from an exploration of "weird fiction" the concept of a third form of life, the "nameless" or unthinkable life, which is distinct from both the existence of humans and of "the ancient ones" in Lovecraftian supernatural horror. This third form of life offers a paradigm from which to mount not a recuperated or alternate theory of life to the

[250] This ritualistic doubling recalls Agamben's work on the doubled existence of the *homo sacer* and the wolf man, and his related discussion of the simulated body of a dead king in the *funus imaginarium*, and the sculpted body double of the Colossus in Roman mysticism has many direct points of connection the filmic special effects body, which consists of many doubles and copies of the performer body's component parts, and even sculptural recreations of the entire body.
[251] Lippit, "The Death of the Animal," 19.

Aristotelian paradigm, which he sees as a limit which has to be "overcome," but a critique of life itself. He approaches Aristotle's *De Anima* as an ontological examination of life, wherein life is not reducible to being. The question posed by *De Anima* then becomes "whether there can be an ontology of life that does not simply become either biological description or theological sublimation." Aristotle's concept of *psukhe* becomes the problematic answer, a metaphysical term which seeks to articulate life without being life itself, yet which at the same time can't be distinct from life—ultimately providing a necessary position from which to "think life," but which is itself seemingly "unthinkable except in its manifestations."[252] For Thacker, the attendant "unthinkable" paradoxes, which threaten to "dissolve the concept altogether" suggest not the need for a recuperative theoretical retooling, but rather offer a guiding contradiction—that while "One cannot think Life without thinking the living; one cannot think Life while at the same time thinking the living."[253] This guiding paradox seemingly offers the ground from which to advance the third form of life, the "biohorrific" nameless thing, as a mode separate and related to the living from which to think life, while also calling into question the (in)commensurability of logic and life, as well as the basic assumption that "thought *is* life." The "weird" life of the Shoggoth found in supernatural horror therefore offers a way to think through the "weird" relationship between life and logic. Thacker later extends this general concept to film in *Excommunication*, focusing on excommunication as the message that destroys communication itself, and is also the radical impossibility that inheres in all communication, and is therefore "prior to the very possibility

[252] Eugene Thacker, *After Life,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 16.
[253] Thacker, *After Life*, 21.

of communication."[254] Drawing on this concept, he theorizes "dark media" as providing a window onto communication with that which cannot be accessed or thought, tracing a line from occult practice to the horror film broadly conceived through the common use of negative ontology. Through his examination of Melies' early special effect films, Thacker defines dark media as engaged in a dual practice of elaboration through certain modes of sight, "seeing something in nothing (e.g., the animate images appearing on the screen or the alchemical glass), and finding nothing in each something (the paradoxical absence or presence of the "demon" behind each thing)."[255] He locates the desire to reveal or elaborate the hidden or numinous as "a religious impulse," linking it to the *via negativa* of negative theology, and ultimately negative mediation.

Thacker's concept of the negative ontology of life and media, in which the biohorrific "nameless thing" is necessary to make all life thinkable, and the impossibility of communication is a prerequisite for its very possibility, provides a helpful model for further advancing Lippit's concept of the anatropic, anametaphoric cinematic animal towards a broader consideration of the lives and deaths of special effects bodies in film, human, animal, or otherwise. It is the animal that cannot truly die that must indeed die onscreen in order to make possible the figuration of the simulated death of the human, in both the spectral, metaphysical sense which Lippit seems to have intended, as well as in very strictly material one. George Ioannides critiques Lippit's theorization of animal death onscreen by reminding

[254] Eugene Thacker, "Dark Media" in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*, Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 16.
[255] Thacker, "Dark Media," 85.

us that both of these are integral pieces of the puzzle—each is reliant upon and intertwined with the other. While the incommensurable figuration of animal death in film may convert the apparatus of cinema into an animated memorial, "an animal that remembers," as Lippit argues, Ioannides reminds us that the material body and the lived experience of the animal are integral to this process.[256] Certainly this is true of all bodily representation, but the corporeal material seems especially important to understanding the connections between animal violence and the simulated violence visited upon other special effects bodies. In the gelatin used to thicken corn syrup "blood clots," in the offal of slaughtered animals large and small that are collected in order to simulate both specific human organs and unspecified mashes of flesh, in the animal bones and all other manner of biological byproducts, practical special effects work has long relied upon the stuff of animal bodies to simulate the interiors of the human and monstrous body in scenes of nonindexical bodily violence and gore.

Just as the relentlessly mobile wolfman ranges far and wide from the "dreary path," it's my hope that a promiscuous scope and a compass (or snout) attuned to the material, the partial, the bodily, the contingent, and the becoming will allow us to uncover not only what is unique or "curious" in the field of bodily special effects, but also lead us to think more deeply and widely in our own deeply embodied entanglements with media of all kinds, alongside our responsiveness to environmental and animal bodies which are likewise entangled and irrevocably implicated within these media.

[256] George Ioannides, "Re-membering Sirius," 104.

So Geographers in Afric-Maps
With Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps;
And o'er unhabitable Downs
Place Elephants for want of Towns.

-Jonathan Swift, 1733

4. The Cannibal: Consumption, Contact, and Capture at the Edge of the World

In 2013 director Eli Roth released *The Green Inferno,* its title and storyline an explicit reference to Ruggero Deodato's notorious *Cannibal Holocaust*. While it did not start the cannibal cycle which swept Italian genre filmmaking in the 1970s and 80s, Deodato's film is its best-known and best-remembered example, widely considered the "*ne plus ultra* of the Italian cannibal movie"[257] despite presenting its most genre-bending incarnation. That Roth—still defending his title as the *enfant terrible* of torture porn, for better or worse—elected to give his film the title of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s diegetic film-within-a-film seems at odds with the straightforward nature of *The Green Inferno*'s narrative, which despite sharing a similar focus on gooey, splattering gore sequences achieved through practical effects work, trades Deodato's provocations around ontological truth, documentary realism, and orientalist visual capture for a flip condemnation of millennials and social media slacktivism. Yet Roth's modestly successful reboot speaks to the continued semiotic power of the figure of the extant cannibal tribe in horror media, as well as its continued connection with spectacular

[257] Simon Hobbs, "Animal Snuff" in *Snuff: Real Death in Screen Media,* Neil Jackson et. al. eds., (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 72.

bodily display as a vehicle for the intertwined affects of desire, wonder, disgust, and pleasure.

This chapter will center the cannibal as a means through which to explore a tangle of themes critical to spectacular bodily technologies—the connection between wonder and curiosity in the consumption of spectacular bodies, and Imperialism's desirous projection of the uncontacted, unseen body primed for visual and material capture; the horrific intimacies of orality and digestion and its relationship to physical and moral disgust and pleasure; and the anthropophagic enteric system as an answer to the reification of speech and communication within the construction of personhood, culture and knowledge. In particular, I will focus on *Cannibal Holocaust* as both genre exemplar and the extension of this genre's themes to their ultimate limit, situating them within an especially incisive interrogation of ontological truth and indexical reality, and insisting upon the materiality and viscerality of cinema itself. As in previous chapters, in untangling the uneasy connections between corpse and corpus, speech and silence, contact and its impossibility, subject and meal, the material and cultural natures of animals will offer a fundamental grounding. The threads of immateriality and seamlessness narratives, and the central role of the enteric system, its knowledges, and its affects, will also continue to be of critical focus.

Following on the écorché chapter's excavation of the Wunderkammer as uniquely suited to considering the material natures of the special effects body, this chapter will center the dark heart of the Wunderkammer—the role of Imperialist violence in the visual, material, and taxonomical apprehension of the "curiosities" of the world, and the attendant colonial

logics of self and other, center and periphery which fuel projects of salvage ethnography, visual capture, and the imaginative projection which produces cannibals and other curious bodies in the margins of the colonial map, and of the Western mind.

Despite the cannibal film as discernable horror subgenre having petered out (Roth's fannish entry notwithstanding) with Antonio Climati's *Natura Contro* in 1988, the cannibal remains a vital figure in 21st century media culture, who remains richly textured with the desirous and digestive logics and technologies of centuries-old Western imperialism. This seeming anachronism, I will argue, is mirrored in the fundamental collision of conflicting temporalities critical to the cannibal figure's meaning-making potency, which undergirds its elements of horror, sensuality, disgust, and desire. As with the wolfman figure in the previous chapter, these threads continue to be interwoven with critical tensions between animality and the human, the eater and the eaten, that here are even more clearly bound up in issues of speech and communication. Moreover, in making literal the ambivalent sensualities swirling around the special effects body and its enteric materialisms—particularly orality, consumption, digestion, and excretion—the cannibal will serve as Virgil-esque guide in this chapter's explorations of bodily special effects.

I. "Satan's Last Stronghold?"—Cannibals in the Margins of the Mind

In November of 2018, the death of American would-be missionary John Allen Chau on North Sentinel Island made international news. Part of a small island chain in the Indian

Ocean, North Sentinel Island is home to the Sentinelese, believed to number only several dozen inhabitants and "considered one of the Earth's last uncontacted peoples."[258] The Indian government prohibits travel within 3 nautical miles of North Sentinel Island as well as the taking of photographs,[259] and has largely respected and enforced the tribe's apparent wish to self-isolate,[260] resulting in a void of outside knowledge of Sentinelese lifeways, language, and even appearance save for a few long-distance images taken by helicopter. The legal prohibition of contact with the Sentinelese is partially based on the knowledge that any physical contact with the outside world would likely spell death for a majority or the entirety of the tribe, presumably none of whom have immunity to the viruses and bacteria visitors would inevitably transmit.

Chau's dogged attempts to illegally reach the tribe and proselytize to its members eventually ended in his own death at the hands of the Sentinelese, who had twice before fired nonlethal arrows at him, causing him to retreat.[261] An evangelical Christian missionary, his own journals and the testimony of his friends reveal that he saw contacting and preaching to the tribe as his life's mission, "his burden,"[262] and that he fully understood the threat to his own life (and to the tribe members' lives, given the pathogen risk) was grave. The night

[258] J. Oliver Conroy. "The life and death of John Chau, the man who tried to convert his killers." *Guardian*, 3 February 2019.
[259] Conroy, "Life and Death."
[260] Other tribes in the island chain have allowed contact and communication with outsiders, however the Sentinelese kill any outsiders on sight. Ibid.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

before his final, fatal attempt at surreptitious contact he wrote, “Lord, is this island Satan's last stronghold where none have heard or even had the chance to hear your name?”[263]

There is no evidence that Chau or official sources consider the tribe to be cannibals, yet both his fanatical dedication to contacting the “uncontacted” and his fantasized vision of the island as “Satan’s last stronghold” as a result of the tantalizingly paradoxical existence of this extant, “stone age”[264] tribe within 21st century modernity, which critically had evaded imperialist exploration and colonial exploitation over the centuries, participate in Imperialism’s longstanding construction of the anthropophagous (or otherwise tantalizingly curious) other in areas of the globe as yet hidden from visual capture, and producing of such bodies as fodder for visual and material consumption. These Imperialist logics are both participated in and problematized by the Italian cannibal film cycle of the 70s and 80s, which overwhelmingly narrativize Western protagonists certain that uncontacted indigenous tribes still exist, hidden within unexplored jungles in primarily South America, who then set out to find and document these groups.

In this section, I’ll first unpack the Italian cannibal subgenre of the 1970s and 80s, in particular *Cannibal Holocaust*, and its challenges to and participation in Imperialist logics and technologies. In imagining the figure of the cannibal in the shadowed spaces of the map (and of the mind), these films’ fantasy crypto-ethnography take up a mode of thinking with a long genealogy, which reached its zenith in the days of colonial exploration. I will establish

[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.

the cannibal within this film cycle as a prehistoric revenant, that evades and explodes the narratives and technologies that seek to contain him. In establishing that these films' ethnographic modes, and the Imperialist logics that inform them, rely upon spectacular, horrific, and often erotic displays of consumption and digestion, as well as on indexical and non-indexical (and human and non-human) death and gore, I will establish the cannibal as a fitting nexus from which to then explore, in the final sections of the chapter, the (im)possibilities of communication, contact, and consumption as it relates to bodily materiality and special effects.

The Italian cannibal film cycle was born out of a distinct set of industrial practices in its native Italy, as part of the prolific production of genre filmmaking which spanned from the late 1950's through the 1980's. These popular genre films were regarded as somewhat lowbrow affairs, and associated closely with Southern Italian working-class audiences—referring to their rapid production at the Roman studio, Pier Paolo Pasolini famously referred to Cinecitta as "the belching stomach of Italy."[265] This did not stop them from becoming hugely profitable both domestically and abroad, and the international circulation of first the peplum sword-and-sandal epic, and then the spaghetti western, soon eclipsed that of their prestigious Neorealist cousins in the early 60's. Marcia Landy traces the rise of these genre cycles to a decline in Hollywood imports sent to Italian theaters after an aggressive push into the European market following World War II resulted in the creation of legal protections for the Italian industry, combined with domestic shifts in the American industry in the 1950's

[265] Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema.* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), 36.

and 60's which decreased the number of Hollywood exports, as well as shifting social and economic contexts of daily Italian life in the 50's and 60's that necessitated a new cinematic address.[266] The economics of film production in post-war Italy favored prolific genre cycles, which could provide a large volume of films to fill in for Hollywood's contracting presence in the market, while at the same time ensuring healthy financial returns by working from a generic model that had already proved popular locally and abroad.[267] These cycles, or *filoni*, were distinguished by their reliance on pre-proven generic formulae and the relatively short, prolific bursts in which they were produced.[268]

Consisting of less than 15 films produced between 1972 and 1988, the Italian cannibal cycle was relatively small and short lived, and perhaps is better understood as an offshoot from the more prolific cycle of zombie and occult horror, which along with a common repertoire of filmmakers, actors and technicians, also shared a taste for the *grand guignol* spectacle of human mutilation rendered in gruesomely realistic practical special effects. Beginning in 1972 with Umberto Lenzi's *The Man from Deep River*, the genre's defining film is Ruggero Deodato's explosive *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), which became the narrative and stylistic model for several films to follow, most notably Lenzi's *Eaten Alive* (1980) and *Cannibal Ferox* (1981). *The Man from Deep River* followed a classical adventure film mode, taking more than a few story cues from *A Man Called Horse*, but by 1977 the

[266]Marcia Landy. "'Which Way Is America?': Americanism and the Italian Western." *boundary* 2 23.1 (1996), 39.
[267] Christopher Wagstaff, "A Forkful of Westerns," in *Popular European Cinema*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 25.
[268] Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto, "The Fair and the Museum: Framing the Popular," in *Popular Italian Cinema.* Eds. Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2012), 4.

cycle had already reached a high level of sexualized violent spectacle with Deodato's own *Last Cannibal World* and the following year's *The Mountain of the Cannibal God* (dir. Sergio Martino), and began to include un-faked sequences of animal killing as a particular calling card of the genre. Joe D'Amato, something of a softcore savant and a fixture of European genre filmmaking of the period, made his mark on the cycle with *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals*, *Papaya,* and *Orgasmo Nero,* which along with several Spanish co-productions helmed by Jess Franco constituted a cycle within a cycle evincing the easy slippage by which the erotics of the genre's excessive bodily spectacle could take center stage.[269] Following *Natura Contro* in 1988, the cycle lay dormant for many years, until being self-consciously taken up again by Eli Roth's *The Green Inferno*.

Following *Cannibal Holocaust*'s tale of an American documentary team's brutal attacks on a peaceful indigenous Amazonian tribe, and the tribe's vengeance through ritualistic killing and consumption of the filmmakers, this basic narrative of redressing of Imperial (and often mediated) exploitation or trespass through the swallowing up of Western interlopers became a hallmark of the genre, as did the inclusion of actual scenes of animal cruelty. Along with the repeated spectacle of over-the-top violence and bodily dismemberment, the inclusion of nudity and multiple sex scenes, and the actual deaths of animals, perhaps the strongest thread that connects the films within the cycle is the project of

[269] Along with D'Amato and Franco's softcore entries into the genre, both produced several softcore (sometimes released with hardcore inserts in certain markets) outings which sought to capitalize on the cannibal cycle's popularity by utilizing similar titles and a jungle location, yet did not depict cannibalistic tribes – perhaps best known are D'Amato's *Porno Holocaust* (1981) and *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (1980).

imagining a cannibalistic other dwelling in the unexplored corners of the world, and the violent confrontation that occurs when the Western foot trespasses too far into these mysterious regions, which remain as-yet untouched by colonial expansion.[270] This mode of imagining a temporally distant racialized other, somehow preserved for centuries beyond the reach of Imperial expansion and knowledge, is in many ways a historically-implicated practice, as I will now explicate.

In *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle,* Fatimah Tobing Rony conceives of ethnographic cinema as time machine, applying the term in the broadest sense to any film which represents indigenous peoples as inhabiting a separate temporal realm.[271] Like Fabian's 'denial of coevalness' and Chakraborty's anachronism, as Bliss Lim points out, Rony's concept of ethnographic time machine illuminates the long history in which colonial expansion drew its justification from the twin concepts of a totalized, universal sense of progress through time, as well as a temporal containment that labelled certain peoples and spaces as primitive—literally as of a different, earlier time.[272] The forced confrontation of conflicting temporalities is a fundamental component of the Italian cannibal cycle, which narratively and aesthetically figure the anthropophagic other as occupying a temporality out of step with western modernity. In the very depiction of the primitivity of the jungle-dwelling

[270] Interestingly, these films (despite many of them being set in Brazil), do not engage with the Antropofagia movement, or its exhortation for the colonized to "eat" the colonizer in order to produce their own artistic and literary works by digesting a wide array of influences.
[271] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 8.
[272] Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 45.

imagined other, invariably clad in minimally-covering costumes made of grass, leaves, or vines, often bearing signs of scarification or imaginative body painting, and lacking in technologies beyond rudimentary tools and the ability to create and tend to fire, these films imagine a people for whom time and history have not progressed beyond the Paleolithic—an evolutionary "backwardness" which occurs not by accident but is implicitly tied to their racial and geographic origin. *Cannibal Holocaust* opens with this monologue delivered by an American newscaster, as an introduction to a news feature about the "children of the space age, armed with cameras, microphones, and curiosity" who have gone missing during their journey to locate and film an uncontacted tribe in Colombia:

> Man is omnipotent! Nothing is impossible for him. What seemed to be impossible undertakings yesterday are history today. The conquest of the moon for example, who talks about it anymore? And yet man seems to ignore that on this very planet, there are still people living in the stone age and practicing cannibalism.

Tarantini's *Massacre in Dinosaur Valley* (1985) extrapolates the anachronism of its cannibal tribe so far into the past that they appear to have coexisted with dinosaurs—their costumes, housing, and religious rituals make copious use of conspicuous dinosaur skulls of varying size and shape, whose remarkable ubiquity and unblemished appearance suggest either a quite recent extinction or a type of dinosaur husbandry. That these films always represent the confrontation between the anachronistic other and Western modernity as an exploratory party 'discovering' a previously untouched people—driving the point home further by overwhelmingly choosing to cut between a B-plotline situated in the chaotic modernity of American metropoles, and the main line of action unfolding in "the green inferno" of Amazonian primitivity—suggests the primal scene of colonialism reworked over and over,

though of course, in this case it is the Western representative that is deconstructed and bodily erased.

Cannibal Holocaust brought the cycle to greater international popularity—and notoriety, due partly to its unprecedented level of human gore powered by virtuosic SFX work, shocking inclusion of indexical footage of unfaked violence against animals, its high profile sanctioning in the UK under the video nasties act—the Parliamentary act spurred by a full-blown moral panic over the VHS release of uncensored foreign horror films, which I will return to later in the chapter— and the criminal charges for obscenity and even murder brought against the filmmakers in their native Italy.[273] Briefly, the narrative concerns the journey of Professor Monroe, an NYU anthropologist, deep into the Amazon in search of evidence of the ultimate fate of journalist Alan Yates and his small documentary crew that had previously vanished into the same rainforest. First encountering the relatively friendly Yacumo tribe, Monroe then encounters the uncontacted Yanomomo tribe[274] who reveal a grisly monumental totem constructed of the lost filmmakers' bones, unopened film cans, and

[273] See Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).
[274] This film is one of the very few that does not invent a tribe whole-cloth, though beyond their shared name and rough geographic location there is little similarity to the actual Yąnomamö people (for instance, their fictional counterparts widely practice exocannibalism rather than the ritual endocannibalism attributed to the actual group, and far from being uncontacted have had regular exchanges with Westerners since the early 1600's). The film's Shamatari tribe also seems to take its name from the Sanumá or Xamatari people who occupy the same region and share a language with the Yąnomamö. The Yąnomamö tribe was described in the years before *Cannibal Holocaust*'s production by ethnographer Napoleon Chandon as a hyperviolent society (claims that were later disputed by other anthropologists), which perhaps inspired the choice of their name for the film's fictional violent, cannibalistic tribe. It's possible also that the names were selected simply because the film's indigenous actors hailed from these groups. This is difficult to track as Deodato and his crew rather dismissively only refer to them in extrafilmic materials and interviews as "indios," undifferentiated by tribal or ethnic background or even by their names, even in the credits.

recording equipment. Upon returning to New York with the film cans, the remainder of the film mixes footage of Monroe and the members of the major TV network that had sponsored the documentary screening the grainy 16mm film recovered from the Yanomomo. This shaky-cam 'found footage' reveals that the documentary crew had set fire to a village, attacked and raped several tribespeople, and generally brutalized the largely peaceful Yacumo all in the name of 'spicing up' their supposedly real footage with constructed mayhem. However, when the filmmakers penetrate too far into the jungle and arouse the ire of the mysterious Yanomomo, they are themselves hunted down, brutalized, dismembered, and ultimately consumed, all of which is obsessively recorded by their own cameras. Having watched the footage, the previously enthusiastic network executives soberly order the footage destroyed, Monroe staggers out into the New York city street to light a cigarette and wonder aloud, "I wonder who the *real* cannibals are," and an on-screen text crawl informs us that a nameless projectionist smuggled the footage out at great personal cost, invoking this primal scene as a final way of lending the recovered footage included in *Cannibal Holocaust* the air of ontological truth.

This interrogation of colonially-inflected technologies of knowledge production is part of a larger tension within the cycle between official narratives and common ways of knowing, with the majority of the films ultimately depicting official historical narratives as flawed, institutional knowledge, while valorizing the folk devils, rumor, imagination and dreams of "common" knowledge. It is to this later mode of knowing that the certainty of a monstrous being under the bed (or around the globe) belongs. The release of both Edward Said's *Orientalism,* inaugurating a global explosion of postcolonial theory and literature, as

well as anthropologist Michael Arens' controversial *The Man-Eating Myth* in 1979 (the same year production began on *Cannibal Holocaust*), which sparked debates all over the world over the legitimacy of cannibalistic social practice's place in the historical record, as well as popular speculation over the ultimate fate of Michael Rockefeller following his disappearance off the shore of rural Papua New Guinea in 1960, likely pollinated the thinking of filmmakers like Deodato, Lenzi, and D'Amato as the cycle took shape.[275] John Chau's ill-fated evangelistic voyage to "Satan's last stronghold" reveals the continued potency of this mode of allochronic desire, as do the persistent theories of Rockefeller having been murdered and devoured by indigenous peoples, the most recent being Carl Hoffman's speculative popular press account *Savage Harvest*. This tendency of cannibal narratives and popular histories to provoke the boundary between ontological truth and fabrication in media likely inspired such a tension to crop up again and again within the cannibal film cycle. However, such a desire to believe in the continued existence of a fantastical other, like the imagination of the racial other as temporally backwards, has deep ties to colonialist modes of seeing the world. As we will see, colonial maps reveal the eagerness with which Imperialist thought imagined the presence of fantastical creatures in the unseen (at least by Western eyes) corners of the world, and Ella Shohat has noted the element of "accidental discovery" in colonialist exploration discourse, arguing that from Robinson Crusoe to Indiana Jones,

[275] For more on the Arens debates, see *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). There has been little academic work on the fantasy narratives that persisted in the decades since Rockefeller's disappearance, and which continue to crop up, most recently in *Savage Harvest*, released in 2014, the latest in a long line of popular press authors claiming incontrovertible proof that Rockefeller did not drown, but was instead killed and eaten by local tribes.

colonial logics of exploration were driven by "the hope that 'nature' conceals in its 'womb' still more, outside the familiar paths of the power of the imagination."[276] Such a desire produced the imagined figures of the mermaid and the Blemmye—humanoid creatures with no head who were said to practice cannibalism, which Sir Walter Raleigh claimed to have found indisputable proof of in *The Discovery of Guiana*—while at the same time, this surety of a hidden monstrous other made the slotting of indigenous peoples encountered by colonial powers into pre-imagined tropes all the easier. Much like cryptozoology persists in imagining fantastical creatures in the unseen corners of the modern world, the cannibal film's insistence upon the extant figure of a monstrous, anachronistic other speaks to a kind of crypto-ethnography by which the desire to locate the unknown, the uncanny[277], or the magical in an age of ever-increasing surveillance, archiving of knowledge, and scientific rigor finds expression.

This same desire is itself implicated in the colonially-inflected projects of salvage ethnography, born of what Lim calls imperialist expansion's "fin de siècle motif," the perverse nostalgia that accompanied the closing of the frontier and the furthest reaches of global colonialism's expansion, in which the colonizers mourned the loss of "the last wild,

[276] Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire," *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged.* Ed. Hamid Naficy, Teshome Gabriel, (Langhorne: Harwood. 1993), 53.
[277] See Piper in *Cartographic Fictions* for more regarding the ties between primitivism's temporality and the uncanny. There's much in the cannibal *filone* about recognizing the self in the other, or at least the past self, given the temporal play – this imbrication of the homely within cannibalistic practice is perhaps clearer in the American subgenre of the backwoods Southern cannibal clans, with examples as varied as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise and the notorious "Home" episode of *The X-Files*.

unexplored places on earth".[278] The salvage ethnography movement, born out of this dissonant melancholia, sought to record indigenous peoples not as they were found, but as ethnographers *imagined* they might have lived had they not come into contact with colonialism—as Rony notes, Flaherty did not record "Nanook" as he lived but how Flaherty imagined he *might* have lived.[279] This self-effacing project—motivated not by shame or humility, but megalomania—which sought to erase every trace of "the white man's foot,"[280] occupies a similar desirous register as that of the crypto-ethnography of the cannibal cycle, while also representing the same conduits of imagination that the *filone*'s filmmakers traversed in their imaging of a fantasy indigenous other, untouched by the modern world. In *Cannibal Holocaust*, Professor Monroe's journey into the Amazonian "green inferno" is motivated by the mystery of the disappeared documentary crew, and his efforts are not only rewarded by the discovery of the as-yet-undiscovered cannibalistic Yanomomo tribe, but also by the revelation of the crew's unedited footage, which reveals the profoundly constructed nature of the so-called documentary they were producing. Despite their numerous violent interventions into the world they've "discovered," the footage reveals the crew's breathless excitement in supposedly having reached "that spot where time stopped 3 or 4,000 years ago," and the possibility of plunging ever further into the mysterious "edge of the world and history" upon which they now find themselves, bearing with them not plundered silver but the visually captured indigene. Indeed, the coda of *Cannibal Holocaust's* film within a film,

[278] Lim, *Translating Time*, 79.
[279] Rony, *The Third Eye*, 15.
[280] Ibid., 92.

which caps its highly manipulated ethnographic footage with the recorded deaths and bodily consumption of the iniquitous documentary crew themselves, is perhaps the truest reenactment of the dissonant fantasies at the heart of the salvage ethnography movement. [281]

Beyond their construction of the image of the anachronistic yet extant cannibal other which confronts Western modernity in its own time, the cannibal *filone* enacts a further mixing of disparate temporalities. In its inclusion of the discovered footage of the lost filmmakers, intercut with scenes from the professor's parallel Amazonian journey, the filmmakers' previous mondo-style work, *The Last Road to Hell*, as well as the deliberations of the network suits in New York City over the final fate of the gruesome footage, *Cannibal Holocaust* perhaps represents the most tangled knot of conflicting mediated temporalities, particularly given the use of stock footage of unknown provenance (often rumored to contain real snuff)[282] to create *The Last Road to Hell*. However, this temporal entanglement occurs throughout the subgenre, narratively in the repeated presence of recovered film and photographic images—or even biological remains—of past deaths and kidnappings which often prompt the films' central explorative journey, and on the level of the filmmaking itself, in the widespread intercutting of generic animal stock footage to create affordable moments of jungle terror without endangering the actors.

[281] This same desire to preserve or consume the other has been linked explicity to the erotic – see Shohat's work on the erotics of male exploration in "Gender and Culture of Empire," or McClintock's concept of porno-tropics in *Imperial Leather*, as just a few examples. This finds great expression in the Italian cannibal cycle, most obviously in the numerous scenes of eroticized consensual sex and rape between the male Western interloper and feminized natives, and in the common trope of the ultimate literal castration of this same male explorer.
[282] Brottman, *Offensive Films*, 130.

This intermingling of material evidence—both biological and nonorganic, of intersecting and contradicting temporalities—is furthered by the material intermingling of human and non-human bodies in the film cycle. Within these films, the indexical slaughter of animals by the actors uneasily coexists with comparably chaste animal stock footage of unknown provenance, while intra- and extra-textual rumors of snuff and the indexical killing of humans butt up against the visually florid spectacle of unindexical murder and maiming powered by cutting edge special effects work. *Cannibal Holocaust* owes at least some of its infamy to the court case launched against Deodato in the wake of its release and the director's (perhaps ill-advised) marketing tactic which required the main cast to not appear in other media for a set time in the hopes of adding fuel to the rumor that the found footage within *Cannibal Holocaust*—and by extension, the actor's onscreen deaths—were real. That Deodato was allegedly charged not only with obscenity but with the actors' murders, requiring the dramatic court testimony of the sequestered actors and of the special effects director,[283] has become a larger than life origin story which, along with its oft-trumpeted claim to have been banned in 53 countries, maximizes *Cannibal Holocaust*'s already outsized reputation among horror and gore fans for "delivering the goods." Yet these goods are by design thorny, troubling, ambivalent even for the most dedicated gorehound, as the existence of "vegan" cuts of the film can attest. These fan-created and circulated[284] cuts of the film excise the indexical killing of animals, leaving intact the nonindexical scenes of

[283] Ibid., 110.
[284] At least initially—the latest special edition DVD release of *Cannibal Holocaust* offers an animal cruelty free cut of the film among its expansive bonus materials.

human bodily mutilation.[285] But I would argue that what troubles the mind and turns the stomach of the viewers of *Cannibal Holocaust* reaches far beyond these recordings of indexical animal killing. In the free intermixing of temporalities and corporeal materialities, *Cannibal Holocaust* and its *filone* cohort places the special effects body front and center, and foregrounds not only the excessively enteric horror of the cannibal figure, but its relationship to temporal rupture as well. These two modes are intertwined within the cannibal figure, an allochronic and emphatically embodied revenant who both exceeds and reinscribes logics of empire and technologies of capture. Allow me to elaborate.

As Rony argues in her analysis of *King Kong* (dir. Cooper and Schoedsack, US, 1933), while the body of the ethnographed other becomes monstrous by nature of its very representation, it is the indigenous person who transcends his temporal containment in the distant past to confront modernity in its present who becomes a mortal threat, "and it is the implicitly monstrous character of this [temporal] hybridity which *King Kong* takes literally."[286] It is cinematic ethnographic spectacle that formulates monstrosity in the register of horror, for it is in the confrontation of coevalness with the ethnographed other that temporal boundaries collapse into each other, and history itself is under threat. Having imaged the cannibal other as decidedly out of step with the evolutionary continuity of global historical time, the Italian cannibal cycle then throws its young (and almost invariably American) representatives of modernity into contact and ultimately conflict with the space-

[285] These scenes of special effects-powered nonindexical violence against humans in Cannibal Holocaust nevertheless contain widespread use of animal body parts, despite the "vegan" label.
[286] Rony, *The Third Eye*, 155.

time of the anachronistic indigene. One could link this insistent American-ness of the protagonists to the sort of cannibalism—through capitalization— of Italy enacted under the postwar Marshall Plan, as another ripple of ruptured time which pervades the filone. Unlike King Kong, it is the Western present that invades the indigenous past, and it is the consumption of the interloper that neutralizes the threat, rather than the death of the indigene, yet ripples of tension remain. In *Cannibal Holocaust*, the unsuccessful suppression of the recovered footage undoes the reparative move of the filmmakers' consumption and absorption at the hands of the Yanomomo, just as the graduate student protagonist of *Cannibal Ferox* chooses to deny the reality of her violent encounter upon returning to New York, suggesting that the threat of the coeval indigene bleeds beyond physical presence, even into the knowledge of his very (co)existence. Like Kong hanging from the Empire State Building, the voracious extant cannibal of the Italian cycle is a prehistorical revenant who threatens to swallow not just the Western interloper but history itself. Indeed, the larger associated category of flesh-eating horror films which became hugely popular in the same period, the Italian zombie and occult horror cycles, figure a similar cannibalistic apocalypse through allochronic rupture—rather than enacting the end of history through the threat of the evolutionarily backward other devouring modernity itself, in these films it is most often a leap forward in time (through futuristic chemical, biological, or technical breakthroughs) that ensures the swallowing of the present.

In its imagination of the all-devouring, man-eating other inhabiting the liminal zones of the globe, the Italian cannibal film takes up a mode of figuring the world and ones' place within it with a long history and a strong imbrication with Western projects of empire-

making. This forms the core of the cannibal *filone*'s affective charge and popular appeal, while also comprising its most tangled ethical and ideological implications—as in its engagement with conflicting and differentiated ethnic and spatially bound temporalities, these films tend to both problematize and interrogate this mode of thinking while also engaging in it at the same time. Just as every child has at some point lived with the terrible (and wonderful) knowledge that some manner of monstrosity resides in the dark corners of his or her bedroom, the human impulse to imagine spaces which are hidden from view as breeding grounds for the fantastic provides a pleasurable and frightening fantasy, and this curiosity and capacity for wonder can be identified both in cinematic spectacle and in the shopworn logics of Imperialism. Much like the Wunderkammer's revelation of wonderous objects otherwise hidden from sight either by the distance of geography or by the veil of the skin, and the growing ambivalence with which the curiosity became divided from the properly rational and scientific discussed in Chapter 1—which was accompanied by a corollary suspicion of hidden knowledges and practices as magical or irrational—the human encounter with the unknown seems fundamentally tinged not just with abjection, but with imaginative desire. From its inception, the cartographic project of visually mapping out that which spatially exceeds apprehension by the human eye alone was accompanied by this intrinsic impulse, such that Roman and medieval European maps often bore the inscription "Here are lions" or even "Here are dragons" on as yet unexplored sections of land and sea. This practice continued into the age of exploration, at which time the limits of European knowledge (and vision) were graphically depicted on maps through the images of sea

creatures, mermaids, and cannibals.[287] As Ann McClintock notes in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest,* blank spaces on 18th century colonial maps were routinely traced over with simply the word 'cannibals.'[288] The colonial map functions as a technology of Imperial knowledge and possession undergirded by visually-based claims to ontological truth and representation, yet at the same time it reproduces lapses, breaks, and gaps within this bank of knowledge, as well as anxieties, fears, and desires within the Imperial psyche. For McClintock, "the map is a liminal thing, associated with thresholds and marginal zones, burdened with dangerous powers. As an exemplary icon of imperial 'truth,' the map, like the compass and the mirror, is what [Peter] Hulme aptly calls 'a magic technology,' a potent fetish helping colonials negotiate the perils of margins and thresholds in a world of terrifying ambiguities."[289] Within the cannibal cycle, cinema can be understood to function in a similar way—with its diegetic obsessions with film technologies and filmmakers, the 'war machines' seized upon by Western imperialism to contain the threat of the anachronistic other are not fighter jets, as in *King Kong*, but rather 16mm cameras and microphones, gesturing beyond the diegesis to the historical function of ethnographic imaging to visually arrest and apprehend the other, and to fix their meaning, as one might pin an "exotic' butterfly in a case.

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[287] Karen Linnea Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race, and Identity,* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002), 6.
[288] Anne Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27.
[289] Ibid., 28, Peter Hulme, "Polytropic Man: Tropes of Sexuality and Mobility in Early Colonial Discourse," in Francis Barker et al., eds., Europe and ltd Otberd, vol. 2. (Essex: University of Essex, 1984).

In playing with the function of visual technology as "magic technology" of Imperialist ethnography, much like the colonial map, the films of the cannibal *filone* most often problematize the colonial legacy of such modes of figuring while participating in a similar ethnographic project themselves. In *Cannibal Holocaust*, the film cans and recording equipment of the devoured documentary crew become a literal fetish for the Yanomomo, who fashion a grisly totem by fusing the mechanical remains of the crew with those of a more biological sort, creating a totem of fused bone, hair, plastic, glass, and celluloid.

During the final scene of the film crew's murder at the hands of the Yanomamo, the filmmakers reach only for their cameras to defend themselves, desperately filming the moment of their own deaths, calling to mind the historical function of visual media capture as a technology of colonial genocide. The Western explorers of *Cannibal Ferox, The Man from Deep River*, and *Massacre in Dinosaur Valley*, to name only a few, all enter the time-space of the monstrous indigene with an easy confidence and laden with recording technology, and are ultimately disabused of their sense of inviolability grounded in their technologically mediated role as bearers of the Imperialist power born of the ethnographic gaze. In Lenzi's *Eaten Alive*, this is taken to the poetic extreme, as the dispassionate footage taken by an American tourist of indigenous dancers in Papua New Guinea serves as the sole trace of her existence after she disappears—yet the mindset of the ethnographic gaze ensures that the camera remains trained on the "ethnograph-able" native performance, thereby capturing nothing of its operator's abduction. These films make clear the deep imbrication between such projects of visual control and imagination, in which lapses produced by the failure of the eye to see or to decipher are filled in by what is imagined and pre-figured, or pre-seen,

recalling the chilling ending words spoken to the ethnographer in Fatimah Rony's video art piece *On Cannibalism*—"You imagined us, you captured us, and then you devoured us." This one-way communication produces and codifies partial and problematic knowledges, a concomitant violence of contact alongside the material and visual appropriation of the bodies and textural lifeways of the colonized, which is highlighted and explored through a variety of narrative and stylistic strategies in *Cannibal Holocaust*—more on this later.

Much like the visual technology of the map's fetishistic charge as a totem of colonial power, which at the same time reflects both the breadth and the limits of that power and knowledge, the recording technologies of visual media function as a magic object for the Western characters of the cannibal cycle, whose blind faith in cameras and microphones exposes visual capture as a powerful tool of the colonial project. Yet at the same time as these films train a critical (or at least bitingly ironic) eye on such legacies of ethnographic capture, their depiction of the temporally out-of-step native as an engine for spectatorial horror, no matter what sympathies to the natives' quest for vengeance the narrative might inspire, participates in the same genealogy of figuring racial and cultural difference as the monstrous anachronistic other that their filmmakers might seek to problematize.

Yet the cannibal figure itself represents both a symptom of the colonial imagination, as well as its defeat. As a figure which blends the ambivalent desire and fear for the unseen and the uncontacted other, a relationship which depends on the imaginative construction of the figure itself, the cannibal, like the wolfman, exists at a contentious cultural crossroads. A border figure who both defines and transgresses longstanding cultural divisions through the

excessive nature of his spectacular body, the cannibal foregrounds entericity clearly routed through logics of time and its allochronic rupture, the visible and the occulted, ontological and subjective truth, communication and its impossibility. That the cannibal in film is most often represented alongside spectacular visual effects is not the limit of its importance for understanding bodily special effects and their material, sensuous enmeshments—rather, as an inherently corporeal, material construction who both defines and erupts fundamental dividing lines through the excessive, out-of-place (and out-of-time, out-of-sight) nature of its body and bodily functions, the cannibal makes visible the tangled cultural, mediated, material connections too often effaced in our discussions of and encounters with special effects bodies.

II. *Mangiati Vivi!* Digesting and Defanging the Mediated Cannibal

Given the Italian cannibal film cycle's retreading (and repurposing) of the cannibal figure's imbrication within colonial and Orientalist logics, fantasies, and desires, this corpus will be my main focus in this chapter's case studies. This section will delve into the mouth as contested locus of power, whether through the production of speech or through the ingestion of matter, the place of the enteric imaginary within the diegesis as well as projecting out to interface between viewer (and fan) body and special effects body, and the ruminative return (and putting to use) of animal lives and biological matter in the onscreen production of these films' affective anthropophagical spectacle. In teasing apart the many rhetorical threads of *Cannibal Holocaust* and its genre bedfellows, entericity remains an important method of

approach which takes up the multivalent affects of disgust which extend from these films, as well as revealing the critical viscerality which underpins the uniquely subversive nature of their spectacular bodily effects, which I will turn to later on in the chapter.

It is within the corpus of the Italian cannibal film that one finds the clearest picture of, and the most play with, the cannibal figure as germinated in the Western mind through centuries of exploration and colonial exploitation. That these films overwhelmingly situate a desirous, fantasizing Western interloper within an originary quest through the "green inferno" or "savage jungle," then deposit them in a ruptured space time "where adventure ends…and hell begins!" —to quote the marketing tagline of *The Man from Deep River*— constructs a "hell" very much of their own imaginative making, and the meaning-making of countless before them. That the revenge, so to speak, of the intruded-upon indigene is to consume the Western protagonists, whether ritually or as a casual meal, inaugurates a larger destabilizing of broader logics and cultural divisions, an unlatching which is located within the torn-apart bodies of each film's unhappy victims, as well as several indexically murdered animals. Certainly, the imaginative making of the body-based cannibals is then followed by the un-making of bodies of the Western explorers, but this extends to a further unhinging of the divisions between human and animal, subject and object, flesh and meat. Moreover, this unhinging does not rest solely on the narrative's (sometimes frail) shoulders—it is the spectacular scenes of bodily destruction themselves, and the special effects bodies enfolded and enmeshed within, that inaugurate a broader unmooring of easy divisions between self/other, animal/human, and food/eater.

It is to these spectacular assemblages, as the meat of the matter in every sense, that I will now turn my focus. While pinning down these biotechnical assemblages across scene, film, and genre can often seem a Herculean task, particularly given their inherent liminal slipperiness and ephemerality—without official archive or preservation beyond their onscreen trace— it is exactly within their squishy, slippery, excessive organicity and materiality that their power lies. This power to fascinate, to reveal, to exceed and to escape—their curious/wondrous "bioluminescence," to borrow from Zielinski—engages with the enteric imaginary primarily, and thus we need an enteric approach to begin to tease them apart. By taking seriously our 'gut feelings,' I argue that an enteric imaginary becomes not simply a conceptualization for these assemblages' curious natures and enmeshments, but rather a method of excavation which is necessarily alive to the thickly textural materiality and fold logics of the myriad human and more-than-human bodies onscreen. Such a formation speaks the lie to theoretical, industrial, and transnational discourses of seamlessness or immateriality within film and media, as I've explored in previous chapters, while also revealing the spectral, spoken, in a sense immaterial nature of supposedly solid cultural dualisms, divisions, and categorizations. And in foregrounding the thickly encrusted connections between all that is fleshly or material both within and outside of the diegetic, the enteric imaginary as method, in centering the viscera, draws into focus the viscerality critical to excavating the special effects body, particularly in the mobile target of an always partial and always becoming transnational exploitation "genre," of which the Italian cannibal cycle is a part. This viscerality includes both the biomaterial matter and congealed labor of human and animal bodies, as well as the vital bodily-based and expressly material affinities,

feedbacks, flows—disgust, consumption, rumination, excretion—which crackle between onscreen spectacular body and viewer, and which together constitute the spectacular effects body hybrid. Just as the limit case of the transnational exploitation "genre," as I will argue in the next chapter, reminds us that there is much of the "productively chaotic" that is foreclosed when boundaries around objects are tightly drawn, or when surfaces are skimmed rather than materially, texturally excavated, the enteric imaginary embraces the productive chaos in approaching the sensuous, visceral entanglements of the special effects body that are otherwise difficult to see, to re-member or re-matter, but are nevertheless, I argue, critical to their exploration and conceptualization. To that end, this section will take up both the effects bodies onscreen in films which figure the cannibal as catalyst for spectacular stagings of human and animal gore, as well as the visceral, enteric connections and flows which extend outward from these bodies to a myriad of other corporealities, both human and otherwise.

As simultaneously the most beloved and reviled jewel in the crown of the Italian cannibal cycle, *Cannibal Holocaust* offers perhaps its most intense example of the material, bodily grounded flows and interactions which hinge upon (and outward from) the special effects body. Certainly the animal body's vital (and often unnoticed) presence within cinematic special effects of all kinds is made violently, emphatically tangible through the film's many scenes of indexical animal torture and killing, which seem to draw far more disgust and disapprobation than the film's many famous scenes of unindexical human mutilation, as the commercial and fan-made circulation of "vegan" cuts of the film suggests. That these versions of the film, which excise only the scenes of animal killing in order to make the lovingly crafted, extensive scenes of violence against humans more palatable, are

sometimes paradoxically called "cruelty-free" cuts of *Cannibal Holocaust* is instructive. Cruelty in and of itself is a major hallmark of the film, as well as a clear feature of its production given the indexical animal scenes and their reception, and as I will argue further on in the chapter, a critical thread in the film's contextualization of bodily consumption, mediated and otherwise, within the long history of visual capture of spectacular bodies as a function of imperialist desires. Alongside this cruelty's inspiration of legal, moral, and aesthetic condemnation, *Cannibal Holocaust*'s reception and censure by the state and the legal system of Britain offers a keen example of the ways that disgust and other gut-based affects can become the primary driver of not only viewer but also institutional engagements with spectacular effects bodies onscreen. Moreover, I will argue that the ambivalent public and institutional reactions to the film reveal tensions around the implications of human and animal violence on impressionable viewers, the safe distancing of viewer from violent and erotic bodily spectacle and its relationship to shifting exhibition modes as well as to degrees of convincing realism in special effects techniques, and the ameliatory mode of educational vs. the more suspicious valence of entertainment and the relationship of both to the provocation of disgust and horror in the viewer.

In their shifting classification and proscription of the film over the last four decades, The British Board of Film Censors (now known as the British Board of Film Classification) utilizes a gradated taxonomy of cruelty, which intermixes and contrasts the role of human and animal actors, linking both clearly to disgust and to moral outrage.[290] *Cannibal*

[290] Created as a private organization by the industry to stave off government censorship efforts in the 1910s, much like the American MPAA's adoption of the Hays code, the BBFC became vested with

Holocaust—though released before the passage of the Video Recordings Act of 1984 appointed the BBFC to regulate home video releases through classified certification—immediately became one of the most visible targets of the "video nasties" moral panic, cited by activists and sensational popular press accounts as a "distasteful fricassee of pornography, rape and murder" and "a slur on British life."[291]

According to the modern BBFC, the distributors of *Cannibal Holocaust* never attempted to submit the film for a cinematic certification as it was highly unlikely to be certified for theatrical release in Britain. Instead, they released a "slightly pre-cut" version into the then-unregulated UK VHS market in 1982. Swiftly landing on the Director of Public Prosecutions "video nasties" list, the tapes were almost immediately liable to seizure followed by prosecution of those attempting to distribute, sell, or rent them, a criminal proscription which was solidified by the 1984 implementation of the BBFC's home video certification program. This new classification system was more stringent than that applied to cinematic releases by design, as home video "filth" was widely seen as more likely to fall into the hands of children, given its unique ability to "invad[e] the home."[292] As one of the most "hard core of nasties that would certainly have posed major difficulties for the BBFC had they been submitted for classification," *Cannibal Holocaust* was not officially submitted

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government power with the passage of the 1984 Video Recordings Act. Their classification power now was brought to bear on the previously unregulated home video market, and came with the power to prosecute distributors and sellers of films deemed to include obscene material, or of any film not given a license by the BBFC. While this legislation remains in force, the BBFC's notion of obscenity has become distilled into primarily that which may cause a criminal offense (primarily violation of the 1937 Cinematograph Films Animals Act.)

[291] Petley, "Moral Panic."

[292] Ibid.

for home video certification until 2001. The BBFC notes that at the time, it was deemed to contain unacceptable scenes of sexual violence and of unfaked animal cruelty. In the former case, they cite their policy at the time of refusing unduly "eroticized" or "endorsed" portrayals of rape, while the animal cruelty they describe as being an infraction of British law, given that it was "clearly unsimulated and deliberately orchestrated by the filmmakers."[293] These decisions required the distributors to remove 5 minutes and 44 seconds of footage from eight scenes to receive an 18 classification. In 2011, the film was resubmitted for consideration, and the board then found that as the scenes of rape contained "limited detail of nudity and therefore little eroticization," and now judging that "their likely effect was to horrify and disgust the audience," they would no longer need to be cut before release for an adult market. The needle had also moved on the board's estimation of the bulk of the animal cruelty scenes—they now found that only one of the four previously cut scenes needed intervention. This was the death of the coati at the hands of Professor Monroe's guide early in the frame narrative, and it is arguably the most violent and viscerally affecting to watch in the entire film, as the squirming and shrieking animal is slowly eviscerated in a closeup shot. In discussing their new finding that only this scene constituted animal cruelty and thus violated the 1937 Animal cruelty law, the BBFC's public case files suggest that this was due less to a change in policy in the intervening years, but more to *Cannibal Holocaust*'s nauseating cultural and legal reputation: "It was acknowledged that the decision to cut these scenes in 2001 was primarily the result of the disgusting nature of the sequences, as well as

[293] "*Cannibal Holocaust*," *British Board of Film Censors – Case Studies*, accessed 17 August 2022, https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/case-studies/cannibal-holocaust.

the history of the film as a DPP-listed 'video nasty', rather than the result of a strict application of policy."[294] The film's original runtime was ultimately restored, save for a 15 second cut excising the wounding of the coati, and this version remains the most complete version available commercially in the UK.

In its gradation of both unindexical sexual assault and indexical violence against animals, the brief justification made public by the BBFC for its historical prohibitions of *Cannibal Holocaust,* in whole or in part, links questions of obscenity, cruelty, criminality, education, and entertainment primarily to disgust. Beyond admitting that the film's disgusting, immoral, and even criminal reputation informed the 2001 board's reading of both rape and animal slaughter in the film as either morally repugnant or unlawfully cruel, the BBFC's 2011 findings seemingly suggest that scenes of sexual violence necessitate clearly visible, sustained attention on the "detail" of naked bodies of victim and perpetrator to be dangerously eroticized or endorsed, and positions the intentionally disgusting or horrifying on the opposite pole, as acceptable, morally benign depictions of sexual violence. The enmeshment of the "living" body onscreen with the living bodies of its viewers is therefore of chief importance to the BBFC's shifting conceptions of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s abject and contaminating nature—whether on the basis of dangerous arousal or morally edifying disgust. Certainly this tracks with the BBFC's stated mission of protecting the British public, especially children, from socially and culturally corrosive material, imagined as capable of eliciting antisocial behaviors in otherwise anodyne citizenry. This is well evidenced by then-

[294] Ibid.

BBFC director James Ferman's extensive campaign against *The Exorcist*'s (dir. William Friedkin, US, 1974) video release in 1988, despite its cinematic release having been certified in 1974, on the basis of its supposedly proven power to cause hysteria and "serious disturb[ance]" in teenagers and children, "particularly girls."[295] Ferman claimed to have solicited testimony to this danger from "child psychologists," in line with much of the wider discourse against this film and those on the video nasties list which made frequent use of shaky scientific claims, including conservative MP Graham Bright's assertion that "there is research taking place and it will show that these films not only affect young people but I believe they affect dogs as well."[296]

Yet, the primary tool with which the BBFC seems to have navigated their excision of film material on the basis of obscenity and social danger is disgust, as 'gut feelings' which not only identified certain scenes as criminally or morally obscene, but also labelled others as safe for the public to consume, whether in the cinema or in the more stringently defended realm of home video. In the absence of actual scientific findings on what precisely would cause violent mental or physical unrest on the part of viewers, or what would influence antisocial or criminal behavior in otherwise respectable members of the public, the BBFC identified the disgusting both as black mark and saving grace of scenes and entire films in wading into the previously unregulated home video market and the highly volatile moral panic raging then around it. Aside from the actual prosecution for obscenity of creators and

[295] Petley, "Are We Insane?"
[296] Phelim O'Neill, "*The Evil Dead, The Living Dead* and the Dead Wrong," *Guardian* 15 October 2010.

distributors slowly winding their way through the courtroom, and the limited legal framework offered by Parliament's official proscription of child exploitation onscreen and of animal cruelty "organized" by filmmakers for the purposes of entertainment, the BBFC found themselves with official guidance only slightly clearer than that given to individual police officers tasked with raiding video shops—removing whatever they judged to be obscene based on their gut reaction to titles and VHS covers—in the years before the 1984 Video Recordings Act. In the language of their official reporting,[297] both during the early years of their classification of the infamous video nasties and in retrospective 'case studies,' BBFC censors directly and indirectly invoke disgust as a primary body-based tool for engaging with and evaluating the safety of full films and scenes, as well as a predictive tool for managing risk to the British public, particularly children and teens. This imaginative projection—critical to their success as a regulating censorship body—requires an implicit extension of an individual's personal, corporeal engagement with a given film to navigate and predict the potential physical, emotional, or behavioral harm (itself linked in their discourse to physical bodily reactions such as arousal, and the potential impulse to act out criminally as a result) that may be worked or not worked upon the embodied citizens they aimed to protect. Interestingly, this imagined citizen is both a potential victim in need of protection from the potentially destructive VHS tape's otherwise unfettered penetration into the unsuspecting British home, as well as a potential criminal or moral reprobate, as biddable and animalistic as MP Bright's supposedly media-addled dogs, who might be driven to

[297] "Cannibal Holocaust," BBFC; "The Exorcist," *British Board of Film Censors – Case Studies*, accessed 17 August 2022.

relocate "eroticized" scenes of sexual violence on film into destructive actions in the real world. In their original judgement on *Cannibal Holocaust*'s scenes of animal killing, the BBFC invokes the (physically, culturally) disgusting nature of these scenes as making them inappropriate for video release, imagining their potential to cause harm to the bodies and minds of the British home video audience due to their disgusting nature. This is quite in line with the wider cultural discourse around the video nasty as concept, which largely positioned the glut of previously uncertified horror films suddenly available in the UK due to the new home video market as extremely dangerous objects emphatically because of the disgustingly excessive gory spectacles they contained,[298] almost viral in their ability to physically harm and morally contaminate their viewers. That the majority of these authors and activists had clearly never seen the films in question, nor had the police constables who routinely were sent to confiscate and destroy all obscene material from the local VHS purveyors and distributors—legend tells of common seizures the decidedly non-obscene Dolly Parton musical *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*—didn't seem to weaken this narrative. Moreover, BBFC director James Ferman's contention that their organization recorded

[298] It's important to note that the spectacles of gore, sex, and gory sex that video nasties were supposedly brimming with were in most cases an imagined construct, based on often misleadingly sensational VHS cover art, the hyperbolic titles common to horror at the time, and the marketing ballyhoo traditional to the 'exploitation genre,' such as it is. Some did of course contain huge amounts of gory spectacle powered by extremely convincing and cutting-edge special effects work, particularly *Cannibal Holocaust* and Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (Italy, 1977), but many did not yet were trumpeted in popular press and by conservative advocates as unimaginable phantasmagoria of obscenity never before witnessed on British shores. One particular whipping boy was Abel Ferrera's *Driller Killer* (US, 1978), given its eye-catching cover art that centered a screaming man, blood pouring from his head as a drill bit is being driven into it in closeup. However, despite its several quick scenes of gory drill kills, the film is first and foremost a languid and often comedic character study of a failing painter and other young bohemians in New York. See Petley, "Moral Panic," and Brottman, *Offensive Films*.

numerous documented cases of hysterical unrest and of physical reactions such as vomiting and fainting that occurred in children who had gone to see *The Exorcist* during its theatrical release directly invokes the film's frequently grotesque spectacles of special effects-powered body horror as directly threatening harm to its more impressionable viewers, thus making it too revolting of an experience for home viewing certification at any level.

Yet at the same time, disgust is invoked in the BBFC's analyses of both films as making acceptable certain viscerally affecting scenes. Repeatedly they found that the construction of scenes of sexual violence, if likely to disgust, revolt, or even horrify the viewer, would make their inclusion in certified releases acceptable. Invoked often as the opposite and thereby sanitizing affective, physical feedback to filmed scenes than eroticism, disgust provoked by such scenes was seen as the moral, "correct" physical reaction on the part of the public. In describing the depiction of *The Exorcist*'s possessed child protagonist violently stabbing into her vagina with an increasingly bloodied crucifix, the BBFC found it passable for certification given that grotesque appearance of Linda Blair's Reagan by that point of the film—per the examiner, "already halfway to becoming a pustulating gargoyle'[299]—together with the presence of her horrified mother ("One hardly anticipates a queue of mothers lining up all turned on by the idea of licking their offspring"), resulted in a scene most likely to provoke a disgusted reaction, and was therefore not an 'indecent' depiction of a child.[300] The mortified "pustulating" flesh of the possessed monstrous child

[299] 1984 BBFC examiner files qtd. in Martin Ian Smith, "Remembering 'the Scariest Movie of All Time:' A Grounded Audience Study of *The Exorcist*," Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University (2019).
[300] Smith, "Remembering the Scariest Movie."

makes safe the potential obscenity of her violent masturbation, while the moral disgust of the incest taboo further dispels any threat of eroticism. Despite this scene being dubbed acceptable through its affective grotesqueries, however, *The Exorcist* continued to be refused certification until 1999, at which time the incoming BBFC director argued that the prevailing decades had "done much to date the special effects,"[301] presumably diminishing the ability of the film's body horror set pieces to disgust and horrify to the point of harm.

The same bodily special effects, it seems, that transformed Linda Blair into a grotesque—and therefore acceptably distancing—gargoyle in the crucifix masturbation scene had elsewhere in the film been the largest obstacle to *The Exorcist*'s certification for video release, and again it was their power to disgust upon which this evaluation turned. Key to this threat to the embodied responses of the British public is the idea of the reality value inherent in these extreme scenes of special effects gore, judged by the BBFC to be much diminished for contemporary viewers in 1998. It is this sense of realism that is shot through much of the BBFC's estimation of the threat posed by a wide variety of horror and exploitation film since the advent of the video nasty, and is of particular interest in understanding the peculiar power of *Cannibal Holocaust* to delight, disgust, and terrify viewers and fans far beyond the UK, a power that has emphatically not diminished in the intervening years since its release.

Cannibal Holocaust features numerous scenes of violent mutilation or death, seven of which depict the indexical killing of animals, the rest of the unindexical killing or wounding of humans, and the film-within-a-film, "The Green Inferno," that sometimes has been

[301] Ibid.

claimed to at least partially contain footage of the actual killing of humans.[302] Of the animal deaths figured in the film, only four are generally identified by fans, academics, and critics (as well as the British censors)—that of a coati, a giant turtle, a pig, and a monkey. The onscreen killings of a snake and a tarantula are typically not singled out for censure, in keeping with Vivian Sobchack's observation that only certain types of animals, typically mammals, work to elicit most viewer's responsibility for care.[303] Moreover, the seventh creature killed onscreen is virtually ignored in academic or popular writing on the subject of the film's animal cruelty—when Chaco, Monroe's guide, discovers the corpse of a fellow

[302] in the scene in which the network executives screen for Monroe "The Last Road to Hell," a previous documentary produced by the vanished crew in an unnamed "third world" location torn by civil unrest and extrajudicial state violence, following a few moments of this "found footage" of executions by firing squad and corpses sprawled in city streets, similarly visually marked as such through damage and decay to the film stock and an assumption of generic documentary presentational conventions, the executives declare that it was all faked, cooked up by the crew in their usual manner. However, the disquietingly visceral footage has long been extratextually rumored to be actual footage taken from some unknown news reportage depicting actual extrajudicial murders, thus constituting an actual moment in the film of indexical human killing – scholars who have written on the film remain divided on this point, and Deodato has (likely intentionally) muddied the waters further by alternately claiming in later interviews that it is true snuff footage he acquired through a British stock film company, or that he fabricated it whole cloth, shooting the scenes in the Roman Di Paulis studio "in the style of Jacopetti." In either case, Cannibal Holocaust remains full of conflicting signals and incommensurable moments which rupture the ontological status of the film, of which the unfaked deaths of its animal subjects represent but one instance.
There's really no consensus on the indexicality of these scenes of human killing, and little chance it will ever be conclusively proven one way or another. Deodato has claimed by turns that he found some actual snuff footage in the collection of a stock footage purveyor, or that he filmed the entire sequence full cloth "in the style of Jacopetti." The sequence itself seems a mishmash of different times and places, with absolutely no context (even the suspect narration we're given elsewhere from the compulsively deceitful documentarians is omitted, as are identifying locations or timestamps). To my eye, the footage seems no more or less convincingly achieved than the faked scenes in many other mondo-style films. I can also see how Deodato's clear exhaustion at the moral debates surrounding his film's incorporation of animal death becoming a primary part of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s legacy would provide a reasonable motivation to deny including footage of human death onscreen, had he actually done so. See Hobbs, "Animal Snuff" and Brottman, *Offensive Films*.
[303] Vivian Sobchak, "Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 9:4 (1984), 283-300.

guide in the jungle, he removes the live maggots and beetles from his partially skeletonized face with the point of his machete, carelessly (and perhaps accidentally on the part of the actor) crushing at least one. As Sobchack notes in her discussion of the locust immolation in *Days of Heaven*, the types of animals that jolt us out of narrative and into documentary space are most often individuated, subjectively limited and often culturally defined.[304] That the maggot, arrayed with several others across the sculpted prosthetic skull of the rotting corpse, seems almost accidentally crushed by the offscreen actor manipulating the prosthetic by machete-point in closeup raises the question of intent— in the absence of the clearly deliberate working of human power on the body of the animal, [305] does this scene lose the visceral charge present in *Cannibal Holocaust*'s other scenes of animal killing? Moreover, is there something in the stillness of this completely sculpted effects prosthetic, representing a corpse decomposed to the point of skeletonization save for a few gelatin flesh clumps bedaubed over the bones, that makes easier the viewer's interpretation of these live insects as mere objects in a still life, rather than living flesh within the hybridized special effects body? In the next section, I will be guided by a further question this moment raises: throughout *Cannibal Holocaust*'s (often uneasy) marriage of organic and inorganic fleshly materials, as well as of documentary and narrative 'fact' and fiction, what enteric entanglements are in play in directing the responses of fans, critics, and censors?

III. Dogs, Cannibals, Cameras: Faces of Death in the *Mondo Cannibale*

[304] Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 280.
[305] Ibid., 284.

Critical to understanding the nature of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s (and indeed the entire cannibal cycle's) indexical onscreen killings is its relationship to the mondo film, its similarly controversial genre progenitor. Drawing on the classical exploitation film's hailing of the spectator to witness the shocking but true activities of exoticized humans elsewhere, chief among them the violation of cultural taboos, the mondo (literally "world") film freely intermixed cheaply purchased stock footage with original faked material designed to simulate documentary aesthetics, and repurposed these scenes within often fantastically invented "factual" narration, delivered in sober voiceover in imitation of an educational film. Originally produced in Italy starting in the 1960s, the mondo mode was later adapted in a variety of production contexts, notably in the 1980s in the American *Faces of Death* video series and its wave of imitators, including series such as *Traces of Death* and *Faces of Gore*. While this later incarnation of the mondo cycle shifted focus entirely to footage of (allegedly indexical, but actually a mix of indexical and unindexical simulations) animal and human death and maiming, the original mondo subgenre had always included this as a primary element of its promised revelations of otherwise hidden, salacious activities in distant (to its primary audience of Western viewers) locales. Chief among these vignettes were the bodily excesses of "uncontacted" groups in the global south, presented in the style of a travelogue cum salvage ethnography and offering the bodily spectacle of the racialized other in the form of dizzying kaleidoscopic montage. These films partake in longstanding orientalist, imperialist legacies of human exhibition, yet their hodgepodge structure is most closely related to the cabinet of curiosities tradition, which maximized surprise and often bizarre combination of disparate elements in their construction of an embodied, haptic sense of

wonder in the viewer. They likewise participate in free manipulation of their subjects, decontextualizing and repurposing existing stock footage (itself most often filmed in an ethnographic colonial context) while also inventing whole cloth their own pseudo-documentatary footage of imagined indigenes partaking in bodily-grounded behaviors which highlight their most extreme difference from Western European cultural norms. Importantly, these spectacular behaviors are most often worked upon human and animal bodies.

Mondo Cane (*Dog's World*, 1962, Italy, dirs. Paolo Cavara, Franco Prosperi and Gualtiero Jacopetti) is generally regarded as establishing the mondo genre, and presents wide and varied vignettes of human and animal behavior, both in the West and in the global South, particularly returning to footage of violent exploitation and killing of animals dictated by human culture. While the title is idiomatic, with a meaning closer to "damn world," the film opens on footage of a dog being dragged into a chaotic dog pound, and the film frequently returns to scenes of animal exploitation and violence, primarily in the context of their industrial use for human food: the skinning alive and butchering of dogs and a snake for meat in Taiwan and the Phillipines respectively, captive exotic animals supposedly sold for meat at a wet market, the force-feeding of foie-gras geese, and the ritualized beating to death and eating of pigs by an indigenous tribe in Papua New Guinea are all depicted to varying degrees of plausibility. These are interwoven with tenderer moments of human/animal entanglements—the aforementioned New Guineans sharing their pork harvest with beloved pet dogs, an indigenous woman breastfeeding an orphaned piglet, and even the gentle massaging of Wagyu beef cows by their keepers. Although, like its cannibal *filone* progeny, *Mondo Cane* also gestures toward the barbarity of the supposedly civilized Western

metropole, there's overt racism and colonial paternalism in the crafting and presentation of these scenes, which overwhelmingly locate cruelty and violence of all kinds in the "green inferno" inhabited by the racial and ethnic other, and which figure the indigene as naively animalistic at best.[306] *Mondo Cane* sets these scenes within a wider field of bodily excess as visual pleasure, encompassing the titillatingly bizarre to the stomach-churning in Western settings and beyond. The body's excessively disgusting intake—revolting canned 'exotic' meat at a trendy New York restaurant, the feeding of poisonous sea urchins to man-killing sharks, to name a few—or the excessive outpourings of bodily fluids like breastmilk, semen, blood, sweat, and vomit—are the font from which *Mondo Cane*'s carnal delights flow, and unfold within a matrix that obsessively figures the (often sacrificial) animal as part and parcel of material human lifeways. As the genre progressed, its entries became entirely more focused on figuring violence and death inflicted on both human and animal subjects (not to mention even more odiously racist, none so much as Jacopetti and Prosperi's own *Africa Addio* [1966] and the more narrativized *Addio, Zio Tom* [1971]), yet the focus on the excesses of the body as grounds for pleasurable spectacle, particularly routed through the mouth and digestion, remained a common thread.

Within this context, *Cannibal Holocaust* and its contemporaries' obsessive narrative and aesthetic focus on spectacular consumption and digestion, materially mapped onto thorny

[306] And of course, as cannibalistic! The scenes of tribal life in Papua New Guinea are narrativized around their consumption of meat, but the voiceover takes care to describe them as cannibalistic as well. There is also the allegation, shown during scenes of disabled Malaysian fisherman collecting shark fin bones from the beach, that these sharks have a "taste" for human flesh, implying a future cannibalism as these bones are described as being sent of to China for use as aphrodisiacs.

engagements with human and more-than-human biological matter, as well as even thornier logics of Imperialist desire and dread, can clearly be situated within the mondo film's lineage of 'realist' cinematic effects bodies. Having established the interrogation of our shared bodily natures and enmeshments through a lens of 'realism' and truth value—in taking up the 'bold! Daring! Shocking! True!'[307] rhetoric of classical exploitation ballyhoo, thereby hailing the viewer with the promise of worldly, fleshly truths too confrontingly salacious, in a sense, too "real," not only to be believed, but to be described or depicted by polite society—the mondo film linked the visual fantasy of salvage ethnography to the visual fantasy of media capture, uniting the imperial machine's hunger for 'untouched,' pre-contact bodies with the desire for bodies captured and laid bare in a 'frenzy of the visible'[308] present since at least the inception of cinema. Promising to denude flesh of all manner of physical and societal veils, films like *Mondo Cane* hail the roving eye of the Western subject with the promise of bodily spectacle in excess of codes of propriety, physical distance, and even time and history itself. "No camera ever captured more," crows the tagline of Russ Meyers' *Mondo Hollywood*—and *Cannibal Holocaust* narrativizes the close relationship between the same dual appetites for flesh the mondo film promised to satiate. In centering both the construction/digestion desires of imperial ethnography and the spectatorial craving for revealed flesh enabled by media technology's capacity for corporeal capture, the insatiable desire for the "still more" surely

[307] Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films 1919-1959,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
[308] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and "the Frenzy of the Visible,"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 36.

hidden in "nature's womb"[309] critical to Imperial affect is explored in relationship to the viewers own appetites for 'new' vistas of bodily display.

On its face, *Cannibal Holocaust*'s coda—consisting of Professor Monroe shakily making his way out of the corporate screening room and into the New York City street, declaring aloud "I wonder who the *real* cannibals are!" moments before post-credits onscreen text declares that the station's projectionist smuggled out the Yates crew's footage that we have presumably just witnessed—seems a facile, ham-fisted final comment on the multifaceted human exploitation we've witnessed in the prevailing hour and a half of footage. This apparently clumsy moralizing in the film's final seconds, followed immediately by a final attempt to suggest the indexical provenance of the found footage excerpts positioned within the frame narrative, seems to have instigated the common (and perhaps equally facile) charge levied against the film by a large number of critics that *Cannibal Holocaust* represents a bad faith condemnation of (particularly news) media sensationalism while itself generating scenes which take sensational spectacle and exploitation to new heights—or lows. Alongside the more garden-variety disgust espoused in the majority of Western reviews of the film, most also seem steeped in moral indignation at the gall of this hypocrisy, calling out Deodato's cynical attempt to have his abject cake and eat it, too. But beyond the obvious object lesson provided by the narrative that individual acts of violence and cruelty for personal gain are bad, and exploitation on a cultural scale worse still, *Cannibal Holocaust* relentlessly probes the critical tangle between processes of ingestion and

[309] Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire," 53.

digestion, death, and the visible body inherent within media technologies and our uses of and entanglements with them. In so doing, the film destabilizes and denaturalizes the act of media spectatorship, dissolving fantasies of watching at a rational remove at the same time that it insists upon the very textures and materiality of the cinema image itself. Put another way, *Cannibal Holocaust* depicts the figurative beastliness of its central characters (and implicitly of its own viewers, a suggestion which perhaps provoked some of the virulent critical responses to its apparent hypocrisy) and ultimately forces them into the position and lived experience of beasts as they become food for the vengeful Yanomomo, but it also posits the disquietingly literal beastliness of cinema itself. Moreover, I argue that the film's relentless insistence upon the material and textural dimensions of these connections and flows points up the material nature of cinema and visual media itself, as well as its fundamental relationship to the enteric system.

For a film ostensibly about the literal and cultural violence humans do to each other, *Cannibal Holocaust* is obsessed with the animal, in particular their bodily natures within which the human and media technologies themselves are inextricably tangled. Nearly every non-indigenous character in the film is shown repeatedly discussing, marveling at, and/or recoiling in horror from the animal and insect denizens of the green inferno in which they find themselves: crocodiles, panthers, leeches, rats, monkeys, snakes, tarantulas, piranha, to name a few. That many of these animals are stitched within the film through the prodigious use of stock footage is nothing new to a wide array of cinema traditions, but the lack of any real effort to conceal or smooth over these sutures highlights their uncertain indexical provenance, particularly in contrast to the in-camera killings and dismemberment of clearly

profilmic animals elsewhere in the film. In particular, the eating and digestion cycles of animals is of particular ruminative interest—both Chaco, Professor Monroe's experienced guide, and Alan Yates and his team refer multiple times to the caiman inhabiting the river as "hungry," while Yates narrates over footage of a dying Yacumo woman they came across in the jungle that "this old woman will probably be lunch for some alligator. In the jungle, nothing goes to waste. Nature recycles everything!" as the camera zooms in on insects already beginning to amass on her diseased, suppurating flesh. Then there are, of course, the scenes of indexical animal killing, all of which are staged for maximum visibility of the death itself and the immediately following revelation and handling of interior organs, fluids, and skeletal structures. The killing of the coati by Miguel, Professor Monroe's second guide, occurs with a static camera, minimal editing, and framed in closeup; and despite the killing of the giant turtle's appearance in the second, far more shakily filmed and rapidly edited 16mm 'found footage' portion of the film, it too is similarly presented with a steady camera and little cutting. The film crew's hidden observation of the Yacumo catching and killing a monkey is more chaotically filmed than these scenes, more in keeping with the bulk of the found footage section of the film, but still carefully constructed to provide for a very visible, steady tableau of the monkey's top portion of skull being severed with a machete, and the face and body being dismembered. An unnamed tribesman, his face shrouded by the foliage partially separating him from the camera's view (and from the hiding film crew) is shown eating the monkey's brain in closeup from the improvised bowl of the upturned skull, and then holding up the flayed face of the monkey as if to give the camera a clearer view, playfully attempting to look through the eyelids. This moment is arresting, not just for the

indexical killing, eating, and flaying of the small, charming mammal, but for the further rupture of narrative space suggested by the actor's diegetically unmotivated blocking toward the camera, which hails the viewer as if they are sheepishly hiding behind a tree to watch him, and good naturedly offers them a better view of the action.

In discussing the affect created by onscreen killing of animals,[310] Vivian Sobchack notes that animals are fundamentally "bad actors," such that their convincing performance of pain and death clues the viewers in that narrative space has been punctured, and electrifies it with what she refers to as a bodily felt "charge of the real."[311] In a sense, it's the facial expressions and bodily gestures of the coati, the giant turtle, or the monkey that more than anything else alert the viewer through a bodily grounded, affectively felt unease that the generally understood, naturalized conventions of narrative film have been broken in this moment, as common "gut" knowledge would hold that, barring the application of digital effects, animals can be assumed to be bound to a certain sense of ontological truth value in their bodily performance. Moreover, in this scene, there is a second "bad actor" in another sense, as the man playing the Yacumo tribesman without warning gestures directly to camera, holding up the already indexically marked face of the monkey killed moments before to behold the viewer with its vacant eyes. I would argue that this discomfiting moment functions as something of a microcosm of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s larger destabilizing strategies, puncturing narrative space but with something far from "documentary space," as Sobchack identifies as intruding in moments like the shooting of the rabbit in *The Rules of*

[310] Sobchack, "Inscribing Ethical Space."
[311] Ibid., 246.

the Game.[312] Rather, I would argue that what crackles throughout this scene is a charge of the *un*real, as an emphatically animal construction which erupts both the found footage segment of the film—itself an uncanny hybrid between documentary and fictional space—and the more conventionally presented framing narrative of the film, and which within *Cannibal Holocaust*'s larger pattern of ontological, narrative, and presentational confusion, explode the very possibility of the reality they ostensibly seek to figure.

In its overarching rumination on the interrelated material natures of both bodies and cinema, *Cannibal Holocaust* dwells visually, narratively, and structurally on the granular details of film and flesh, and insists upon their shared natures. In repetitively showing—indeed, thrusting into the face of the viewer—the interior folds and dripping, gooey contours of animals that were living moments before this indexical postmortem display, and then just as repetitively presenting the outpouring of these same unsimulated animal viscera from special effects bodies in the simulated deaths of the film's human characters, *Cannibal Holocaust* removes the typical distance comfortably erected between the cinematic viewer and actual death and bodily exploitation inherent in the production of pleasurably 'fake' narrativized death and violence. Beyond simply showing the viewers how the sausage of special effects gore is made, the film emphatically centers film and media technologies with their often effaced or invisible legacies of hunger for bodily consumption of all kinds, as well as their oft-glazed over nature as animal products. This reinscription of entericity at all levels of filmmaking suggests the beastly nature of cinema itself, as well as its imbrication within

[312] Ibid., 246.

systems of consumption, digestion, disgust and desire. Pleasure is not absent from *Cannibal Holocaust*, which cannily problematizes the dually xenophobic and xenophilic spectacles offered by Gualteri, Jacopetti, and their compatriots by casting the *mondo* mode of address within the context of brutal colonial and cinematic exploitation, while also taking up these films' promise of "shocking but true" excessive bodily spectacles as a proven driver of audience satisfaction. In a sense, this reliance upon the entertainment value of travelogue style "weird" bodily excess grounded in a similarly weird mélange of real and unreal is not a veiled hypocrisy on which the film should be charged and condemned, as seemed to be the opinion of many contemporary critics, but rather is entirely the point. The delights of the denuded body and its components, both animal and human, are a fundamental piece of special effects and cinema itself, and the abject, gut-turning desires and affects involved are inseparable from the wondrous spectacle, just as the uses and abuses of human and animal biomatter cannot be divided from the mediated image and its circuits of consumption. In an interview decades after *Cannibal Holocaust's* filming, the actor portraying Alan Yates describes pleading with Deodato and his crew during the filming of the monkey and the pig's indexical killings: "this is the movies, we don't have to do that!"[313] *Cannibal Holocaust* deconstructs the notion that "the movies," as objects and as a practice with a long history, are somehow distanced from the material (mis)use of flesh of all kinds, cracking open its seemingly smooth, seamless surface to reveal and manipulate the gooey, twitching viscera inside, and exploring the broader connections inherent in cinema's cross-species viscerality.

[313] Interview with Carl Gabriel Yorke, *Cannibal Holocaust* special ed. DVD. Dir. Ruggero Deodato. Grindhouse Releasing, 2008.

IV. "It's Hard to Have a Conversation with a Cannibal:" Polyphagia and the Impossibility of Communication

As I've argued in the previous chapter, the wolfman figure presents similar opportunities for exploration (and excavation) of the material, embodied layers of special effects bodies in film as does the cannibal, primarily grounded in the wolfman's case in the shifting possibilities of skins, layers, veils. The cannibal instead foregrounds viscerality in all senses of the word—certainly in the figure's own out-of-control, excessive processes of ingestion and digestion, the visual display of which overwhelmingly serves alongside the preparatory mutilation of (often living) animal and human comestibles as the primary spectacular effects centerpieces of the films in which it appears. In the previous sections, I've explored how the Italian cannibal cycle of the 1970s, and *Cannibal Holocaust* in particular, have used the cannibal figure as an apt ground from which to stage interrogations, critiques, and negotiations around neocolonialism, death, creatureliness, humanity, and media technologies, and the integral role that the cannibal as totem of not only bodily materiality but particularly the feeling, understanding, interfacing, and imagining enteric system. At the same time, the gut remains critical not simply to the construction of the films themselves, but also looms large in their cultural reception and interpretation, driving legal, critical, moral, and fannish responses to the films within the cannibal zeitgeist of the 1970s.

However, another element of the enteric system is critical to approaching these films, and the cannibal figure more broadly, as well—the oral focus of the cannibal is also mapped onto tensions around speech, contact, and communication, which are inexorably tangled around the enteric system of digestion. In the cannibal horror cycle, the horror of orality depends upon both the threat of anthropophagy—the human subject being *mangiati vivi* in spectacular fashion—as well as the horror of contact with the "uncontacted," and even "uncontactable"—the impossible communication in which the voiceless speak back. Key to this construction is the interplay between the mouth's interjection of speech, laden with the heavy cultural weight of conveying subjectivity, humanity, reason, versus the mouth's uncanny introjection of matter outside the hermetic casing of the body, possessed of its own cultural baggage around sins of the flesh, animality, and the state of nature. As Bernhard Siegert has argued, the erection of mediating technologies to regiment and make safe the act of ingestion—ritual manners and accessories of the table, for instance—speaks to the mouth's liminal power as both frighteningly uncanny and inescapably intimate portal.[314] This inherently eerie nature of the mouth is a major component of the wolfman's power to terrify, as I've argued, yet the cannibal takes up this horrific orality in a different mode. It is not simply the devouring mouth of the cannibal itself, but that mouth's attachment to a digestive system that is the seat of the cannibal's disruptive power. And tangled together with the swallowing, consuming, excreting horror of cannibal digestion is the production of speech, or lack thereof, from the mouth, as I move to examine in the next section. That this tangle is

[314] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 46.

specifically mapped onto media technologies and cinema itself in *Cannibal Holocaust* provides an apt example from which to explore the cannibal's making of meaning within the context of filmed special effects, given the latter's shared imbrication with the enteric system.

To return to the example of John Chau's doomed foray into the territory of the Sentinelese people with which I opened this chapter, the concept of contact and its absence (or impossibility) is clearly foundational to the fantasy ethnographic mode of Imperialist logics, of which the cannibal figure is a venerable production. It is both the promise of contact with the uncontacted that spurs imperialist exploration, and the desirous imagination of a lack of contact with still more peoples and lands ripe for pillaging that fuels the imperialist imagination, and informs the melancholic production of salvage ethnographic media, itself an attempt to preserve the indigene at an imagined moment before this contact. Thus contact itself seems a slippery notion, as both the desire for and denial of this primal scene of colonial expansion seemingly undergirds the imperial mindset. This is especially visible in the impulse of fantasy ethnography, which produced mermaids and Blemmyes on the margins of colonial maps, and insists upon the presence somewhere in "nature's womb" of the uncontacted cannibalistic indigene. The concept of contact under imperialism is also idiosyncratic in that its ostensible meaning of shared communication between groups, as well as the implication of physical interfacing, is most often a relentlessly one-way communication, as the colonizer overwhelmingly speaks for the colonized, producing his own knowledges and truths about the indigene as a way of constructing them as colonized subjects. Sharing Fatimah Tobing Rony's assessment of the machine of colonization as

cannibalism on a grand scale, Winona LaDuke recalls a conversation with a First Nations chief about his attempted negotiations with the Canadian government to protect tribal land from the encroachment of logging companies, which he characterized as a futile attempt at making "small talk with a cannibal"—futile because it "always gets down to the same thing."[315] Within the larger project of indigenous rights under neocolonialism, LaDuke suggests that indigenous groups speak "at the risk of being heard," and that much has stayed the same across the longue durée of colonial exploitation, including the continuation of difficult, and perhaps impossible, conversations with the cannibal. Colonialism's actual, brutal consumption of human lives and lifeways—ironically juxtaposed with the common blood libel in which indigenous groups, real or imagined, were often accused of human consumption by their colonizers as justification for their exploitation—is certainly a running theme in the Italian cannibal cycle, and gives us Professor Monroe's immortal line "I wonder who the *real* cannibals are!", yet there is a deeper interrogation present of contact/speech/swallowing/digesting, as a complexly visceral exploration of the cultural meaning making of the cannibal figure.

In *Cannibal Holocaust*, the silence of the indigenous characters is met throughout with the speech of the Western explorers in a hyper-repetitive motif, beginning with the largely unchallenged pronunciations of Professor Monroe and his guide Chaco, then followed by the clearly faked, improvised running commentary provided by Yates and his crew in the

[315] Winona LaDuke, Introduction to *At the Risk of Being Heard: Identity, Indigenous Rights, and Postcolonial States*, Bartholomew Dean and Jerome M. Levi, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 2003.

found footage segment of the film. While Professor Monroe is established as an educated American anthropologist, he has never been to the Amazon region before, despite insisting that he has experience travelling in the undifferentiated monolithic space of "the bush." Immediately upon arriving in Colombia and meeting with his guides, he is given a captive Yacumo man as a sort of "passport into the green inferno" by a local military official. Chaco roughly inspects scarification markings on the silent captive's body, declaring that it means he is the son of shaman and "consecrated to the spirit of the jaguar," before claiming that the cannibalism the soldiers caught this man performing was uncharacteristic of the tribe, "which means it was *probably* some Indio ceremony, meant to chase evil spirits out of the jungle. White man's spirits!" As Chaco delivers this line, Professor Monroe grabs the silent man's face and inspects his mouth, the camera lingering on an extreme closeup of the now cavernous mouth with its many missing teeth, ending the scene. This scene is the first of many in which Monroe, and to a lesser degree Chaco, read the signs of the indigenous body and immediately produce their confidently florid diagnosis as absolute truth. While witnessing a Yacumo man violently rape and murder a Yacumo woman, Monroe whispers "You know, I swear that looks like a ritualistic punishment for adultery!" and Chaco replies "that's what it is"; later, Monroe dictates to his tape recorder confident narratives about both the Yacumo and the Yanomomo villages they visit, in the absence of any scenes of communication with these tribes which would explain how he's learned this information. In fact, the Yacumo, Yanomomo, and Shamatari characters are almost never shown speaking, and overwhelmingly are depicted silently staring, even when attacked and panicked, as in the opening scene of the Colombian soldiers firing on the Yacumos they find in the middle of a

cannibalistic meal. In the very rare moments in which indigenous characters are shown to speak, there are no subtitles, and their words are not translated by or responded to by the guides, who presumably speak some of the native language. They are also not replied to by any other characters, leaving completely absent any sort of conversation involving an indigenous character, despite their frequent visual presence and critical importance to the narrative. Perhaps as a result of this construction, none of these characters are given names or any sort of identifying character elements. They are differentiated only by their larger tribal affiliation, visually expressed in their contrasting costumes—no body paint for the Yacumos, greyish clay covering the bodies of the Yanomomo, and black paint borne by the Shamatari.

While Monroe and Chaco's declarations about the nature and lifestyles of the tribes they interface with are developed in absence of any sort of communication with the tribespeople themselves, the film does not explicitly problematize these conclusions, or otherwise suggest their fallibility in the moment. However, the 16mm found footage segment of the film follows the exact same repetitive motif of speaking for the indigenous characters in the production of supposedly absolute knowledge, while clearly showing it to be either invented whole cloth or applied to supposedly real situations instead constructed by Yates and his crew. The motif of the completely silent tribespeople, even in moments where silence seems wildly inappropriate, continues to underpin these scenes of Western actors speaking for the indigene. Their own words are carefully recorded by their media technologies for later broadcast as educational material, codifying the knowledge production process and constructing the newly 'contacted' peoples into colonial subjects. The clearly bogus nature of Yates' documentary monologues leaves the actual significance of the actions and rituals

undertaken by the tribal characters a complete mystery, and in keeping with their silence resists the production of knowledge about their lives and lifeways, gesturing toward the impossibility of such contact in an imperial paradigm ever leading to true communication, or to the production of knowledges about a post-contact people that rings true to their lived experience.

The impossibility of communication is an especially strong thread throughout *Cannibal Holocaust* in particular, which is joined up to its wider problematizing of documentary or historical truth, and predicated upon the usage of media technologies in the production of fraught knowledges. The notion of the impossible communication underlying all communication has been developed in a media studies context, and offers a mode of conceptualizing the cannibal figure's place in the fantasy of contacting the uncontacted (or uncontactable) other. Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark develop the concept of execrable media as a "tactical" theory of media capable of shaking off the theoretical limitations congealed into "new" media theory, and of radically extending the borders of the field to include the "absolutely alien".[316] Excommunication, as the message that destroys communication itself, is also the radical impossibility that inheres in all communication, and is therefore "prior to the very possibility of communication."[317] Thacker develops the concept of excommunication further, developing a concept of "dark media" as that which contacts the uncontactable, a technology that functions "too well" and thereby

[316] Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, Introduction to *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*, Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 21.
[317] Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, "Introduction," 16.

foregrounds the impossible communication inherent in all communication.[318] He develops these ideas primarily in the context of the supernatural, analyzing our pop culture obsession with media technologies which "provide a link to what American author H. P. Lovecraft once referred to as "cosmic outsideness,"[319] yet this cosmic outsideness can be extended to the case of the fantastical, half-imagined "uncontacted" tribe upon which the cannibal mythos relies. This brings us a step closer to untangling the complex orality of the cannibal figure—as the abject mouth which does not speak, which cannot be contacted or communicated with, and which also devours human flesh rather than animal—the "cosmic outside"[320] of an anthropophagic human who reverses the violent primal scene of colonial "contact." Here the play between interjection and introjection becomes instructive. The cannibal figure is spoken for by orientalist colonialism, imagined and documented in the far corners of the colonial map (and mind), and always bound up in the desire for contact, or in salvage ethnography's desirous projection of the *un*contacted. The penetrative desire of salvage ethnography of course also includes the perverse wish for contact with the uncontacted, ultimately uncontactable, imagined other. In the impossible tension between historical imperialism and frontier salvage desires lurks the excommunication—the ambivalent fantasy of the impossible communication, the face-to-face contact with the uncontactable. Yet in this ambivalent (lack of, desire for) communication matrix there is a further level of anxious, fantastic relationality—that of introjection. While the fantasy of colonial desire and salvage

[318] Thacker, "Dark Media."
[319] Ibid., 91.
[320] This can also be thought through in Wolfe's discussion of Levinas' encounter with Bobby the dog, as not the cosmic outside but the "Kantian outside" that reveals the spokenness and precarity of humanism. Wolfe, *Animal Rites*.

ethnography rests upon the inability of the indigene to speak (and the prolific production of speech from the colonizer to fill that silence) the cannibal figure consumes, ruminates, digests the Western subject, reversing the privileging of speech and threatening to explode the entire discursive project. It is ingestion, rather than introjection, that gives the cannibal much of his liminal power to subvert existing cultural ley lines.

Whenever the cannibal is seen to speak in *Cannibal Holocaust*, there is no use of subtitles, dubbing, or diegetic translation. Chaco and Miguel, Professor Monroe's guides, do not translate the very few utterances we witness the tribal characters make, and have no mutual conversations with them, while the found footage film-within-a-film quickly dispatches the Yates crew's guide and translator with a deadly snake bite before they interface with any indigenous groups. Moreover, Yates and his crew are revealed to have no interest in even the impossible colonial project of documenting the existing reality of the uncontacted Yanomomo tribe, but instead to brutalize and exploit the peaceful post-contact Yacumos in order to generate a highly dramatic "documentary"—to create whole cloth a documentary which "speaks" entirely for the people they capture. In this sense, the media technologies can be understood under the matrix of excommunication as advanced by Thacker, as "dark media" machines which function "too well," revealing not only the avaricious natures of their supposedly civilized operators but the complete impossibility of the salvage ethnographic project, as well as the fallacies of documentary evidence and historical truth. This project unfolds not simply from the narrative of *Cannibal Holocaust* but from its patchwork style, which produces the deeply, viscerally upsetting special effects sequences of both indexical and nonindexical torture and execution of living creatures, and of

the equally viscerally eerie 16mm and 35mm interrogations of rational facts, gut knowledge, and infotainment broadcasting. Underpinning this construction is both the tension around communication and its impossibility, as well as the foregrounding of the material use of the lives and bodies of animals, an insistence which suggests the beastly nature of cinema itself. This animal thread relies as well upon contact, communication, and its absence.

As I've explored in the previous chapter, the animal exists within human culture as a liminal and even eerie presence, critical to the production of dualisms which enshrine humanity, sight, speech, the city above animality, smell, vocalization, and the forest. Cary Wolfe has convincingly argued that animals' critical role in constructing and maintaining "the poverty of humanism" directly leads to their exploitation in human society, and informs our culture's longstanding repudiation of the bodily, the low, and the material, a cultural thread against which this entire project must work. The attendant reification of speech as fundamental to the granting of subjecthood, results also in the animal (or otherwise more-than-human) being's exploitation being made culturally palatable by their inability to speak. Similar to the wolfman of the previous chapter, the cannibal presents a consumptive threat to the human, not just to the animal, and threatens to assign the supposedly natural animal state of to-be-eaten-ness, of becoming "meat" rather than flesh, to the human subject. Both figures thereby upend culture's carnophallogocentrism identified by Derrida, the logic by which animal death sacrificially constructs and protects the category of human, including the powers of the state and of language. This meat logic depends both upon the commodified and the sacrificial use and consumption of animal bodies, removing human flesh from the sacrificial economy, save for a trace still congealed in the consumption of bodily labor under

capitalism. [321] The threatening, profaning mouth of the wolfman explodes easy divisions between human and animal both in his very nature as a lycanthrope as well as in the horrific possibility that when transformed, the wolfman's indiscriminate rampages may just as easily lead to the consumption of human flesh as of animal meat. The cannibal, on the other hand, presents a ravening oral subversion in a slightly different register, one predicated primarily on the reversal of the enshrining of language and communication in the production of the subject, and of the definition of devourer and devoured under carnophallogocentrism.

Additionally, many of these films narrativize what cannot be spoken—namely, not the existence of these tribes or the fact of their "contact," but specifically the fact of their cannibalism. In *Cannibal Ferox,* the graduate student ethnographer and sole survivor of her party's encounter with an unnamed cannibal tribe is shown publishing *Cannibalism: End of a Myth* at the film's end, a book which replaces her traumatic experience and the extremely brutal mutilation and cannibalism of her friends with purported proof that cannibalism has never been practiced by any people in the history of the world, least of all the tribe she met with in Colombia. This theme is even repeated in Roth's *The Green Inferno,* which ends with the protagonist falsely giving public testimony that she and her fellow activists (actually murdered and eaten by this film's unnamed cannibalistic tribe) were treated kindly by the natives they encountered, and that any brutalization was inflicted by militiamen hired by local petrochemical companies. Even in *Cannibal Holocaust,* which centers around clear documentation of cannibalism, the climactic screening of the filmmaker's last recorded

[321] Wolfe, *Animal Rites*

footage of themselves being brutalized and eaten leads the television executives watching it to order it quietly destroyed. Of course, in this film, the final destruction of diegetically indexical footage is held up against the preponderance of diegetically faked footage as part of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s larger interrogation of the possibility of mediated truth, but the widespread use of the trope of official denial points to a larger linked logic within the cannibal mythos. The cannibal's reversal of the violence of speech and knowledge production into an act of bodily devouring seems to unhinge, at least momentarily, the imperial logics underpinning the entire myth, as a "cosmic outside" which, like Bobby the dog, reveals the spokenness and the precarity of the entire project.

Existing as both a volley against wonder or curiosity in all of its violent and disturbing historical and cultural contexts, as well as a perfect channel for it as a spectacularly other bodily display, the cannibal of the 70's Italian *filone* can be said to both explode the Wunderkammer model while also being displayed within its shelves. As a devouring mouth attached to a hungry digestive system, the cannibal's silence is subtended by a powerful reversal of speech and communication, which answers the consuming desires of colonial exploration and the ethnographic imagination tied to the notion of 'contact' with its own swallowing introjection. As a curiously intimate and eerie passageway—the interior 'tube' of the enteric system allows outside matter to pass through the core of the body itself, both part of the body and separate from it—the taking in of matter is as much an interrelational contact as the expulsion of meaning-laden speech, yet it's a contact which silences communication at the same time that it enables a literally visceral exchange between self and other. Despite the effusively horrific and disgusting affective charge attending

Cannibal Holocaust's scenes of anthropophagy, its marketing tagline of "Better to rest in peace in the warm body of a friend, than in the cold ground" gestures toward this undercurrent of uncanny intimacy.[322] Within the narrative, cannibalism is primarily violent and outward facing, like the repeated depiction of tribespeople putting curare-tipped darts expelled from blowguns to deadly use, characterizing both the inward and outward pathways of the enteric system as dangerous liminal zones between inside and outside, self and other.[323] That this deadly expulsion of breath employed by the cannibal characters is a direct mirror of real-world colonizers' lethal exhalation of pathogens often leading to the genocide of native people with whom they come in contact further cements the mouth's intake and output as critical to the primal scene of Imperialism. As a metaphor for excommunication—the impossibility communication that inheres in all communication—the cannibal figure's entericity reroutes the reification of speech into a valorization of the feeling, interrelational system of the gut, insisting upon the material, the fleshly, the sensual dimensions of life and

[322] Interestingly, however, the film does not depict funerary cannibalism, the much more documented form of cannibalism among human groups, which foregrounds the intimate, affective relationship enabled by anthropophagy, but rather characterizes indigenous cannibalism as fundamentally an outwardly facing act, with which the in group attempts to establish dominance against other tribes, or at least draws an added nutritional bonus from the spoils of violent clashes with these enemy groups. Monroe declares into his tape recorder after meeting the Yacumos that the "center of the jungle" is controlled by the fearsome Shamatari and Yanomomo groups who are "perpetually at war with each other….each considers the other fair game. Hunted, and then eaten." Of course, Monroe's narrativizing of these tribes he has not yet encountered occurs after his meeting with the Yacumos from which any kind of dialogue with the tribesmembers is conspicuously absent. The initial witnessing of the (supposedly) rarely cannibalistic Yacumos eating human flesh, which Chaco supposes was a rite meant to banish the evil done by white men from the jungle, is not explained or returned to beyond Chaco's brief (suspect) explanation.

[323] A subtle trace of the intimacy of digestion exists only in the restorative, recycling nature of the jungle and its animal denizens brought up often in the dialogue, as well as the brief suggestion that the Yacumo's unusual cannibalism at the film's opening was a restorative ritual meant to cleanse the evil of what Yates and his crew had done.

rejecting the supposed primacy of sight, speech, and disembodied rational thought erected by the same xenophobic, misogynistic, and carnophallogocentric humanism that produces monstrous others such as the cannibal. The structures and systems that confer the status of human subject to some and that of less human to others rely upon the categories of animal vs. human, jungle vs. city, meat vs. flesh, mind vs. body; and in reversing the supporting logic of meat eating, the cannibal figure subverts these longstanding dualisms while pointing up the importance of animal flesh and consumption that is often hard to see. At the same time, the desires for bared flesh to consume through the cinematic gaze—desires for visual capture and revelation grounded in an always already Imperial position of wonderous consumption of "the curious," drawn through the Wunderkammer tradition and rooted in even earlier displays of the spectacular (in its difference) body—are fully courted and fulfilled by *Cannibal Holocaust* and its compatriots within the cannibal cycle. That the pleasures and entertainment value of such scenes were not universally shared by all viewers does not change the fact that the gory, squishy delights on show do offer a feast for the eyes on par (though certainly heightened with the inclusion of actual animal killings) with the wider swath of films centered around the visual pleasures of violence worked upon human and humanoid special effects bodies, a transnational group of which soared to new heights of perceptual realism[324] in practical bodily effects work in the decades between 1960 and 1990. In foregrounding and figuring the animal body and its consumption upon which foundational cultural logics are built, while further inscribing the material and the corporeal through the

[324] To borrow Lisa Purse's term—as distinct from the optical realism in seamless frames pursued by ILM & later digital effects artisans. Purse, *Editing and Special/Visual Effects.*

subversive potentiality and power of the devouring, interpersonal gut, all in the context of producing the visual pleasures of body horrific cinematic special effects while relentless interrogating the flesh-eating natures of media technologies, *Cannibal Holocaust*'s materializing and re-membering of the slippery cannibal figure constitutes an uncommonly complex provocation to explore the hearts of darkness too often papered over by rhetorics of seamlessness and surface within the production and consumption of cinematic visual pleasure, and of knowledge and indexical reality itself. In drawing out and literally thrusting the actual biomaterial of living beings into our faces, repeatedly manipulating the gut's hidden gooey textures and slippery folds in closeup, *Cannibal Holocaust* insists upon the creatureliness and the viscerality of cinema itself, particularly in the context of the production of spectacular effects bodies which are presented on the shifting sands of a deeply problematized and liminal "reality." In sporadically provoking the gut response, the "charge of the real," of the seemingly indexical nature of its onscreen violence through a myriad of narrative and stylistic techniques—the nestled found footage structure, the animal "bad actors" captured in their actual death throes, the bravura special effects employed in the depiction of unindexical human gore, and the still murky montage of possible human snuff in "The Last Road to Hell," to name a few—*Cannibal Holocaust* combines the visual pleasure (and pleasurable revulsion) offered by onscreen violence worked upon special effects bodies with a jolting reminder of how the sausage is made, not only the offal-filled sausage that is spectacular human violence, but also the animal product of cinema itself, here contextualized against the long, troubling legacy of wonder and curiosity's hunger for the visually packaged, visceral charge of the real.

I hope that I've shown here the beginnings of what can be gleaned from *Cannibal Holocaust* and the larger cycle of the Italian cannibal film despite—or indeed because of—their partial, often problematic nature. Their status as limit cases of the stomachability of the shaky transnational exploitation film 'genre' is perhaps the very thing that makes them so useful for enteric interrogation, alongside their clear narrative and stylistic dedication to viscerality itself, and to the staging of fantastical displays of bodily gore and violence centered around the cannibal figure. Within this staging, these films center the animal's long bodily use within the production of cinema itself as well as of special effects bodies, making expressly, viscerally visible a thread too little paid attention to or explored.

"The sound of the Gion Shoja temple bells echoes the impermanence
of all things; the color of the sala flowers reveals the truth that to flourish is to fall."

- 平家物語 *The Tale of Heike* (c. 1300)

"The question that keeps me awake at nights in the cold Canadian hinterlands
is this: "What is *Porno Holocaust*?"

-Letter to the Editor, *European Trash Cinema* vol. 002 no. 2

5. Conclusion: The Revenant

Takashi Miike's 2007 film *Sukiyaki Western Django* opens with the figure of Ringo, a poncho-draped cowpoke played with much catchpenny aplomb by none other than Quentin Tarantino, shooting a snake that has absconded with an egg from beside his campfire. Rather than the vistas of monument valley, he is framed before a candy-colored backdrop depicting an abstract painting of Mount Fuji and a red, circular sun, and lit by a shifting variety of self-consciously vivid primary-color gels. Confronted in the act of slicing open the snake's belly to retrieve the now bloodied egg, Ringo pauses to quote the famous opening lines from *The Tale of Heike* before dispatching the troublesome band of anonymous desperados to the pounding of traditional *gagaku* drums. That Tarantino's gunslinger switches from his self-consciously camp Roy Rogers drawl to solemnly intone said quote in an exaggerated imitation of a Japanese-English accent only adds to the air of winking pastiche and narrative by free association. Now free to return to his task, Ringo cracks the salvaged egg into the pot of steaming sukiyaki noodles simmering over his campfire.

Much like the disparate, digitally-animated elements of this soup pot that splatter toward the camera in the following credits sequence, this opening scene represents both an affectively awkward mix of various distancing techniques and a surrealist candy-coated confection of pure visual and visceral entertainment. It also pairs its jagged union of disparate time, location, and cultural reference with a joining of both bodily gore and food products as fodder for cinematic spectacle and all its attendant sensual pleasures. The slicing of the snake's belly in extreme close up is used to introduce the primary visual metaphor of the film—the gush of red blood from the wound is followed by the sight of the pure white egg shell revealed as Ringo's thumb wipes away the blood, establishing the narrative's central clash between the Genji and Heike clans, whose costumes and living spaces are completely given over to these respective colors for the remainder of the film. However, its prominent placement in this opening scene, and the length at which the camera dwells on this evisceration, would seem to exceed this narrative foreshadowing. Moments later, as Ringo shoots through his anonymous enemies, one turns when shot toward the backdrop behind him, and is seen to throw a handful of stage blood up toward it as he falls out of frame. This blood then splatters gratuitously across the sheer fabric screen, now the camera's sole subject for an extended beat. Finally, as Ringo cracks open the recovered egg into his pot, takes a taste and lets out an improbably musical shriek of pleasure, the camera seemingly dives into the pot of sukiyaki, where the lengthy credits sequence is set among now monumentally sized blocks of tofu, vegetables, noodles, and other tasty tidbits as they whiz past the camera. That this series of spectacular moments adds to the film's everything-but-the-kitchen sink approach to cultural references—recalling everything from Japanese *chanbara* film and

traditional theater to Italian spaghetti Westerns and Hollywood B-movie singing cowboys—is certainly the case, but it also establishes a firm association between the guts of human and animal gore, and a consuming gut, again both human and animal. Moreover, this visual logic ties this consumption to violent death, bodily recycling and production, and rebirth. If the youthful bloom of the sala flower contains its future withering death, if "to flourish is to fall," then the scene suggests both the impermanence and uncanny permanence of the body and its cultural mediations, a permanence grounded in the vivifying and productive capabilities of the gut itself.

Sukiyaki Western Django is just one in a larger cycle of retro, campy film pastiche inspired by the so-called 'grindhouse aesthetic' to pop up worldwide in the last two decades. In his work on the role of collective memory in grindhouse fandom, David Church coins the term "retrosploitation," which refers to texts "which blend the grindhouse 'aesthetic' with deliberate archaism "as interpretive cues to an intended blend of ironic distance and earnest appreciation."[325] This term can apply to the filmic output of cultural remixers and fanboys turned filmmakers like Robert Rodriguez, Quentin Tarantino (who would embark on his own retrosploitation-flavored refashioning of *Django* just 5 years after appearing in *Sukiyaki*), and Takashi Miike, yet it also encompasses an entire cottage industry of products tailored to fans of the grindhouse or exploitation aesthetic by consciously recreating the visual, aural, and formal conditions of exhibition in the grindhouse space. *Sukiyaki Western Django* is unique in its explicit layering of elements taken from the Spaghetti Western and the *chanbara* films

[325] David Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 124.

that inspired them, thereby creating a hybrid space of the mythic American West and 11th century Japan. Like many retrosploitation media products, it also layers digitally-created texture and distressing onto the digital "film stock,"[326] and its Japanese actors speak their lines throughout in phonetically-memorized English as an homage to the Italian 'grindhouse' pictures' often improbable English dubbing. The film's unique foregrounding of ephemerality and resurgence highlights the grindhouse "aesthetic"—and the shaky genre of exploitation itself—as critically joined to both death and birth, decay and vibrancy, consumption and reproduction. That this impermanence and rebirth is coded into the exploitation "genre" itself by the particularities of exploitation as a historical industrial production and exhibition practice points to the lasting effects of this exhibition context on the meanings and uses of these cultural objects today.

In this chapter, I'll consider the retrosploitation wave in the context of this vivifying viscerality, through which the gut's affects and actions persist in various ways. In its curious kind of nostalgic remembrance for an imagined or prosthetically applied past, retrosploitation's part in the wider field of the exploitation or grindhouse "genre" highlights both the precarity and partiality of such labels, as well as their potentiality. What I'll call the necromanticism inherent in the culture that's grown up around this cinematic corpus is strongly linked to the enteric imaginary, I argue, and in concluding this dissertation I will

[326] Caetlin Benson-Allott, "Grindhouse: An Experiment in the Death of Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, 62:1 (2008).

move to suggest the future affordances of further enteric excavation of media which centers the spectacular body of all kinds.

As a nebulous classification for the shifting corpus of films it seeks to enclose, the exploitation or grindhouse label is an attempt to gather together a "genre" which can only be apprehended in its transnational, partial, and improvisational nature. As Chung's media heterotopias and Sarkar and Neves' penumbral global model remind us, there is much of the "productively chaotic" that is foreclosed when boundaries around objects are tightly drawn, or when surfaces are skimmed rather than materially, texturally excavated.[327] Moreover, while all media flows can benefit from a more transnational lens, the special effects body has always already been widely transnational, even before the globally distributed model of digital effects work came to bear, by nature of its roots in this very grindhouse corpus. The exploitation film troubles easy genre categorization for a variety of multilayered and interconnected reasons, including the global and transnational nature of its production and reception circuits, and the multitude of other generic alliances legible among the films within its corpus. It has also been a matter of debate on what basis of similarity or belonging with which to define such a genre: one of aesthetics? Of belonging to an alternative auterist canon? Of subversive political narrative and production practices? Of historical periodization? Or perhaps of strategic reception? Of particular importance to the creation of such a genre, I would argue, is its interaction with globality, rerouted outside of a static center/periphery model of film criticism. The extremely porous, liminal categorization of the

[327] Chung, *Media Heterotopias* and Sarkar and Neves, "Introduction."

exploitation film is grounded within wide, multidirectional constellations of transnational flows and circuits of inspiration, technique, aesthetics, and cultural, historical, and industrial contexts. Its porosity and "minglings" extend to its unique affective and embodied dimensions of engagement and fan practice, which are constitutive of its very viability as a generic category, as we will see. As such, the exploitation genre requires a model of globality that seeks to access its amorphous and hybrid contexts and potentialities.

Having made a workable heuristic for approaching this uneasy genre, the grindhouse or exploitation corpus' return in the forum of retrosploitation pastiche is now possible to grasp. In what remains of this chapter, I will first explore the retrosploitation genre as a particularly enteric melancholic nostalgia, shot through with intensely embodied affects and affinities that crackle between fan and film. It is through this limit case that the oft-ignored but ever-present figure—what Chung would call the "spectral residue" —[328]of the material and the sensuous in cinematic bodily effects is at its most visible, and is most clearly bound up in what I will call the necromanticism that attaches to specific historical forms of (most often practical) bodily effects work. This corporeal revenant has tracked throughout the case studies I've raised in this dissertation, in the shifting skins of the écorché, the wolfman, and the cannibal, and represents the vivifying, provocative current that troubles narratives of seamlessness, surface, and simplicity, and is revealed when spectacular bodies on film are materially re-membered and texturally excavated. By way of summing up—and suggesting the myriad future affordances offered when this revenant is attended to with an enteric lens—

[328] Chung, *Media Heterotopias*, 5.

this conclusion will consider the revenant through the case study of retrosploitation as not only a necromantic but an execretory (and excretory) media, bound up in the impossibility of communication and grounded in the enteric imaginary.

I. Necromanticism: A Gastronomy of Horror

For the staggeringly wide breadth of films that were relegated to the American grindhouse and drive-thru circuit, no matter their original production context, nation of origin, artistic or economic intent, the label of exploitation film continues to function not only as a strong marker that implies a certain set of meanings, but also as a powerful generic classifier. It is this classifier that makes strange bedfellows of films as disparate as Roger Corman's goofy cheesecake B-Western *Five Guns West* (1955), Herschel Gordon Lewis' bravura splatter film *Blood Feast* (1963), and Ruggero Deodato's infamous found footage "video nasty" *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980). Indeed, the exploitation or grindhouse (the terms have become somewhat slippery and interchangeable in their popular use) "genre" is something of a misnomer because while the terms exploitation and grindhouse refer to an industrial practice and an exhibition setting respectively, they have come to unify a wide range of films not necessarily on the terms of their shared characteristics or generic tropes, but rather on the terms under which they were (or were imagined to be) commodified and distributed upon their release in America. The exploitation genre as such, then, is something of a hodgepodge, one that stretches the boundaries of the term "genre." It is, however, both in spite and because of its confounding qualities, a highly productive object to consider. Before

its meaning shifted in common use, exploitation cinema properly referred to a specific independent American production and exhibition context. These "classic" exploitation films, as historicized by Eric Schaeffer, were produced roughly between 1919 and 1959 and existed "in the shadow of Hollywood," an existence which, as Paul Watson reminds us, served to strengthen and uphold Hollywood as the aesthetic and cultural standard-bearer of American cinema.[329] The films that came to be subsumed under the uneasy genre signifiers of exploitation or "grindhouse" include a far greater array of globally produced pictures, from a wide array of cultural and production contexts, and often more clearly belonging to a number of other more normative genre categories. Moreover, the exploitation genre often seems to be in the eye of the beholder, as one fan's Italian giallo or Brazilian vampire horror film is another's schlocky "grindhouse" flick. This distinction has led Jeffrey Sconce, and many theorists following him, to theorize this nebulous body of films not as a genre or genres, but as particularly receptive to a specific reading strategy which he dubs paracinema. While it is a productive framework, as I will discuss, it is not the only means to account for both the somewhat shakily fabricated and leaky nature of exploitation as genre and the critical importance of fan practices, knowledges, and attitudes to its construction and cultural currency. As David Church has argued, it is in fact a specific kind of imaginative nostalgia for the obsolete exhibition spaces these films either did or could be imagined to have circulated within (this construction primarily depends upon an American or Western

[329] Shaeffer, *Bold!*, 2; Paul Watson, "There's No Accounting for Taste: Exploitation Cinema and the Limits of Film Theory," *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and Its Audience*. Ed. Deborah Cartmell et. al. (Chicago: Pluto, 1997), 67.

European context for these nostalgic sites, though the films to which it is applied are heterogeneously global, to the point that their original production conditions are largely effaced in this process). Under both models, it is through fan engagement with specific films that the exploitation genre is produced, whether through collective processes of nostalgic spatiotemporal longing, often mediated through home video technologies, or through personal distinction according to a classifying reading strategy which seeks to reject middlebrow or elite aesthetic tastes through a recuperation of the paracinematic. In my discussion of the relative merits and limitations of these to my conception of transnational exploitation film, I will move through what I consider to be the genre's essential (and interconnected) features: nostalgic negotiations with industrial practice, ambivalent and complex relationships with hierarchies of class and taste, and the primacy of an affective and bodily seated interaction between fan and film.

Church conceives of nostalgia in the context of the exploitation or grindhouse genre as primarily collective and itself multiple: viewers of the genre experience multiple, sometimes conflicting, "nostalgic valences" in the processes which construct the corpus of their affection, as well as in experiencing these films' reappearance in the marketplace as newly valued, accessible, and mainstreamed, prompting a further object of nostalgia in the previous subcultural community around these films "that perhaps never truly existed." As a result, "nostalgia's affective qualities mediate between intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of fan identity that are subtended by broader changes in media industries, technologies and

ongoing histories of social inequality."[330] The "imaginative time-travel" Church argues underpins fan's pleasurable engagement with the exploitation genre as such depends upon the appropriation of classed, raced, gendered exhibition spaces in the context of the urban grindhouse of the 1960s and 70s, requiring both an acknowledgement of the "social and material decay" of such spaces for their subcultural thrill, as well as a gentrification of these spaces in their imagination, such that they can more easily be nostalgically folded "back into the bourgeois social fabric with which grind houses historically had such a tenuous relationship."[331] Church argues that through the medium of VHS, and later DVD and digital streaming, fans mediated a collective and imagined affinity with the imagined subcultural community of grindhouse patrons, which paradoxically are foregrounded and effaced through this mental gentrifying process.

The utopic and speculative properties of this process of prosthetic remembrance, unto which Church brings to bear an insidious element of violent class, race, and sex-based erasure, can be compared to the initially revolutionary image of the paracinematic viewer, a picture which Sconce then complicates by laying bare its grounding in Bourdieu-ian class-based taste hierarchies. Sconce defines the paracinematic reading strategy, which delights in "splatterpunk, 'mondo' films, sword and sandal epics, Elvis flicks, government hygiene films, Japanese monster movies, beach-party musicals, and just about every other historical manifestation of exploitation cinema from juvenile delinquency documentaries to soft-core pornography," as "a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of

[330] Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia,* 4.
[331] Ibid., 110.

cultural detritus."[332] Defining it against the reading strategy of camp, Sconce argues that paracinematic culture is emphatically a challenge to existing aesthetic and cultural norms, "an aesthetic of vocal confrontation" which he identifies as emanating from "disaffected middle-class youth." For Sconce, this aggressive recuperation of the lowest of cultural forms itself reveals the unevenly-afforded class privilege of "double-access" to both the realms of high and low culture.[333]

For Church, this paracinematic construction forecloses part of the bigger picture. If all that is afforded in paracinema's logics is an ironic, distancing delight in the failure to emulate, rather than conscious refusal, of dominant cinematic codes, then affect is largely shut out from analysis of the exploitation genre and its uses. Instead, Church asserts that much of fan engagement with these films is, in fact, "sincere," which can be either the primary affective engagement or easily coexist with varying levels of ironic enjoyment closer to the paracinematic paradigm. Moreover, he argues that ironic paracinematic engagement is not the sole purview of a specific class, and that to argue that it is enacts its own paternalistic view of the naïve masses—for Church, cultural products like Mystery Science Theater 3000, which Sconce himself references, speaks to "the range of audiences who can, even with middling levels of cultural capital, still recognize and laugh at a film's technical ineptitude or exploitative excesses."[334] I find that both of their engagements with viewer negotiation have limitations in their application to the exploitation genre. Sconce's model of paracinematic

[332] Jeffrey Sconce, "Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* (1995), 372.
[333] Sconce, "Trashing the Academy," 374, 384.
[334] Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 43.

strategy leaves very little room for the genuine pleasures clearly both offered and taken in the wide body of films which fall under the exploitation label, while Church's recuperative move to hold up sincerity as positive and primary to fan practices, and irony as negative and secondary, is itself a foreclosure of the multiple and multivalent pleasures, interpretations, and engagements that viewers can and do take sensuous and pleasurable part in. Certainly, irony, sincerity, disgust, "cringe," camp—all can and do coexist within a truly affectionate and affinitive engagement with media of all sorts, in particular those collected under the banner of grindhouse, as I know deeply from my own personal and communal fan experience. Returning the body to the viewer/fan's engagement with these bodily-based films in particular opens up our analysis to the sensuous and affective hailing so important to the genre, while also evading limiting discourses which fail to grasp the complication, partiality, and variety of the engagements fans build with the texts within it.

While Church's imagined nostalgia framework is valuable for the substrate of class tensions critical to an understanding of exploitation film it uncovers, I would argue that this approach ignores the role bodies play in imagining, remembering, "fanning." The limit case of the transnational exploitation genre, with its critical basis in the flows and interactions between viewers and the special effects bodies onscreen, most clearly requires the enteric imaginary as a conceptual (and perceptual) means of accessing these flows in all of their dimensions. Enteric engagement allows for the bodily-based affinities and feedbacks—disgust, consumption, rumination, excretion—important to the constitution of and interaction with the exploitation genre to come to the fore. It also makes visible different but similarly critical patterns of fan nostalgia for specific industry practices which work to constitute the

genre: most significantly for my project, towards (usually practical) bodily special effects work, whose excessive use becomes linked to the imagined spatiotemporality of the generic grindhouse, while also being figured through nostalgic negotiations of bodily-based affects between viewer and onscreen techno-biological assemblage. It is within these bodily assemblages, whether practically or digitally produced, that Hye Jean Chung's assertion of the congealed and residual materiality of globally dispersed chains of transnational embodied labor, both human and animal, can be located. An enterically materialist perspective, tuned to the transnational, can attend to the very real structures and flows which crackle between and around onscreen SFX body and fan body within exploitation cinema, and the far wider body of special effects in film broadly conceived. Rather than a cinematic reading strategy as Sconce elaborates it, strongly identified with ironic distance and a focus on the film's failures to adhere to normalized codes, such a perspective might more clearly be considered a paracinematic affinity, an emphatically bodily-grounded variety of investments, aesthetic, affective, nostalgic, speculative, or otherwise, with which fans draw together the disparate films which make up the transnational exploitation corpus.

Projects of constructive or speculative nostalgia are also important to the contemporary retrosploitation object, which further frustrates the figuring of the transnational exploitation corpus within any particular historical past. While the affinitive kinship between corpse and corpus is inherent in the enteric construction through which fans collect and make sense of the media objects that fall under the banner of transnational exploitation, this connection is perhaps most visible in retrosploitation objects. While I would argue that the affective and embodied relationships between fan and onscreen special effects body are

"where the bodies are buried" in the realm of transnational exploitation cinema—that is, the fecund site from which its varied material natures can be productively read—these "bodies" are also anything but buried. The retrosploitation pastiche is perhaps the benchmark of their highest visibility.

To return to the entanglement of corpse and corpus in the case of the transnational exploitation genre, there is something of the necrophilic (or nec/romantic) highlighted by the retrosploitation example but present throughout exploitation as genre, predicated as it is on an pleasurable engagement with the violent or sexual bodily spectacle of the films themselves, the bodily feedbacks of nausea, disgust, laughter, or arousal experienced by the spectator, as well as in fan discourse. This can be seen in the frequent invocations of bodily fluids and excretions, of blood, piss, sweat, and shit, which can be tied to the transgressive thrill offered by exploitation fandom, but also the recurrent nostalgia for the "sticky floors" of the grindhouse space itself, perhaps subconsciously related to these spaces' historical function as hook up spots.[335] This bodily appeal is contextualized within a dead industrial practice, and a genre one could characterize as resurrected, whose individual films can seem obsessed with death, haunting, and bodily violence. To return to Mr. Tarantino's egg, harvested from the viscera of a dying snake to be cracked over a steaming fresh pot of Japanese-flavored resurrected Spaghetti, the commodified fan practices of a supposed

[335] Mark Jancovich and Tim Snelson, "Horror at the Crossroads: Class, Gender, and Taste at the Rialto" in *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse*, Cline and Weiner, eds., (Latham, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 112.

"grindhouse" or "exploitation aesthetic" seems bound up in notions of death, rebirth, consumption and re-consumption.

If retrosploitation is a love letter to fans of the grindhouse genre, the role of fan, creator, and cultural progenitor are excessively blurred. As filmmakers of retrosploitation projects, Takashi Miike, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino both adopt a fanboy persona which characterizes these works as loving homage, while also approaching the grindhouse genre's panoply of different works with distinct contexts and meanings as largely undifferentiated grist for the creative mill. Tarantino certainly has the most outsized reputation for mining these cultural works, even in previous productions which do not announce themselves as retrosploitation remixings.[336] Yet while these somewhat derivative references are often not advertised as such, the creation of such stealthy retrosploitation projects as *Pulp Fiction* and the *Kill Bill* series offer a kind of puzzle-box of grindhouse aural, visual, and affective reference for initiated fans and newcomers alike. These likely bear at least partial responsibility for the preponderance of younger fans, as Church notes, who develop a prosthetic memory of a grindhouse space they never could have participated in. This prosthetic memory is not unlike that of the horror fans I examined in the introduction, who pine for a supposedly lost profilmic reality of practical effects, a loss that not all of them will have been present to acutely feel. However, the affinity exploitation fans feel, and the desire many have for newer works which lay claim to occupying a corner of that canon, may

[336] For instance, films like *Jackie Brown* and *Kill Bill* vols. I and II.

just as easily be routed through the excessive corporeality such films proudly allowed to take center stage.

Just as Sconce and others have articulated when applying Bourdieu to the "paracinematic" reading strategy, there is indeed a strong element of culturally potent taste decisions implied by embracing grindhouse film as genre. However, there is an even stronger taste at play as well—as I've explored throughout this dissertation, the rumbling undercurrent of animal and human biomateriality which roils up into spectacular bodily set pieces offers not only a deeply visceral experience for viewers, but this literal feast for the eyes ruptures the supposedly seamless surface of the film screen, while also exploding limiting longstanding dualisms and divisions by celebrating completely the fleshy, the lowly, the animal, and the feminine. Rather than simply offering transgressively lowbrow thrills for those rich in cultural capital to slum in, or by nature of a naïve "to-be-laughed-at-ness" inherent in the form, the grindhouse film is distinctive (and even made possible to figure as a canon of films) by virtue of its vibrant, complicated flows and senses which bodily enfold the viewer, and which offer up a rich *amuse-bouche* for those willing not only to consume it, but to ruminate with it, and even digest and repurpose it.

In reviving and serving up (un)dead flesh, retrosploitation media offers a particular twist on this viscerality. The bodily bits provided have been even more chaotically admixed, layered, and arranged together than in their original cinematic forms, advancing an acceleration of the Wunderkammer's curious material mélange. As a romantic, sensuous embrace, as a resurrection of departed media technologies and their resulting material traces,

and in an attendant melancholic desire for an idealized and imagined shared history, the retrosploitation film can be understood as a necromantic production in every sense of the word. As such, this necromanticism engages with the three theoretical threads that I have attempted to draw throughout the chapters of this dissertation, and in this concluding chapter I shall attempt to tie them into as neat a bow as can be expected in the case of this most beguiling, chaotic, and transformable subject. In thinking through the animal and human as equally materially present (yet not equally visible) in the production of special effects bodies, retrosploitation accelerates the bodily-effects film's paradoxical hyperpresence and absence of the animal through its return to practically-mounted bodily gore, alongside a primarily digital mortification of the skin of the (simulated) celluloid. This additive layering of simulated wounds on the film "stock" itself also touches upon the second thread, that of problematized seamlessness and surface which belies an emphatically material and corporeal depth. Retrosploitation's hypermixing of varied contexts, histories, bodies, and cultures further heightens this original tendency in cinematic spectacular effects bodies broadly, and their use in exploitation film in particular. Finally, the major underlying thread of entericity as it relates to taste, digestion, distinction, consumption, already hyperpresent in films which center the spectacular effects body, and perhaps bubbles up to its highest visibility in the exploitation canon, is again accelerated and foregrounded in the retrosploitation media object.

The acceleration of these three impulses, encapsulated so explicitly in the opening scene of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, can be found throughout the varying objects which figure the retrosploitation canon. Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's *Grindhouse* (2007, US) project,

originally released as a single film in affectionate imitation of a grindhouse double bill complete with "fake" trailers sprinkled throughout, and later severed into two films upon home video and streaming release, embarks on a similar patchwork of referential and temporal pastiche as *Sukiyaki*. *Planet Terror*, Rodriguez' opener to the double bill, locates its "wandering biology" in the familiar form of the flesh-eating zombie horde, and interweaves these splattering, suppurating forms with major plotlines occurring in a hospital and in a run-down Texas barbecue stand. Both of these settings offer a rich array of stomach-turning setpieces—the explosive squeezing of pustulating boils and diseased genitals, together with squishy, sloppy plops of haunches of barbecued meat and dripping, running sauces of indiscriminate origin—and each is linked to orality as a seat of horror and disgust.[337] As in *The Howling*, meat and the eating of flesh, whether human or animal—this is notably complicated with repeated equation of the sexual objectification of our go-go dancing protagonist with the consumption of flesh—is hyperpresent throughout the narrative and the mise en scene, and is used as an emphatically shaky defining line between human and monster. Seamlessness is visually erupted through the extreme use of digitally-achieved popping, scratching, and missing reel effects, as well as the constant interruptions and breaks involved in a single film's 2 separate (yet tantalizingly linked[338]) set of creators and film-

[337] Brolin's doctor continuously sucks on a thermometer as he encounters and probes these pustules and wounds, and at one point the explosive discharge he squeezes from a boil splatters into his face and mouth. The owner of the barbecue restaurant constantly walks around chewing on his meat and offering tastes to others, and his discussions of the secret recipe with his sheriff brother create a mobility of these disgusting associations between meat and scenes of horrific violence or bodily mortification.

[338] Hints abound at a shared universe between the two diegeses – for instance, Jungle Julia, an early victim of *Death Proof*'s murderous antagonist, is given a brief eulogy over the radio that characters in *Planet Terror* are listening to.

length narratives, as well as the inclusion of multiple short film "trailers" and advertising/corporate materials.

Anna Biller's *The Love Witch* (2015, US) is less aesthetically obsessed with highly contrastive pastiche, yet it erects a pleasurable Wunderkammer of a different kind. In telling the technicolor tragedy of its protagonist Elaine, *The Love Witch* obsessively establishes a temporal authenticity of a particular kind—director, screenwriter, producer, and set designer Biller handmade Elaine's costumes using "authentic" vintage patterns, hand-hooked her Satanic pentagram shag rug, and hand-painted the psychedelic paintings adorning her carefully constructed Victorian apartment.[339] The film was shot on actual film stock, with only cinematographic and lighting effects available to late 60s filmmakers, and presents a highly aestheticized vision of an imagined past. This obsessive visual regime deepens the film's narrative and stylistic focus on beguiling surfaces which conceal dangerous depths beneath. Elaine is often shown as she applies makeup and hairpieces, constructing the shallow screen with which she hopes to transactionally achieve love and understanding, and many loving montages present her pleasurably sumptuous surface to the viewer as she goes about her various crafts or launches her seductions of various men. Along with the carefully affected sets, costumes, and props, Elaine's outer shell offers visual pleasures which are constantly shown to conceal a dangerous, mercurial being beneath. This being has been created through the violence of sexual objectification and assault, has had her body consumed, dehumanized, and flattened so many times that it is no longer clear (even to

[339] Colleen Kelsey, "Anna Biller's Practical Magic," *Interview Magazine*, 14 November 2016.

herself) what sort of being remains. Like the wolfman, Elaine's outer skin is more reversible cloak and shielding costume than truthful identifier of its owner, yet while the film assures us of her inner darkness, we never are granted a glimpse of what lies beneath. Much like Scarlett Johansen's inscrutable predatory alien in *Under the Skin*, Elaine's horror and attraction is located in an unknowable "being-without-thingness," which unlike the former is never denuded of her deceptive sheath. Instead, Elaine is repetitively shown in the act of reversing her consumption and denial of subjecthood. Her magical seductions are predicated on forcing her paramours to consume her body in a different way, by eating meals she prepares and drinking her potions which are suggested to contain her bodily fluids, and being bound by totem objects she creates with her urine and menstrual blood. Part of this metaphorical and actual consumption of Elaine's body is shown to be their sexual encounters, which occur either before or after she serves her victims a home-cooked meal. After reversing the patriarchal carnivorism which previously defined her as meat for consumption by male subjects, Elaine proceeds to either poison or violently stab her victims, and begin her search for an idealized mate once more. Yet rather than foregrounding the horror of her killing spree, the primary affective experience offered by *The Love Witch* is that of pleasure—in consuming the beautiful surfaces the film relentlessly presents in its jewel box mise-en-scene and the body of its central figure, in laughing at the often camp "naivete" carefully effected in key moments of dialogue, and in the delightfully icky gross-out moments which punctuate these pleasures[340]—an emphatically embodied experience of

[340] These moments are themselves intensely corporeal – primarily occurring as Elaine utilizes her own biomatter in her spells and food she produces for her victims to eat.

curiosity and wonder which, it can be argued, distances viewers from the tragic and horrific elements of the narrative, at the same time that it provokes contemplation on the repetition of her entrapments and murders. Here, then, is perhaps the most romanticized necromanticism the retrosploitation genre has yet offered to fans.

II. Execretory Media

Having offered just a brief glimpse into retrosploitation's participation in the themes I've focused on throughout this dissertation, there's a further dimension of retrosploitation's entericity that, I hope to suggest, raises further questions that beckon for materially-focused attention on the broader genre of special effects in film. In previous chapters, I have suggested the relationship between communication and its impossibility, and the special effects body's uniquely liminal and provocative material dimensions. In applying the notion of contact and its absence, speech and silence, to the retrosploitation canon, I argue that there is an interplay between its place as execretory media and what I will call excretory media, and that this dimension is nested within the wider necromanticism inherent in the uneasy genre. As articulated by Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, "excommunication" represents the paradoxical impossibility of communication without which communication cannot be thought. The resulting concept of execrable media offers a "tactical" theory of media capable of shaking off the theoretical limitations congealed into "new" media theory, and of radically extending the borders of the field to include the "absolutely alien." Excommunication, as the message that destroys communication itself, is also the radical impossibility "prior to the

very possibility of communication."[341] Thacker further develops this idea into his concept of "dark media," which he compelling argues provides a window onto communication with (and of) what cannot be accessed or thought, tracing a line from occult practice to the horror film broadly conceived through the common use, he argues, of negative ontology. Excommunication becomes a gulf which is bridged in the supernatural horror film through media which are not broken, but rather function "too well." Media here is less an object, and more the possibility and negation of mediation between 2 points inherent in media itself.

This concept of media—particularly horror and special-effects heavy films—offers Thacker a mode of accessing what is both wonderous and difficult to apprehend within it. This intersects with Zielinski's "bioluminescence," or magical core that inheres within certain media objects yet is difficult to grasp, that provokes a curiosity or wonderous response.[342] Thacker's exploration of Méliès' magical special effects films suggests their dual use as dramatizations of dark media, as well as dark media objects themselves, and while he does not explicitly center bodily special-effects heavy films in his study, they loom large in his selection of horror media case studies. As elaborated by the Méliès films, dark media engage in a dual practice of elaboration through certain modes of sight, "seeing something in nothing (e.g., the animate images appearing on the screen or the alchemical glass), and finding nothing in each something (the paradoxical absence or presence of the "demon" behind each thing)."[343] That Thacker locates the desire to reveal or elaborate the

[341] Galloway, Thacker, and Wark, "Introduction,"16.
[342] Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*.
[343] Thacker, "Dark Media," 85.

hidden or numinous as emphatically "a religious impulse," linking it to the *via negativa* of negative theology and ultimately negative mediation, suggests a further kinship with Zielinski's approach to media, which reject the evacuation of the magical, the numinous, and the chaotic from studies of science and technics of all kinds, and particularly in media studies approaches. As I have argued, this bioluminescent glimmer attending this oft-ignored but ever present vein in media is emphatically bound up in embodied—and enteric—experience, and requires a creative approach that is alive to the flows between the variety of human, animal, and technical bodies which make up the cinematic special effects body's hybrid materiality. Existing between religious instinct and scientific rationality, Thacker's dark media also approaches the tension between fantasy and technics inherent in special effects bodies, while extending this tension to the body's capability to "darkly" mediate. In unfolding the horror located not with media but a mediation that performs "too well," he explores the body as the ultimate site of mediation within supernatural horror. Again linking media studies to religious and magical logic, he cites pre-Christian demonology's reading of "errors of the body" as mediations of invisible, and perhaps unthinkable presences to horror media, a further step which suggests the fundamental role of special effects bodies in this tension.[344]

It is here that the figure of the revenant becomes instructive. As both a curious and ultimately unthinkable presence—a "weird" life that makes all life thinkable, as Thacker has argued for elsewhere in the case of weird fiction,[345] in the manner of Agamben's *homo*

[344] Ibid., 128.
[345] Thacker, *After Life*.

sacer—I argue that the special effects body onscreen functions as a dark mediator between its own hybrid material body, to which multiple laboring bodies, both animal, human, and nonhuman, have always already become enfolded, and which create bodily flows, affects, sensations with viewer bodies. It is this multivalent, partial, becoming mediation that powerfully arrests through its paradoxical communications, which suggest both the possibility and impossibility of communicating with unthinkable forms of life and experience. As a being both cursed and sacred, both dead and alive, both human and more-than-human, machinic and organic, born and created, the revenant of the special effects body provides an emphatically corporeal execrable figure, (re)animated in order to be mutilated and killed, to both live and die within the "animating loops"[346] of cinematic preservation.

As such, the excommunication of the retrosploitation film in particular contains an even further twist in this matryoshka of meaning and materiality. Both execrable and excretory, the enteric affinities and repurposing, recycling approach foreground even further the role of the gut, the wide array of morally and culturally inflected tastes and distastes inherent in the exploitation/grindhouse object, of consumption of the flesh of (un)dead cinema itself, and its ruminative excretion and recycling into new exploratory hybridities and transformations of spectacular effects bodies onscreen. By making excessively visible the critical, visceral materiality of the special effects body onscreen, retrosploitation offers a highly generative limit case through which the haunting presence of not a vaporous ghost or disembodied spirit, but an emphatically embodied revenant that inheres in all cinematic

[346] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

bodily spectacles, comes clearly into view. I hope that in this dissertation, my speculative and heuristic attempts to grasp and to ruminate on this revenant will inspire a further focus on the corporeal materiality of special effects across all media broadly conceived.

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