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Publication Date

2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Fraught Pleasures:

Domestic Trauma and Cinephilia in American Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Film and Television

by

Benjamin Raphael Sher

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fraught Pleasures:

Domestic Trauma and Cinephilia in American Culture

by

Benjamin Raphael Sher

Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Kathleen A. McHugh, Chair

This project examines different ways in which people have used their profound love of mainstream American films to process experiences of trauma that take place in and around the home (including abuse, neglect, abandonment, and bullying/violence related to identity). It argues that a love of film, known as cinephilia, may contain and be motivated by painful traces of trauma that create barriers to personal growth. At the same time, the fraught pleasures that lead a person to re-enact his or her traumas by, for example, obsessively watching films, though often regarded as destructive and counter-productive, may carry within them reparative, therapeutic tools.

Popular fictional films and television shows repeatedly make connections between trauma, cinephilia, and criminality. These texts refer to widely accepted assumptions made by organizations, including the government and the educational system, that trauma survivors' consumption of media relating to their devastating experiences will lead them to perpetuate

traumas on others. This project counteracts such assumptions by examining less prominent evidence that presents trauma survivors' cinephilia as therapeutic, including case studies by therapists who use popular films in treatment and autobiographical documentaries.

This dissertation illuminates the experiences of filmmakers and audience members who are often relegated to the margins of mainstream and academic discourse. It argues that trauma survivors constitute an oppressed group, whose engagements with media warrant (but have not received) similar research to that focused on people of color, women, and LGBTQ people. Indeed, examining trauma survivors as a group reveals uncharted intersections among people of different colors, sexual orientations, genders, and nationalities. This dissertation creates a map of several uncharted relationships: Between trauma survivors and media; between the aesthetic, the personal, and the political; between different people who share similar profound challenges; and between popular entertainment and therapeutic action.

The dissertation of Benjamin Raphael Sher is approved.

Chon Noriega

John Thornton Caldwell

Janet Walker

Kathleen A. McHugh, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

For my family.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It feels wonderful to think about all of the people who have helped me complete this dissertation, but it's hard to find words to convey all that they have done for me and meant to me. I find myself tempted to just re-print the lyrics from Lulu's song "To Sir, With Love," because the song conveys the level of my gratitude. If any of the people on this list wanted the sky I would write across the sky in letters, that would soar 1,000 feet high. However, I think it necessary to give more specific praise and thanks. It isn't easy, but I'll try.

UCLA Graduate Division and the trustees of the Harold Leonard Fellowship funded my master's degree at UCLA, allowing me to relocate to Los Angeles. The Kemp R. Niver Scholarship in Film History, The Plitt Southern Theater Employees Trust Fellowship, and a UCLA Graduate Division Dissertation Year Fellowship crucially funded the final two years of the process, and helped me to reach the finish line.

Julie Abraham and Malcolm Turvey, at Sarah Lawrence College, first inspired me to take the academic path. They've been advisors all along the way. I give my profound thanks to the entire faculty and staff of the Cinema and Media Studies program at UCLA, for picking me out of the crowd, giving me a department in which to fulfill so many personal and professional goals, and recommending me for the aforementioned awards. I owe certain individuals extra thanks. Vivian Sobchack encouraged me to take on unconventional topics and write about them unconventionally. She's provided a great deal of encouragement and inspiration, and also asked the hard questions. Steve Ricci and Allyson Nadya Field offered ideal guidance as I formulated my dissertation prospectus in their Research Design courses, making a task that initially seemed insurmountable manageable and fun. My committee members, Chon Noriega and John Caldwell, took a lot of time sharing brilliant insights on my work, and impressing me with their vast realms

of knowledge about everything. Chon helped me formulate the dissertation's overall structure, and makes my day whenever I see him (especially now that I've learned how to match him joke-for-joke). Graduate Advisor Cheri Smith answered all of my questions about navigating graduate life at UCLA without ever losing patience. I thank her for her sense of humor, and also for discussing *Dark Shadows* with me. Brian Clark, the Cinema and Media Studies program's Academic Analyst, has supported me tremendously, as he does everybody in our program. We widely acknowledge him as the glue that holds us together! Over many lunches and meetings, Department Chair William McDonald offered advice and various kinds of support when I was Teaching Assistant Coordinator for my program. He and Stephen Mamber also orchestrated my nomination for The UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award, which gave me the cherished knowledge that my students benefitted from my teaching as much as I benefitted from knowing them. Indeed, I thank the students in my courses "LGBTQ Media Spectatorship" and "American Genre Films and Domestic Trauma" for sharing my passions, and for influencing many of the ideas in this project.

I never imagined, when I "left everything behind" in New York to come to Los Angeles, the depths of the friendships that I would find here. I met my cohort first. I could not have jumped through all of the flaming hoops of graduate school without knowing that Bryan Hartzheim, Dennis Lo, Phil Wagner, and Julia Wright had my back. In particular, Mila Zuo and Samantha Sheppard have been like siblings. I've grown so much as a person and a scholar from knowing them, and from having the privilege of following the progress of their work. Chris Carloy and Sierra Wilson were my first constant companions and confidantes in Los Angeles and graduate school, and eased my transition immensely. One night in the study lounge of graduate student housing, I fell asleep reading Deleuze and woke up to meet my fellow New York

expatriate, Virginia Woolf enthusiast, and soul mate Jacquelyn Ardam. I cannot imagine a better companion at the Algonquin round table of academia and life. My two-person coven with Morgan Woolsey has been like a century spent in Shangri La, an overnight stay at the best mom and pop video store, and the best academic conference ever all rolled into one. I cherish living and breathing movies, the 1970s, and feminism with Maya Montanez Smukler, but I've gained even more from her humor, kindness, and extraordinary wisdom. Thank you to Lindsay Giggey, Katy Peplin, and Allison McCracken for being girls like us. Lindsay, our many sushi dinners and yogurt trips have been like a beloved TV series. We will own it in its entirety. The much esteemed and beloved Ross Melnick entered my life as an extraordinary graduate student mentor/teacher, and ended up being a close friend (to whom I still go for advice all the time). At UCLA, I must also thank Jennifer Porst, Ben Sampson, Diana King, Mark Quigley, Jennifer Moorman, Jason Gendler, Daniel Steinhart, Clifford Hilo, Harrison Gish, Michael Kmet, Heather Collette-Vanderaa, Bryan Wuest, and Jose Salvador Gallegos.

Outside of UCLA, Rachel Green has infinitely brightened my life by sharing her paintbrush with me. Michael J. Ferrari and Jesse Murray gave me lasting friendship, a shared understanding of Shelley Long's magic, and wonderful para-academic outlets for my cinephilia and writing. Trish and Russ Fisher, Alison Keohane, Ann Fountain, Lindsay Zielinski, Carmen Fong, and Josh Atkinson have always been there when I needed to go home. Marcia Greenberg offered many insights on the relationship between film, myth, and therapy, and was the most excited of all my friends to read the final product. I give my gratitude and love to the Sunday men, who have understood and supported me in ways that nobody else can, and who frequently reiterated the importance of this project from beginning to end. Claire Vancik, my oldest friend,

has been there through it all. We know everything there is to know about each other, and I am grateful for it.

It seems almost ridiculous to try and sum up everything that my family has done for me in a few tidy sentences. My mother, Nina Sher, supported my love for many of the films and genres analyzed in this dissertation when people in my hometown acted like doing so made her a bad parent. She let me skip summer camp so that we could go see *Single White Female*. She told me that my eccentricities, condemned by many, would eventually lead to a rewarding life. Largely because she kept urging me to believe that, she ended up being right. She inspired my teaching tremendously. When I was born, my dad had only seen about two movies in his life and referred to the TV set as “the idiot box,” so he was disturbed when it became the center of my universe. It speaks to his open-mindedness that he has become one of the most enthusiastic supporters of my work. Because we are very similar, we need and understand each other in a special way. My sister, Jackie Schillinger, is my life companion and truest confidante. They have supported me emotionally, financially, and at all hours of the day. They have given me the rare and invaluable gift of fundamental security, which has allowed me to take risks. I feel lucky to have a terrific group of in-laws. Eric Schillinger, Marilyn Storey, Kenny Tomasian, and Ewa Gonsko have treated me like a beloved relative since we met, have taken interest in my life and work, and have never, *ever* pejoratively asked “When are you going to be finished?” Melissa Routhier and I have shared a special bond since day one of my relationship with her brother.

I could accurately say that I could not have written this dissertation without everybody mentioned in these acknowledgements. However, I owe four people special thanks. David Schreiber was the first person to encourage me to write my dissertation about this topic, when I had planned to write about something different. I gleaned as many insights about trauma and

cinophilia from our relationship as I did from any of the books and media texts analyzed herein. His support has been vital in many areas of my life. Janet Walker's book, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, showed me that it was possible to write about the alignments between trauma's frustratingly abstract qualities and film in the ways that I had begun to think about them. It made me realize that, perhaps, I could write my dissertation. I felt so honored when she came on board as my outside committee member. She has been extraordinarily involved in the writing process, reading multiple drafts and always making herself available to chat on Skype about academic quandaries. Her work, and kind guidance, have immeasurably influenced this project, and led to many of what I feel to be its most important arguments.

I knew that I would attend UCLA's graduate program as soon as I met Kathleen McHugh. Our connection first manifested itself during a passionate discussion about *The Grifters* and *In the Cut* in 2007, and has grown ever richer since then. When I began to formulate this topic, I had found very little evidence to back up my central ideas about the relationships between trauma and cinophilia, other than a kind of basic intuition. Kathleen encouraged me to follow my intuition, and assured me that I would find the evidence I needed. Every discussion that we've had about this topic has been enormously generative. Whenever she suggested that I take part of the project in a direction that I resisted (usually because I found it particularly challenging), pursuing the path always led me to create work that I loved. Over the years, she has employed me, advocated for me, supported me through situations both exciting and challenging, responded to a million e-mails, and met with me for as many hours. She's been an ideal professor, advisor, and dissertation chair, but also a friend.

Finally, I offer the greatest of thanks to my husband, Jason Tomasian, who has been the most present in my life through every step of this process. Our frequent discussions about trauma, psychology (and their social aspects), movies, and cinephilia have certainly informed my work tremendously. He's watched me rehearse many conference presentations and given me feedback on everything I've written. However, I'm most grateful to him for giving me a home filled with laughter, sharp observations about strange things, love, and peace.

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Introduction:

A Relationship That Has Not Spoken Its Name

Domestic trauma and cinephilia tend to get relegated to the shadows. Domestic trauma (trauma that takes place in and around the home, including abuse, neglect, abandonment, and persecution based on identity) is defined partially by the many institutional structures that keep it a secret. When an instance of domestic trauma is made a part of public discourse, such as when Penn State football coach Jerry Sandusky was accused and convicted of multiple child molestations, or when Christina Crawford documented the abuse that she experienced at the hands of her mother Joan in her 1977 memoir *Mommie Dearest*, the fact that the traumas were kept carefully under wraps for so long inevitably become a prominent part of the scandal. For different, less clear reasons, domestic trauma remains marginalized in cinema and media studies scholarship as well, in spite of groundbreaking work by scholars like Janet Walker and Ann Cvetkovich. For example, in the 2015 Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) catalog, the vast majority of papers (and all panels) related to trauma focused on collective, national traumas like September 11, 2001. Although, as Walker so effectively demonstrates, collective traumas influence and create domestic traumas, traumas that take place in and around the home remain under-discussed.¹

Secrecy and marginalization are not necessarily fundamental components of cinephilia. However, as with domestic trauma, a set of institutional structures—including taste, class, the academy, and models of exhibition and distribution—contribute to the marginalization of many different kinds of cinephilia. Richard Brody opened his 2015 *New Yorker* article titled “The Limits of Cinephilia,” which discussed the release of Jean Luc Godard’s film *Goodbye to*

¹ Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Language and a biography about famous New York cinephile Amos Vogel, with the statement: “The history of cinephilia—of movie madness as an artistic principle—is a tale of two cities, New York and Paris.”² As I will elaborate, this notion, which declares that “the history of cinephilia” is a history of urban intellectuals engaging with films that they deemed important art, has permeated much academic discourse about what cinephilia is and how it functions, creating histories and theories of cinephilia that exclude very different types of marginal cinephilia.

This dissertation examines several locations in which domestic trauma and cinephilia encounter one another. I present and examine a tapestry of case studies of people who have communicated how their experiences of trauma and cinephilia have intertwined through therapy, film-making, and other forms of creative production, and examine how the relationship between trauma and cinephilia that they articulate has been understood and misunderstood in American culture during the 20th and 21st centuries. In uniting trauma and cinephilia, two perceptual experiences that have often been theorized similarly, but apart, I make these marginalized phenomena central. Bringing trauma and cinephilia together also insists on a breaking down of boundaries that are commonly taken for granted in the academy when trauma and cinephilia are described and discussed: those that separate high and low culture; reality and fantasy; spectatorship and fandom; spectatorship and production; aesthetics and ideology; the indexical and representation; public and private; positive and negative affects; home vs. theatrical exhibition. By bringing trauma and cinephilia together, I have gathered a substantial amount of evidence that reveals profound, previously unexamined ways in which spectators engage with popular genre films (including “low” genre films). This evidence also illuminates the ways in

² Richard Brody, “The Limits of Cinephilia,” *The New Yorker*, January 20, 2015, accessed 3/23/15 at <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/limits-american-cinephilia>

which genre films can intentionally and unintentionally contain vivid representations of trauma and post-traumatic subjectivity.

I define cinephilia as a passionate love for film and/or media that creates within the spectator a desire to make media texts, or certain media texts, his or her own. This passion may include: watching a film or television series over and over again, garnering each nuance from the information presented in the screen space (from indexical details in a film's *mise-en-scène* to its fictional characters); the tendency to seek out behind-the-scenes, historical, and contextual information about a media text; collecting media and paratextual materials that relate to media; and/or the desire to produce film, art, photography, criticism, literature, or therapeutic discourse related to cinephilic perception. Cinephilia can take place in a movie theater where a 35mm print is being projected, and it can also take place at home in front of a television screen.

As I will elaborate, my definition of cinephilia insists on the expansion and complication of influential scholarship that describes cinephilia as a purely aesthetic experience: an experience of physical bliss that comes from noticing an indexical detail in a film, like the wind in the trees behind a film's actors, or the color of Cary Grant's socks in *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959). Much of this scholarship purposefully excludes the multiple ways in which spectators may experience cinephilic engagement with a film's representations (its constructed narrative, thematic, and ideological meanings). In doing so, it excludes the ways in which race, gender, sexual identity, and/or different psychology may inspire and inform a person's cinephilia. The filmmakers and authors examined in this dissertation purposefully make connections between identity, engagement with filmic representations, and cinephilia. For them, cinephilia is not a perceptual experience that excludes representation, but one that involves a strong cathection with the *interplay* of a film's representations, ideological undercurrents,

indexical qualities, aesthetics, and form. As such, discussing domestic trauma and cinephilia in relation to one another creates the opportunity to examine cinephilia that takes place on the margins of society and its cultural institutions.

Cinephilia is often associated with “good” taste, or a love of aesthetically accomplished films by filmmakers who have earned the designated title of “artist.” Scholars have designated adoring spectatorship of low culture, or of media other than film, as fandom. The cinephiles described in the following chapters blur the lines between fandom and cinephilia, suggesting that cinephilic perception can also include low culture and media other than film. They often love and draw inspiration from violent, lurid contemporary horror films and erotic thrillers, irreverent, politically incorrect comedies, exploitation movies, 1970s science fiction TV shows, sitcoms, and TV talk shows. These cinephiles—who could also be described as lay theorists—illuminate the profoundly serious meanings that can be found in media often characterized as trash. Jeffrey Sconce has written about spectators who are drawn to “trash cinema” in his edited anthology *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics* and his seminal article “‘Trashing’ the Academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style.” However, the engagement that Sconce describes is cynical, mocking, and distanced from the object of “affection.” The engagement with “trash” cinema demonstrated by the cinephiles that I will discuss, a kind of engagement that is excluded from Sconce’s theory, is loving, serious, and sincere: in another word, cinephilic.

Indeed, it seems notable that all of the cinephiles in this dissertation, in spite of their highly varied object choices, are all drawn to mainstream American genre films, which have often been excluded from scholarship about trauma and media. Evidence suggests that this phenomenon is likely more than a coincidence. Like a trauma cycle, a genre or genre cycle keeps

repeating itself, but the structural repetitions among genre films underlie different details in plot and style (much in the way that a person repeating a repressed trauma often repeats it in varying ways, depending on his or her life events and circumstances). Finally, my discussion of cinephilia joins a growing body of recent scholarship that counteracts the frequently made assertion that cinephilia, by nature, is an event that first takes place in a movie theater.³ Post-traumatic cinephilia often takes place at home, which fundamentally informs its nature and meaning: People experience cinephilia in the same environment that they experience trauma.

In bringing trauma and cinephilia together, I assert that a person's use of cinephilia to engage with their experiences of trauma can become a fundamental component of everyday life. This assertion problematizes a common academic and popular notion that a person's experience of cinephilia constitutes an event that takes place in a movie theater, that the cinephile later tries to re-capture through writing or filmmaking (although it can never be re-captured or reproduced completely). Ann Cvetkovich has problematized similar descriptions of trauma (as the experience of an event that the survivor then obsessively, if unintentionally, tries to re-create in order to process it, while never being able to quite re-create it). She examines the ways in which trauma—the events of trauma, and the effects of trauma—become part of everyday life. Cvetkovich writes about how domestic trauma, rather than a catastrophe that exceeds ordinary experience, is often embedded in people's everyday lives, tied to broader structures like capitalism, sexism, classism, colonialism, racism, and homophobia. She argues that trauma, more than just a singular traumatic event, can permeate people's everyday thoughts, experiences, and

³See: Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment" in *Cinephilia, Movies, Love, and Memory*, eds. Marijke de Valck & Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 36.; Lucas Hilderbrand, "Cinematic Promiscuity: Cinephilia After Videophilia," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, no. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2009), 214; Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

interactions, with each other and with culture.⁴ My study of cinephilia draws upon Cvetkovich's understanding of trauma in order to study how cinephilia is also a perceptual experience that is very much a part of everyday life, and that is tied to one's positioning as a subject within broader social systems related to identity. I counteract scholarship by Keathley and Willemsen, and their descendants, by insisting that cinephilia includes not just a transcendent experience of a film's aesthetics, but the ways in which memories from films and ideas inspired by films—often, by their *representations*—emerge to a cinephile as he or she goes about his or her business, informing the way in which the cinephile experiences and interacts with the surrounding world. Scholars and popular critics have often gestured towards this way of experiencing movies as part of everyday life. In Linda Williams' article about *Stella Dallas*, she quotes a scene in Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room* in which several friends describe how much *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1933) instilled in them a base belief that a woman's life must be one of self-sacrifice, but also a desire to rebel against it.⁵ The title of Pauline Kael's first book of essays, *I Lost it at the Movies*, directly references Kael's "losing it" during a screening of *Shoeshine* (Vittorio de Sica, 1946) when the emotions inspired by the movie melded with her emotions after a recent breakup, but also indirectly alludes to films' ability to make us lose our innocence.⁶ These film critics and scholars, like many others, take it for granted that cinephilia interacts with everyday life without making an effort to systematically analyze how this phenomenon works and what processes it entails. They explore the everyday life of cinephilia through autobiographical engagement or by putting psychoanalytic concepts in conversation with film texts. I undertake a systematic analysis of how cinephilia exists as a part of everyday life,

⁴ Cvetkovich, 44.

⁵ Linda Williams, "Something Else Besides a Mother: 'Stella Dallas' and the Maternal Melodrama," *Cinema Journal* (Autumn 1984) 24, no. 1: 2.

⁶ Pauline Kael, *I Lost it at the Movies* (New York: Little Brown & Co., 1965).

including the everyday life of trauma, by examining multiple cases in which this phenomenon takes place. I place these cases in conversation with various discursive sources (fictional feature films; therapy books) that, to an extent, misunderstand how the relationship between trauma and cinephilia can work, and point to broader cultural misunderstandings of that relationship. Various components of the experience of trauma (repetition compulsion; hyper-vigilance; the tendency to blur the lines between fantasy and reality; the burning need to describe intense experiences and feelings that cannot be described) uniquely complement what have been theorized as the components of cinephilia. I, taking a cue from scholars ranging from Freud to Ann Cvetkovich, argue that the consumption and production of art—even violent, horrific or unpleasant art—can become a way to work out traumas for its producers and for its spectators by providing them with forms of (sometimes ambivalent or problematic) pleasure. In particular, Freud writes that “artistic imitation” is one of the major ways in which adults work out their traumas through artistic production. He describes people who imitate reality by acting in, writing, and directing fictional plays. For cinephiles that have experienced trauma, “artistic imitation” often entails imitation of other films (imitation of, perhaps, of the cinephiles’ alternate or affective realities). Acts of creation and/or imitation are inextricably intertwined with trauma and cinephilia in all of the texts discussed herein.⁷

My dissertation examines a group of texts that bring together trauma and cinephilia, but have not been examined by scholars writing on either subject.⁸ Throughout my dissertation, I draw upon contemporary cognitive and psychoanalytic theories of emotional trauma and put them in conversation with the spectator positions articulated by the texts and filmmakers under

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey. (1920, repr., New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 17.

⁸ The exception to this rule is Odette Springer’s *Some Nudity Required* (See: Walker, *Trauma Cinema*). However, Walker does not discuss the film as a representation of cinephilia.

discussion.⁹ I will argue that these texts demonstrate parallels between the symptoms of trauma and the practices and scholarly definitions of cinephilia. I will also put theories of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in conversation with some of the films and film genres that the cinephiles represented in my central texts repeatedly appropriate (contemporary slasher films; melodramas; etc.). These texts demonstrate that elements of film style and genre conventions resonate strongly with the subjective experience of emotional trauma, perhaps suggesting one reason why trauma and cinephilia are repeatedly linked. This dissertation offers a systematic analysis of “cases and situations” in which the everyday life of trauma becomes inseparable from the everyday life of cinephilia. At the same time, it aims to create a theoretical and historical framework that allows us to account for this relationship’s complex, almost infinite possibilities and types of manifestation.

I. Trauma and cinephilia: theories of spectatorship with similar trajectories in the academy

Trauma and cinephilia do not seem to go together, predominantly because they’ve historically been associated with negative and positive affects, respectively. However, placing the bodies of academic theory on both subjects in conversation reveals many uncanny similarities in the ways that they’ve been theorized. This dialogue suggests that they have always shared many fundamental qualities, even as scholars have (likely unintentionally) kept them apart.

Scholars have repeatedly defined both trauma and cinephilia as forms of spectatorship and witnessing (of traumatic events, and/or media texts) that are characterized by their fraught

⁹ As will be discussed in my literature review, this methodology is inspired by Janet Walker’s work on trauma and cinema.

encounters with the possibility of representation, and their overall un-reproducibility. It speaks to the commonalities shared by trauma and cinephilia that the bodies of theory on each have taken similar historical trajectories. I have identified three different groups of scholarly writing about trauma and cinephilia. Although the publication dates of the writings in these groups sometimes overlap, overall each group marks a shifting development of scholarly understandings of trauma and cinephilia. Because of this, I describe these groups as “phases.” In each phase of writing about trauma and cinephilia, theories about the complex workings of these phenomena have demonstrated notable similarities with one another and, sometimes, similar limitations. These paths have only recently begun to cross.

One of the earliest and most influential texts on the psychology of trauma, Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, makes an immediate connection between experiencing trauma and highly catheted spectatorship and production of performing arts. Freud makes the influential argument that those who have experienced trauma develop repetition compulsion: in various ways, they intentionally or unintentionally re-enact their trauma over and over again, in order to master and understand it. Freud writes that the acts of watching, writing, directing, and performing plays about trauma are ways in which this repetition compulsion may manifest itself. By doing this, he makes connections between trauma, repetition compulsion, spectatorship, and production/creation that are similar to my own. He writes:

Finally, a reminder may be added that the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children’s, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. This is convincing proof that, even

under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself un-pleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind. The consideration of these cases and situations, which have a yield of pleasure as their final outcome, should be undertaken by some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subject-matter.¹⁰

Freud's argument that the consumption and production of art—including disturbing art—can become a way to work out traumas for its producers and for its spectators by providing them with forms of (sometimes ambivalent or problematic) pleasure has strongly informed my own. I particularly appreciate Freud's flexibility regarding how post-traumatic spectatorship works. In making the assertion that people can use spectatorship and performance of plays as means of working through trauma, Freud suggests that aspects of trauma can be represented, and that people can have profound engagements with representation. Freud also does not impose limits on the types of culture that can have meaning for people who have experienced trauma. For example, he does not argue that Shakespearean plays about trauma are more conducive to working through trauma than plays by popular, contemporary writers. Later writings on trauma and cinephilia, though both sharing similarities with Freud's discussion of post-traumatic spectatorship in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tend to keep trauma and spectatorship of the arts apart, even though they theorize both trauma *and* media consumption as types of spectatorship with many similarities. As importantly, these writings imposed far more limits on what can be represented, on what kinds of art can be meaningful for people with various life histories, and on

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey. (1920, repr., New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 17.

what *elements* of art can be meaningful for them. The limits that these scholars have imposed on post-traumatic perception and cinephilic perception have created large blind spots that have kept us from fully perceiving and understanding the relationships between trauma and cinephilia that have existed in American culture throughout the 20th century, which I aim to fill in this project.

The subjects of this project, trauma survivors who use cinephilia in order to process their experiences, are highly engaged with film aesthetics *and* film representations. Indeed, trauma survivors often identify specifically with films' interplay between representational elements (characters; generic motifs) and aesthetics (color, cinematography, indexicality, etc.), which in various ways resonate with their traumatic experiences and/or post-traumatic subjectivity. Problematically, early scholarship suggested that both trauma and cinephilia made engagement with media representations impossible.

Arguably the most influential early work on cinephilia, Keathley's monograph *Cinephilia, or the Wind in the Trees*, excludes engagement with representations from cinephilic perception, thus excluding the experiences of many of the trauma survivors described in this project from cinephilia's history. Ironically, Keathley enacts this exclusion by drawing upon works by Roland Barthes that I would describe as early documentations of post-traumatic mediaphilia. Keathley formulates his theory of cinephilia by placing an early discussion about cinephilia conducted by Paul Willemen in conversation with the concepts of "the third meaning," "the punctum," and "*jouissance*." Roland Barthes' developed and mobilized these concepts in order to analyze his reactions to photographs documenting imagery that alluded to or aimed to represent trauma. Importantly, he felt compelled to perform many of these analyses while

grappling with grief in the wake of his mother's death, which he experienced as traumatic.¹¹ However, Willemen forcefully excludes issues of representation from his theory of cinephilia. Thus, in creating his theory of cinephilic perception from a dialogue between Barthes and Willemen, Keathley excludes discussions of trauma and representation from his definition of cinephilic perception, creating a structuring absence in academic discussions of cinephilia that this dissertation aims to rectify. Keathley and Willemen's definitions of cinephilic perception also prove somewhat limiting in that, in trying to pin down a few specific ways in which such perception works for all cinephiles, they create a theoretical and historical methodology that does not leave room for cinephilic perception's highly, even infinitely individualized nature.

Willemen defines cinephilic perception as the tendency to experience "moments of revelation," moments in a film "which can only be seen as designating, for [cinephiles], something in excess of the representation."¹² Willemen defines representation as "what is being shown" by a film's makers (writer, director, actors, cinematographer, producers): it is what they intend for the spectator to perceive and understand about the diegetic world that they create. In other words, representations constitute the filmmakers' constructions of narrative, thematic, and ideological meaning. Keathley builds on Willemen's identification of cinephilic moments of revelation by arguing that one of the predominant practices of the cinephile is to experience "cinephiliac moments" and "panoramic perception" while watching a film. Keathley defines *panoramic perception* as "...the inclination to fix on marginalia in the images or landscape that pass before the viewer's eyes."¹³ He defines a "cinephiliac moment" as "the sudden eruption of

¹¹ Kathleen McHugh, "The Aesthetics of Wounding: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Critical Voice" in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 247.

¹² *Ibid.*, 240.

¹³ Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 44.

the real...in a text dominated by iconic and symbolic practices.” He understands the “eruption of the real” to be an unplanned visual documentation of physical, natural reality: something concrete and objective. Most prominently, he describes a number of movies that poetically document “the wind in the trees” behind the filmic narrative.

Keathley draws upon Barthes’ discussions of “the third meaning” and “the punctum” in order to explain the ways in which cinephilic perception functions, and to further illuminate Willemen’s theory. Barthes describes “the third meaning” as an under-current of the film that often contradicts the film’s temporality, shots, and sequences. It reveals something to the spectator that is counter-logical to the film’s narrative, and yet true. He finds the third meaning to be most detectable in film stills, rather than films themselves. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes introduced the term *punctum*. The *punctum* is a detail in a photograph that attracts the spectator to a photograph, that reaches out beyond and perhaps contradicts the photo’s *studium* (its most overt, culturally determined “meaning,” akin to Willemen’s definition of representation). It is somewhat similar to “the third meaning.” However, Barthes specifies that *the punctum*, more than just something inherent in the text, is the result of an exchange between the text and the spectator. As such, *the punctum* is individuated. Different spectators are touched by different *punctum* when looking at a photograph, and some are not touched by it at all. Barthes describes the *punctum* as what the spectator adds “to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*.” Keathley argues that the *punctum* reaches out from the film’s *studium* (its constructed meanings) and pricks the cinephile.

The subjects of my project largely demonstrate the effectiveness of Keathley’s use of Barthes to define the ways in which cinephilic perception functions: many of the cinephiles that I will discuss seem to respond to something in popular films that is counter-narrative, and yet true

to them. However, they also problematize the ways in which he draws upon Barthes to forcefully exclude an engagement with representation from cinephilic perception. Keathley writes that:

In the context of Barthes' overall critical project, the third meaning and the *punctum* can be understood as eruptions of figuration in a text otherwise dominated by representation. In *The Pleasures of the Text*, Barthes contrasted representation to figuration, arguing that while the former is an organization of cultural and ideological meanings, resulting in *plaisir* (pleasure), the latter is beyond such generalizable meaning, marked by *jouissance* (bliss)—the individual's fetishistic, bodily experience of pleasure...Placing figuration on the side of fetishism, and setting representation against it, Barthes wrote, "That is what representation is: when nothing emerges, when nothing leaps out of the screen."¹⁴

Kathleen McHugh's reading of the punctum strongly problematizes Keathley's use of Barthes' terminology to define cinephilia as, by nature, a perceptual experience that excludes representation, and thus the social, the political, issues of identity, and, as a result, the traumatic. In her discussion of *Camera Lucida*, McHugh notes that, although Barthes never explicitly addresses the active presence of the political and the social in his discussions of the individual's (and, particularly, his own) subjective, affective perceptions of the aesthetic, he still purposefully acknowledges their presence through his use of politically and socially infused photographs that resonate, in various ways, with traumatic experiences in order to explicate the notion of "the punctum." His choice of photographs also demonstrates his personal engagement with the

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

subjects that they represent. Furthermore, McHugh points out that Barthes' definition of "the punctum" both appropriates the language of trauma ("that accident which pricks me, but also bruises me, is poignant to me") and is, as was aforementioned, formulated from his experiences of looking at photographs while grappling with the trauma of his mother's death.¹⁵ McHugh argues that the punctum that "prick" Barthes from the representations in these highly socially and politically informed photographs allegorize his post-traumatic affect.

I use the texts examined in this project to compose a history and flexible theoretical framework of marginalized cinephilia. They demonstrate that, by excluding engagement with representations from their definitions of cinephilic perceptual practices, Keathley and Willemen leave out fundamental cathected points of entry for cinephiles who are not typically discussed in scholarship about cinephilia, including African-Americans, gay men and women, feminists, and trauma survivors. Thus, they do not examine the ways in which race, gender, sexual identity, and/or different psychology may inspire and inform a person's cinephilia. Indeed, both Willemen and Keathley forcefully point to the *Screen* theorists' (and, in particular, Laura Mulvey's) focus on representation and identity as among the leading causes of cinephilia's death. This dissertation demonstrates that representations often "emerge," "leap out of the screen," and become fetishized for under and/or misrepresented viewers. The texts and people that it examines suggest that a spectator's response to an "organization of cultural and ideological meanings," and his or her discovery of a third meaning that allows resistance to or re-appropriation of that organization, can lead to an aesthetic, "fetishistic, bodily experience of pleasure" that is certainly also cultural, social, and political. For evidence of this, one need only watch one of Tyler Perry's multiple drag re-enactments of *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985).

¹⁵ McHugh, 247.

Early trauma theorists' engagement (or lack thereof) with representation are notably similar to those of Keathley and Willemen. Early theories of trauma suggested that trauma was impossible to experience in a coherent way, and thus could not be represented. Trauma survivors dealt with much more devastating experiences and higher stakes in witnessing and remembering trauma than cinephiles. However, their perceptions were understood as similar to those of cinephiles, who experienced and then tried to remember and recount their cinephilic perceptions, which were both separate from the film's coherent aspects (its representations) and impossible to represent coherently themselves.

Early trauma theorists also argued that those who experienced trauma could only witness, remember, and document their experiences indirectly. Cathy Caruth argues that literature, like the psychology of post-traumatic stress disorder, structurally reveals some information about a story or its characters to its reader, while keeping other information back or representing it only symbolically. Caruth argues that literary and filmic tropes are unusually successful at documenting trauma because they allow for recreation of the aspects of the experience of trauma that cannot be represented in a literal way: the ways in which memories and experiences of trauma often take place well after the trauma, and in forms highly divergent from what actually happened. In Shoshana Felman's analysis of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, she argues that Lanzmann deals with Holocaust trauma's complete unrepresentability by only representing things that took place around it: the empty train tracks to the concentration camps, empty concentration camps now covered with flowers, the incommensurable memories of witnesses (including S.S. officials, Polish townspeople, and Jewish people who survived the genocide). When I watch Lanzmann's insistent focus on the serene nature that once surrounded the atrocities of the Holocaust as they happened in *Shoah*, I am reminded of Keathley's suggestion

that the cinephile is more likely to have a profound bodily experience in response to, and need to tell others about, the wind in the trees behind Jules and Jim, than in response to Jules and Jim themselves. Indeed, Lanzmann similarly focuses on the wind and the trees behind an event that is allegedly later excluded from representation in its recounting. However, when one of his subjects states that the field in which untold numbers of bodies were burned was as peaceful then as it was in 1986, he points to the fact that, for a spectator of trauma, the representable remnants of an allegedly unrepresentable event (the wind in the trees behind the place where the bodies were burned) cannot be experienced as separate from what took place there by a survivor of the event. Although their traumatic experiences were very different from the survivors documented by Lanzmann, the survivors documented in this dissertation similarly cannot (indeed, do not seem to want to) completely extricate their cinephilic experiences from film representations, even when their cinephilia also includes film's non-representational marginalia. It is often the representations in film that come closest to giving cinephiles documentation of the events in their lives that they find otherwise unrepresentable or inaccessible.

Early theories of cinephilia and trauma also share a tendency to argue that both phenomena can only be adequately grappled with by high, often modernist culture. Early critical writing and filmmaking conveying cinephilia, by authors like Bazin, Godard, and Truffaut, did not celebrate the authors' beloved B-genre films as low culture, but rather aimed to elevate their status to that of high art. These cinephiles aimed to raise the cultural capital of their beloved objects by celebrating their innovations in intellectual journals and paying homage to them in modernist films. A sequence in Godard's *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, in which Godard (the film's narrator) opines that he cannot decide whether to focus on the film's main character when she goes to a gas station, a random woman sitting in the same gas station, or the wind in the trees

behind the gas station, seems like a template for Keathley and Willemen's theories, although neither discuss it. While French cinephiles used high culture and modernist production in order to communicate their cinephilia as a means of raising the cultural status of cherished films, authors like Caruth and Felman seem to take it for granted that modernist texts are necessary for communicating trauma both because their inclusion of structuring absences resonate with symptoms of PTSD, and because low cultural forms are not adequate to document events as profoundly serious as those that constituted the Holocaust. Joshua Hirsch discusses how this resistance to low cultural depictions of the Holocaust manifested itself in mainstream culture, when he describes Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel's furious letter to the *New York Times* about the 1978 miniseries *Holocaust*. Hirsch points out that Weisel was deeply offended and angered by the idea that a Hollywood-style melodrama miniseries could represent an event whose deeply traumatic elements made it impossible to comprehend (similar complaints would later be made about Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List*).¹⁶

The second phase of writing on trauma and cinephilia grapples with the possibility that witnesses of trauma and cinephiles could engage with the representational, and representable, aspects of trauma and cinephilia. These authors' demonstrations that representation can be a fundamental part of trauma and cinephilia, and the art that communicates both experiences, contribute to establishing the politics of both phenomena. For example, in her article "Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience" and her book *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Walker applies a somewhat similar methodology as Caruth in her analysis of films and videos that document incest and the Holocaust. However, one of Walker's most essential points is that trauma can be representable even in its inability to be conventionally

¹⁶ Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 4.

represented (both in fiction and in film texts). Such representations, she argues, reveal unique truths about traumatic experiences and contribute to its essential documentation and historicization. She argues that film and video makers have used elements of film style (gaps and delays in voiceover; images that contradict the film's soundtrack; shots of objects and forms that stand in for other things) in order to demonstrate that documenting the "fallibility" of traumatic memory is sometimes the most effective way in which to construct and convey a different, but no less legitimate, kind of historical truth about traumatic events.

In particular, exploring the representational and representable aspects of trauma allowed these authors' to explore more specifically the ways in which trauma is imbricated with aspects of each individual survivor's identity and perception. As part of this project, the second phase of writers focusing on trauma stressed the complex and individualized nature of traumatic encounters by analyzing the experiences of certain individuals and groups. Joshua Hirsch eloquently describes the need for an individualized approach to analyzing the experiences of trauma survivors by pointing out that the frequently repeated description of trauma as unrepresentable is essentialist, failing to acknowledge the fact that those who experienced the Holocaust each experienced it, and are able to remember it and communicate about it, in different ways. Hirsch writes:

The assertion of absolute unrepresentability, while appealing as a response to the terrible sense of otherness that seems to characterize the Holocaust, implies both a rule of representational transparency to which the Holocaust is the exception, and an assertion of an essential truth of the Holocaust known only to witnesses.

Following Hayden White and others, on the other hand, I would argue that no

historical representation gives access to essential truth, not even the memories of witnesses. All historical representation is, rather, limited in at least three ways: by signification (the ontological difference between the reality and the sign, including the memory-sign), by documentation (limited documentation of the past), and by discourse (limited framing of documents by the conventions of discourse).¹⁷

Hirsch, like Walker, finds that representations of the Holocaust that acknowledge and explore its representational fallibility are historically and politically productive.

This second phase of scholarship about trauma corresponds with the second phase of scholarship about cinephilia, which similarly demonstrates that exploring cinephilia's engagement with representation, and its representability, is essential for exploring its relation to identity. Patricia White's chapter "Lesbian Cinephilia" broke ground by drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, testimonies by lesbian film lovers from a 1980 issue of *Jump Cut*, and interpretations of films and photography by queer women that appropriate Hollywood texts in order to define and historicize lesbian cinephilia. In the ethnographic study "A 'Basement' Cinephilia: Indian diaspora women watch Bollywood," Nandini Bhattacharya describes various ways in which Indian women who have migrated to the United States use home viewings of Bollywood films in order to "construct—and not merely consume—new definitions of national and diasporic identity and motherhood" through their viewership. The films' representations, particularly their characters and narratives, are central to their cinephilia, which relates to their struggles with identity in transitioning from one nation to another.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

The subjects of this dissertation often find that popular and “low” culture texts resonate strongly with their traumatic experiences. Thus, this dissertation explores the ways in which popular and low culture often contain unexpected traces of trauma. The authors who compose the second phase of scholarship about trauma and cinephilia first made vital interventions by suggesting that popular culture, and its representations, can be both a container and activator of marginalized perceptions and emotions. In “Lesbian Cinephilia,” Patricia White argues that classical Hollywood films allow for points of entry for lesbian spectators, even as they overtly exclude lesbian characters. Bhattacharya demonstrates how Bollywood films give Indian women a further means of engaging with, articulating, and processing their new transnational identities. In doing this, she problematizes the fact that Bollywood films are often left out of canonical academic discussions of “important” Indian cinema in favor of works that earned attention from international art house viewers (such as those by Satyajit Ray). Hirsch is one of the first theorists of trauma and media to suggest that popular cinema and its conventions, or at least their active disturbance, may actually be useful in documenting trauma. He writes that:

The point is not simply to classify certain films as modernist and posttraumatic as opposed to realist. The notion of post-traumatic cinema is ultimately less useful as a category of films than as the name given to a discourse that was disseminated across categories, appearing in many films that blended realist and modernist tendencies.¹⁸

He finds the post-traumatic encounter of realist and modernist/popular and avant garde film conventions most pronounced in Sidney Lumet’s 1964 film *The Pawnbroker*. Janet Walker

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

explores the possibilities, and limits, of popular Hollywood films, made for TV movies and news programs, and experimental autobiographical films and videos as “trauma cinema.” Furthermore, in her analysis of Odette Springer and Johanna Demetrakas’ *Some Nudity Required* (1998), she begins to explore the ways in which mainstream erotic thrillers that do not overtly or intentionally deal with incest or sexual abuse can contain traces of post-traumatic affect, a line of inquiry that I continue to pursue in this project’s third chapter.

This dissertation examines how cinephilia becomes intertwined with the ways in which traumatic experiences and memories are mediated as they transition from the unconscious to the conscious. By introducing the possibility that trauma and cinephilia can be in dialogue with and include representation and popular culture, scholars from the second phase first theorized that fantasy can be an essential component of both trauma and cinephilia, breaking down the notion (prominent in early scholarship about cinephilia *and* trauma) that memories of cinephilia or trauma respectively focus on indexical, non-representational moments of a film, or flashes of a trauma that accurately reveal “what happened.” Such scholarship excluded the productive possibilities of fantasy’s “distortion” of the real from the study of cinephilia and trauma. White’s lesbian cinephiles fantasize that they are either the lovers of the women on screen, aligned with the men who make love to them, or are in the movie watching on the sides.¹⁹ Susannah Radstone protested against Cathy Caruth’s perspective on trauma, taking it to task for suggesting that a trauma always manifests itself as one specific event (rather than, for example, a traumatic context that manifests itself over time in different ways). She also felt concerned that trauma theory’s “welcome attention to memory and history” would prompt “a retreat from film theory’s

¹⁹ Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39-47.

imbrication with questions of fantasy and spectatorship.”²⁰ Radstone feared that, possibly because of the social climate of the 1980s and 1990s (and the notorious debates over recovered memory and false memory syndrome), trauma studies had looked away from the notion that fantasy often mediates how people’s memories and histories (especially traumatic memories and histories) are processed, and the ways in which unconscious feelings reveal themselves to consciousness.²¹ She writes:

The trauma theory imported into the humanities via Felman, Laub, and Caruth is shaped, I think, by more general developments in US psychoanalysis characterized by what some would see as a postmodern move away from models of the mind that conceive of a ‘surface’ consciousness and a subterranean unconscious (otherwise known as a depth model) and form the understanding that fantasy is the motor of psychological life and subjective meaning. This is not a path that has to be followed.²²

Walker similarly argues that historical texts (including fiction and non-fiction films and videos) that incorporate the role that fantasy plays in memory, and the way in which it mediates communication between the unconscious and the conscious, reveal unique truths about traumatic experiences.

I believe that traumatic subjectivity’s tendency to blur the line between fantasy and reality for survivors explains, at least in part, why genre films tend to carry such resonance for them. Just as Radstone points out that traumatic experiences and memories are mediated as they

²⁰ Susannah Radstone, “Trauma and screen studies: opening the debate,” *Screen* (2001), 58, no. 4: 191.

²¹ For more information about the recovered memory debates, see Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 49-82.

²² Radstone, 191.

transition from the unconscious to the conscious, genre films often use excessive film style, allegory, and fantastic conventions to “mediate” reality into another form, one that contains elements of documentary and fantasy. E. Ann Kaplan wonders about the ways in which genre films can contain traumas in her essay “Melodrama, Cinema, and Trauma.” She writes:

In what senses can one speak of ‘cultural’ trauma? What analogies might be possible between forms of individual and of cultural trauma? Could we say that in a culture as in an individual, the impact of an overwhelming event cannot be absorbed and is split off? That it returns in fictions apparently unrelated to that event, yet insisting on its remembrance, insisting on keeping the event present? What evidence is there that an aesthetic genre like melodrama may bear traces of cultural trauma?²³

I offer further evidence to back up Kaplan’s hunch by using case studies to demonstrate that genre films contain the traumas of cultures and, particularly, individuals that have been wholly or partially split off. For spectators who have experienced trauma, genre films can insist on its remembrance, and insist on keeping the event present, even when viewers have highly varying degrees of knowledge regarding the traumas that they have experienced, and even when the fiction films are “apparently unrelated” to the traumatic events in their lives. This project focuses on the ways in which specific genres resonate with different people’s specific traumatic experiences and ways of processing them.

In her article, Radstone hoped that trauma theory may take up the issue of media spectatorship. She writes “Trauma could revise theories of spectatorship by considering the

²³ E. Ann Kaplan, “Melodrama, Cinema, and Trauma,” *Screen* 42, no. 2 (2001), 202.

relations between fantasy, memory, temporality and the subject. Moreover, screen theory's history has prepared it well for pursuing such a path, but right now, I think it is the path least likely to be taken."²⁴ Radstone was largely correct. The relationships between trauma and media spectatorship remain largely uncharted, and those texts that have delved into the issue often imagine a theoretical spectator of trauma films by analyzing the films themselves, rather than tracing the experiences of actual spectators who have experienced trauma.²⁵ This dissertation begins to rectify this absence by taking up the ways in which trauma and media spectatorship intertwine by examining the spectatorship of trauma survivors.

The paths of trauma and cinephilia, which have taken similar trajectories and yet never quite met, have begun to come together in what I'd describe as the third phase of writings on the subjects, which includes the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Thomas Elsaesser, and Ann Cvetkovich. Although these scholars still do not discuss trauma and cinephilia together, using those words, their theories still begin to very directly suggest how these two phenomena can work together. Thomas Elsaesser's article "Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment" makes an effort to assess the ways in which cinephilia functions in our current moment. Although Elsaesser has often written about trauma and media in the past, his essay does not address the ways in which cinephilia may be informed by trauma directly. However, his descriptions of the perceptions and behaviors of cinephiles are startlingly aligned with Ann Cvetkovich's

²⁴ Radstone, 191.

²⁵ For example, see: E. Ann Kaplan & Ban Wang, eds., *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 9. Kaplan and Wang formulate four main positions that trauma films designate for their viewers: the spectator is introduced to trauma through a film's themes or techniques, but the film ends with a comforting closure or 'cure'; the spectator is vicariously traumatized; the spectator is positioned as a voyeur; or the spectator is addressed as a 'witness' to trauma. Kaplan's and Wang's assertion that these are the only possible viewing positions for trauma films demonstrates considerable blind spots. First, Kaplan and Wang assume that the viewer of trauma films has not experienced a trauma. Second, their argument (and the essays in their edited reader) locate "viewing positions" only theoretically, through analyses of the form of trauma films.

descriptions of queer trauma survivors' efforts to process their experiences in her book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. The authors indicate the central role that fantasy plays in both trauma and cinephilia, and describe the serious cathections that can connect marginalized people to different forms of "low" culture. However, most importantly, Elsaesser and Cvetkovich's scholarship demonstrate that cinephilia and trauma can both be generative in similar ways. They allude to the ways in which the cinephile and trauma survivor's need to *share* what they have witnessed can result in the creation of art, literature, media, and even communities.

Elsaesser indicates that instances of marginalized cinephilia, like those described by White and Bhattacharya, are part of a cultural trend. He divides the current generation of cinephiles into two groups. The first group, exemplified by Jonathan Rosenbaum, Adrian Martin, and other contributors to the 2008 anthology *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, have "kept faith with the *auteur*." Rather than discovering their auteurs within the Hollywood machine, these cinephiles find their "neglected filmmakers" among independent and experimental filmmakers, and the emerging film nations of world cinema.²⁶ Elsaesser also describes a second group, whose cinephilia is "less well-documented." He writes:

The post-*auteur*, post-theory cinephilia that has embraced the new technologies, that flourishes on the internet and finds its *jouissance* in an often undisguised and unapologetic fetishism of the technical prowess of the digital video disc, its sound and its image and the tactile sensations now associated with both.²⁷

²⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment" in *Cinephilia, Movies, Love, and Memory*. Marijke de Valck & Malte Hagener, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

Elsaesser points out that that he repeatedly associates three new types of cinephilic practice with these cinephiles: “Re-mastering, re-purposing, and re-framing.” The cinephiles in this group re-appropriate beloved films by, for example, making YouTube mash-ups to suggest a queer relationship between two characters that didn’t exist before, by writing about them in online communities, or by making art that appropriates or pays homage to scenes from them. Elsaesser argues that these cinephiles are often concerned with issues of identity. I would argue that this “less well-documented” group would include White, Bhattacharya, and the cinephiles described in this project. Although he does not state it overtly, Elsaesser alludes to a possible connection between trauma and cinephilia through his language, which suggests that people can use cinephilia in order to re-appropriate the power of an oppressive force that might influence them. He writes that this generation of cinephiles “[re-master] in the sense of seizing the initiative, of re-appropriating the means of someone else’s presumed mastery over your emotions, over your libidinal economy, by turning the images around, making them mean something for you and your community or group.”²⁸ This group of cinephiles collapses any forms of artistic hierarchy when reveling in their love objects. “Trash cinema” is valued as highly as the new *auteurs* discovered by Rosenbaum and Martin. Their cinephilia “confers a new nobility on what once might have been mere junk.”²⁹

Cvetkovich argues that the consumption and production of art work (music, literature, paintings, films, performance pieces, art installations) create archives in which artists and consumers deposit their feelings. She describes a wide range of texts that include live performances by lesbian bands Le Tigre and Tribe 8 (who use a punk rock sound and aesthetic to, among other things, grapple with issues of sexual trauma and encourage their audiences to do

²⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁹Ibid., 41.

the same), the novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (which blends fiction and memoir to recount the story of a girl's physical and sexual abuse, and spawned an enormous and vocal cult following), the popular self-help book *The Courage to Heal* by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, and novels and memoirs by lesbian authors who have described their appropriation of the book, which emphasizes the experiences of heterosexual female abuse survivors. Cvetkovich makes a bold intervention by suggesting that trauma can contain or ultimately inspire positive affects such as humor, exhilaration, and empowerment, in addition to the negative affects emphasized by much of the trauma theory described above.

In the final chapter of Cvetkovich's book, "In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings," Cvetkovich makes the first (and only) academic connection between trauma and cinephilia that I have found (although, again, she does not use the word cinephilia). She discusses Jean Carlomusto's film *To Catch a Glimpse*, in which the filmmaker tries to learn about the early death of her grandmother (who may have died from an illegal abortion), and its impact on her family. In the film, Carlomusto's mother, a cinephile, tells the story of seeing Reinhold Schözenel's *Balalaika* (1939) three times, and eventually being hauled out of the theater by her sister. Cvetkovich writes:

Carlomusto includes footage from *Balalaika* in which the star visits her mother's graveyard to tell her that she has just realized her dream of becoming an opera star; one imagines the sentimental power of the film for a daughter who has lost her mother at a young age, and the footage serves as a documentation of the emotional life that her mother can't necessarily speak of directly...Carlomusto includes Hollywood melodrama in her archive as a document of the emotions

generated by stories that cannot be told and secrets that will never be uncovered.

The film clips become part of her emotional archive.³⁰

Balalaika, a Nelson Eddy star vehicle, is the virtual opposite of the sort of high-brow, modernist film that early scholars associated with the representation (or unrepresentability) of trauma, and the aesthetic bliss of cinephilic perception. Richard Dyer has named Eddy's films with Jeanette MacDonald as exemplifying the middle-brow entertainment that gay spectators have woven into camp.³¹ However, Cvetkovich shows that the film can contain the most profoundly serious emotions of its spectator, to whom it means a great deal partly because of her own personal experiences. She demonstrates that it can deeply resonate with its spectator's experiences of trauma, and have a role in their processing.

Elsaesser's and Cvetkovich's discussions of media spectatorship, cinephilia, and trauma suggest that, in many instances, the lines separating cinephiles from fans have become blurred to the point of non-existence. Taking Elsaesser's definition of cinephilia and Cvetkovich's documentation of cinephilia into account, we might now interpret seminal scholarship on fandom, such as Henry Jenkins' discussions of bisexual and lesbian fan fiction about the TV series *Star Trek* and the 1990 movie *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott), and Jackie Stacey's work on women's adoration of movie stars in the 1940s and 1950s, as scholarship about cinephilia, in addition to fandom.³² I have not encountered scholarship about cinephilia that purposefully

³⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 261.

³¹ Richard Dyer, "It's Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 110-117.

³² Henry Jenkins, "Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire's Kiss" in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds. *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000) & "Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk" in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*

distinguishes it from fandom, or vice versa (oddly, the scholars on either “side” of the field tend to ignore one another). However, one of the distinctions that seems to have separated cinephilia from fandom in scholarship (based on the subjects that “cinephilia scholars” and “fan scholars” choose to write about), is that cinephiles have been drawn to the aesthetics of feature films, while fans are more associated with textual and extra-textual aspects of television, stars, and music. This project demonstrates that in spite of the “cine” in “cinephilia,” one can also have a cinephilic engagement with television texts and stars. Furthermore, like fans, cinephiles engage with much more than just a film or television show’s textual aesthetics. If there are qualities that separate cinephilia from fandom, many cinephiles—including those discussed in this dissertation—bridge them through their passionate engagement with media.

Sedgwick’s essay “Paranoid and Reparative Reading, or You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You” first articulated many of the reading strategies that Elsaesser and Cvetkovich employed, while engaging more directly with the relationship between trauma and reading strategies. Sedgwick theorizes about how people can use the practice of reading as a balm for different kinds of open wounds. She writes that “paranoid” readings of texts look underneath what is apparent to find the oppressive structures that lie beneath (an example of a paranoid reading would be Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” which finds the repressive structures that underlie the pleasurable characteristics of Hollywood films). On the other hand, reparative reading finds the potential positive qualities in texts that paranoid readings might find corrupt. Sedgwick writes: “The desire of a reparative impulse is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or

(New York: Routledge, 2012); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Patricia White similarly makes a connection between the fandom described by Stacey and cinephilia in her chapter “Lesbian Cinephilia” in *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*.

inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self.”³³ This reparative impulse strikes me as highly similar to the cinephilic impulse to “re-master” described by Elsaesser, the trauma survivor’s impulse to create archives of feeling described by Cvetkovich, and the uses that trauma survivors in this project find for their own cinephilia. Sedgwick’s use of the word “inchoate” calls to mind recurring descriptions of trauma survivors as “broken” or “shattered” by their experiences.³⁴ All of the cinephiles represented in this project re-mix, re-master, and archive in order to “assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self,” for better and worse.

Although Sedgwick describes “paranoid” and “reparative” reading as practices mostly partaken by scholars, most of the popular discursive texts that I examine participate in paranoid and reparative reading. Films like *Fade to Black* and *Scream* are paranoid interpretations of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia: they find pathology and even criminality underlying the intense pleasure that certain people find in movies. At the same time, therapy books like *Reel Therapy: How Movies Inspire You to Overcome Life’s Problems* argue that cinephilia is an antidote to trauma and, thus, a form of perception that differs from and corrects post-traumatic perception. However, Sedgwick argues that truly reparative reading necessarily contains elements of both pain and healing.³⁵ The actual trauma survivor-cinephiles described in this dissertation often participate in complicated reparative reading that encompasses many affects. Many of the texts that I will discuss (case studies of cinema therapy clients; films by Tyler Perry, Lee Daniels, Odette Springer and Johanna Demetrakas, and Jonathan Caouette) reveal that

³³ Ibid., 151.

³⁴ For examples of the use of such language to describe trauma, see James Cassese, ed., *Gay Men and Childhood Sexual Trauma: Integrating the Shattered Self* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2000).

³⁵ Sedgwick, 146.

connections between trauma and cinephilia are closely intertwined with both pathology and healing. At the end of Sedgwick's article, she calls for the investigation of reading strategies that contain multiple affects. She writes: "A disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind-whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, *jouissance*, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation."³⁶ The texts that I will discuss demonstrate that trauma can inform and even contribute to a spectator's pleasure, ecstasy, and *jouissance*, words frequently used to describe the experience of cinephilia. At the same time, they demonstrate that cinephilia may be tightly interknit with affects including self-shattering, suspicion, abjection, and horror, words frequently used to describe the experience of personal trauma. Sedgwick's chapter is a call against theory that undertakes the proliferation of only one type of affect. My project demonstrates that, although many theories of cinephilia and trauma undertake the proliferation of only one type of affect, such theories miss many essential nuances in the experiences of those for whom the two phenomena are inextricably enmeshed.

II. The functions of post-traumatic cinephilia

If this introduction has argued that cinephilia can function symptomatically and reparatively in relation to domestic trauma, the question remains: How? The case studies in this project suggest that, for trauma survivors, media can function in different ways. Cinephilia can, in some ways, prove cathartic for trauma survivors. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers three definitions of catharsis: "1: purgation; 2a: purification or purgation of the emotions (as pity

³⁶ Ibid.

or fear) especially through art; 3a: elimination of a complex by bringing it to consciousness and affording it expression.” It would be inaccurate (and perhaps, even, dangerous) to suggest that cinephilia can result in a “purgation” of trauma, or the effects of trauma. I’m not sure that any one reparative tool, no matter how effective, can lead to the “purging,” or, to use what I feel to be more accurate terminology, full integration of trauma. In his essay, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” Freud outlines the many challenges that can prevent the “complete processing” of a trauma within a therapeutic context, and although much of his language is arcane, his outlining of the difficulties and inconclusiveness of the therapeutic integration process remain largely persuasive.³⁷ I see integration as an ongoing process that is, perhaps, never complete. However, I believe that my dissertation persuasively demonstrates that, for trauma survivors, cinephilia can contribute to a *cathartic process*, if not a complete catharsis. Throughout my dissertation, the reader will see many examples of people successfully using media to bring traumatic experiences and emotions to consciousness and afford them expression. Each of the filmmakers described in the third chapter of my project describe having experiences watching media texts that align with what I have described as a “cathartic process.” It is, perhaps, this tension—between knowing that cinephilia and cinephilic production can contribute to a cathartic process, and finding that they cannot lead to *complete* integration—that contributes to the subjects’ of this dissertation’s need to continue to consume and create.

My dissertation also demonstrates that, for some trauma survivors, media can serve as a (not necessarily sexual) fetish: People can become unusually, even inexplicably cathected to media texts because they can stand in for emotions and memories or experiences that the person has, to at least some extent, repressed from their consciousness, but which insistently, often

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable/Interminable,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 18 (1937), 373-405.

indirectly return. Media texts can become material representatives of intangible, but essential, elements of a person's life that they cannot otherwise access fully. Numerous examples of media as fetish and cathartic process appear in Chapters Two and Three.

In assessing the ways in which cinephilia functions in relation to trauma, I have found it useful to draw upon several theories of trauma, its after effects, and its treatment that have rarely been used in scholarship charting the relationship of media and trauma. The Freudian juxtaposition of "acting out" and "working through" has proved extremely useful in making sense of the fraught cinephilic processes that I've observed in my research. According to Freud, patients who "acted out" emotionally repeated their traumatic past, often in destructive ways, rather than remembering it (and, thus, being able to integrate it). The patient "working through" his or her trauma in therapy remembered the event, and was able to process it through critical reflection.³⁸ As this dissertation will demonstrate, cinephilia is usually presented in mainstream American culture as a mode of acting out trauma (in, for example, horror movies about cinephilic serial killers) *or* as a mode of working through trauma (in, for example, therapy books). My dissertation makes the argument that, for actual trauma survivors dealing with their experiences using cinephilia, the line between "acting out" and "working through" is often hardly clear. In Chapter Two, a therapist draws upon a teenager's tendency to act out by re-creating horror films in order to, ultimately, help him work through his traumatic experiences. I argue that the cinephilia of filmmakers like Tyler Perry and Jonathan Caouette seems to involve simultaneous elements of unconscious acting out and self-aware, self-critical working through. My dissertation ultimately argues that, often, because of the complexities inherent in working through a trauma, our culture mistakes people's working through of their experiences through

³⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, and Trauma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 208.

cinophilia as “acting out,” a tendency which has dangerous and oppressive implications. Many trauma survivors’ efforts to work through their experiences often contain elements of acting out, and sometimes they find that they must go through one to ultimately achieve the other. Dominick LaCapra’s writing on acting out and working through exemplifies more recent scholarship that backs up my assertion of their fluidity. LaCapra argues that these processes should not be seen as mutually exclusive and that, often, they purposefully combine. He builds on Laplanche and Pontalis’ more recent definitions of these terms to make his argument:

Although they present working-through as countering compulsive acting-out, Laplanche and Pontalis do not give way to a simple ideology of liberation from the constraints of the past. They mitigate the opposition between acting-out and working-through by noting that “working through is undoubtedly a repetition, albeit one modified by interpretation and—for this reason—liable to facilitate the subject’s freeing himself from repetition mechanisms. Working-through would thus seem to involve a mode of repetition offering a measure of critical purchase on problems and responsible control in action which would permit desirable change. Laplanche and Pontalis also indicate how working-through is not a purely intellectual process, but requires a form of work involving not only affect but the entire personality. Indeed, for them, “working-through might be defined as that process which is liable to halt the repetitive insistence characteristic of unconscious formations by bringing these into relation with the subject’s personality as a whole.”³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., 209.

Robert Stolorow draws from Heidegger's theories of phenomenology in order to argue that "Trauma is constituted in an intersubjective context in which severe emotional pain cannot find a relational home in which it can be held. In such a context, painful affect states become unendurable—that is, traumatic."⁴⁰ In suggesting that trauma may not necessarily take place only in response to one specific event, but a *context*, I argue that Stolorow illuminates another way in which cinephilia may be especially appealing to and useful for trauma survivors. The following chapters (especially Chapters Two and Three) suggest that the presence of media can create a reparative element in an otherwise "traumatic context." These chapters demonstrate that survivors of emotional trauma—often unable to turn to "real people"—may find a degree of empathy, understanding and validation ("a relational home in which trauma can be held") in media. Stolorow writes that "I have long contended that a good (that is, mutative) interpretation is a relational process, a central constituent of which is the patient's experience of having his or her feelings understood."⁴¹ Through my dissertation, I hope to build upon film theorists who have suggested that spectatorship may actually be a relational process, and assess ways in which, in understanding movies, a trauma survivor may get what they can get nowhere else: the "experience of having his or her feelings understood."⁴²

However, while I do find it productive to list psychological processes with which the post-traumatic cinephilia described in this dissertation resonate, I strongly believe that it would be impossible to come up with one comprehensive theory of how cinephilia works in relation to

⁴⁰ Robert Stolorow, *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2007), 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² Vivian Sobchack seminally describes film spectatorship as a relational process in *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) and *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

trauma. The key to understanding this relationship is to examine as many examples as possible, to keep teasing out the possibilities. As such, this dissertation purposefully unites what Sedgwick has described as “strong theory” and “weak theory.” She writes that strong theory reveals one system underlying a broad (social) phenomenon. I would argue that Willemsen’s and Keathley’s suggestions that cinephilia can be reduced to two or three perceptual experiences could be considered examples of strong theory. Weak theory, on the other hand, focuses more on individual experiences within a larger social system. Rather than looking for systems underlying certain forms of behavior, it takes them at face value but examines them carefully. Sedgwick argues for a reclamation of weak theory, stating that it is fundamental to scholarly understanding of certain reading strategies and certain works. She writes:

What could better represent ‘weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain,’ than the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading? But...there are important phenomenological and theoretical tasks that can be accomplished only through local theories and nonce taxonomies; the potentially innumerable mechanisms of their relation to stronger theories remain matters of art and speculative thought.⁴³

I argue that many of the texts that I will discuss may be described as forms of weak theory, or as “local theories,” about trauma, and about cinephilia. As such, taking a cue from Sedgwick, I argue that close reading of weak theory is necessary in order to chart trauma and cinephilia, which are so personal, so individualized, so mysterious in nature and hard to pin down. Each of

⁴³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 145.

my central texts, using multiple narrative and stylistic tropes, shows ways in which relationships between trauma and cinephilia manifest themselves. These cases generally vary greatly from case to case, depending on the contexts in which the trauma and cinephilia that they represent take place. They also show us this relationship from different angles. For example, *Tarnation* makes an effort to put us inside a traumatized cinephile's head, while *Fade to Black* shows the life of its traumatized cinephile from an omniscient (third person) perspective. They offer rich, nuanced accounts of the experiences of people whose traumas and cinephilia intertwine.

However, they often give overly simple and unsatisfying explanations as to how and why this intertwining takes place, or do not give an explanation at all. I argue that, viewed together, these cases insist that we cannot account for or explain the nature of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia with one strong theory. At the same time, in spite of their differences, it is impossible to ignore striking similarities that these cases share. Thus, we can further illuminate these representations of trauma and cinephilia by placing them in conversation with strong theory (cognitive and psychoanalytic theories of trauma; theories of cinephilia; historical materialist methodologies). My dissertation, then, is an effort to find and create a venue in which strong theories of cinephilia and trauma and weak theories of cinephilia and trauma can interdigitate, and begin to fill in each other's gaps.

I chose my central case studies through a lengthy process of data collection, or detective work. My first phase of data collection involved scouring films, literature, primary documents, and internet resources to find evidence of what I initially found to be an important but seemingly relatively obscure connection. My discovery of many mainstream American feature films and television shows that dealt with the relationship between trauma and cinephilia helped me to identify American popular culture's tendency towards vilifying people who use media in an

effort to process their traumas. I hypothesized that the social assumptions that recurred in these fictional media texts likely referred to influential discourse in reality. I investigated this hypothesis by reading many cultural histories of the United States from various disciplines and perspectives, and scoured newspapers and magazines from the 20th century. This research suggests that mainstream discourse often misguidedly discourages necessary healing by characterizing trauma survivors' passionate, potentially therapeutic engagement with films and media as criminal.

Seeking real life case studies that might counteract the perpetuation of this characterization, I found less widely circulated therapy books, articles describing case studies by therapists, independent fiction films and documentaries, memoirs, and novels that offered powerful portraits of trauma survivors engaging with media in therapeutic ways. Unlike mainstream media texts, which tend to take “black and white” perspectives in their reading of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia, these texts offer productive shades of gray. They demonstrate that cinephilia can concurrently manifest itself as both a symptom of trauma *and* a tool of reparation. They suggest that sometimes trauma survivors need to engage intimately with the symptom in order to repair, integrate, and heal. All of these texts, from the fictional to the journalistic to the autobiographical, demonstrate that the relationship between trauma and cinephilia in American culture has a rich, complex history. They also reveal that there is a community of people who have used their cinephilia to process their experiences of trauma. However, the connections between its members, and the historical context that they compose, have heretofore remained invisible. In this work, I aim to materialize those connections and begin to write that history. From this history, theories of how cinephilia and trauma work can be expanded. I hope that this project will be ongoing. I begin the process in the following chapters.

In Chapter One, I look at mainstream feature films and television episodes that make a connection between cinephilia and criminality. In these films and episodes, trauma is repeatedly the “explanation” linking the two. Like the texts discussed throughout my dissertation, these representations link domestic trauma and cinephilia to forms of creative production (in these cases, pathological and/or criminal creative production). I situate these films and television episodes within their historical contexts, demonstrating that representations of trauma and cinephilia refer to a variety of cultural anxieties, from the studio system’s post-war crisis to debates on violence in the media and its effects on children, which have permeated discourse on media since film’s beginnings, but exploded in the 1950s.

In Chapter Two, I analyze therapy books and articles by psychologists and social workers that suggest that watching films and discussing them in therapy can help patients heal from their traumas. I make a distinction between “prescriptive therapy books,” which give directions on how to conduct Cinema Therapy based on a theoretical spectator, and “Case Study” therapy books and articles, which make an effort to demonstrate the usefulness of cinema therapy by carefully describing case studies involving patients who processed their traumas in therapy with help from popular films that moved them. I analyze these books and the spectator positions that they articulate in order to assess what kinds of films and film spectatorship are deemed clinically acceptable for people who have experienced trauma. Authors of “prescriptive therapy books” tend to “prescribe” highly literal representations of trauma (i.e. 1991’s *The Prince of Tides* and 1993’s *This Boy’s Life*), failing to acknowledge that traumatized people do not always understand or experience trauma as a literal narrative, or as a clear and overt representation. “Case study” therapy books serve as counterpoints to prescriptive therapy books, demonstrating ways in which the narrative and style of eclectic films that do not always overtly represent

domestic trauma may still be highly resonant for trauma survivors. In doing this, they encourage an expansion of scholarly definitions of cinephilia.

In Chapter Three, I look at filmmakers who—in their films, and in discourse surrounding their films—have purposefully made both their cinephilia and their emotional traumas fundamental parts of their self-constructed identities as film *auteurs*: Tyler Perry, Lee Daniels, Odette Springer, and Jonathan Caouette. I look at their films, and the contexts in which these works were produced, marketed, and received. These filmmakers, like the characters in Chapter One, link trauma, cinephilia, and creative production. Unlike the characters in Chapter One, they represent the creative impulses that they derive from their traumas and their cinephilia as reparative, healing, and productive (rather than pathological and destructive). However, this “healing,” “productive” cinephilia is not without complexity. For example, in spite of Perry’s and Caouette’s frequently demonstrated cinephilic love for and cross-identification with female characters (and their suggestions that they have contributed to their healing and their artistic and financial success), it has been argued that the filmmakers pathologically exploit the suffering of women in their films in their efforts to heal themselves.⁴⁴ I do not wish to argue that the cinephilia that filmmakers like Caouette and Perry demonstrate in their films and the discourse surrounding them is pathological and exploitative *or* healing and empowering. Rather, Perry’s cinephilia contains elements that are pathological and exploitative *and* healing and empowering,

⁴⁴ In a blog entry on the website for *Ms. Magazine*, Jennifer Williams writes: “Black men directing films that highlight black women’s trauma is not necessarily a bad thing, but in the case of *For Colored Girls*, the bodies of black women become instruments to bolster Perry’s credibility as a serious film maker and to provide catharsis for his abused-child self, at the same time that his muscle in Hollywood makes it possible for him to greenlight his own version of *For Colored Girls* after writer and director Nzingha Stewart (now an executive producer of the film) had already drafted a script and brokered a deal with Lionsgate. In a post-film discussion with at least 40 women in attendance, journalist Esther Armah described Perry’s strong-arming tactics as “molesting on the big screen via his power.” Williams, Jennifer, “For Colored Boys Who Have Survived Sexual Abuse, Is ‘For Colored Girls’ Enuf?,” 11/15/10, accessed 4/8/11, <http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2010/11/15/for-colored-boys-who-have-survived-sexual-abuse/>.

and Caouette's can productively be read in both ways. If most of the texts in Chapters One and Two take firm, fairly clear cut ideological stances on cinephilia informed by trauma (that it is either pathological, or reparative), the work of the filmmakers in Chapter Three suggests that cinephilia informed by trauma is often necessarily contradictory and complex, marked by pathology, symptoms, and reparation. In my concluding chapter, I argue that the historical and theoretical groundwork that I lay for understanding the relationship between trauma and cinephilia throughout my dissertation can give us new understandings of the "trigger warning" controversy that has recently spread throughout college campuses, and American culture as a whole. Finally, I propose and begin a discussion about several areas regarding the relationship between trauma and cinephilia that deserve further in-depth research.

Structurally, I see my dissertation functioning similarly to a diamond. While the chapters do build on one another, each series of case studies contains insights that inform the others. For example, I would argue that the somewhat broad cultural history of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia in the United States, which I outline in Chapter One, has certainly influenced the experiences and creative productions of the actual trauma survivors whose cinephilia I discuss in Chapters Two and Three. However, I believe that, after reading chapters Two and Three, the reader will likely look back and see the history discussed in Chapter One differently. The relationship between these chapters serves as an effort to demonstrate the relationships between collective and individual experiences of trauma and cinephilia. This dialectic permeates my project.

My central texts are not overtly connected by one decade, genre, or mode but by the relationship between trauma and cinephilia that they repeatedly articulate. I do not focus on one identity group that scholars have traditionally discussed in relation to media and spectatorship,

such as women, gay men, or African Americans. Rather, I make an effort to establish trauma survivors as a multifaceted but singular identity group, which includes members from all of the groups mentioned above and many more. Indeed, the cinephiles in this dissertation often cross-identify with members of social groups other than their own, partly because of the experiences of trauma that they share. I argue that trauma survivors constitute a group whose relationships to media warrant attention and discussion. The wide variety of texts in my dissertation demonstrates, in multiple ways, that the relationship between trauma and cinephilia crosses historical contexts, social boundaries, and genres. The unquestionable, insistent re-occurrence of this relationship in so many different areas of popular culture gives me the strong conviction that such crossings are worth exploring.

It has been a thrilling challenge to analyze the interrelations between personal emotional trauma and cinephilia, which, as I've laid out, are often defined by the extent to which they are repressed, kept secret, and described as indescribable. My dissertation seeks to demonstrate that the same elements that make research on this topic difficult are the very reasons that make it important.

Chapter One:

Criminal Cinephilia and the Vicious Circles of Domestic Trauma

Domestic trauma and cinephilia are not phenomena that intuitively go together. None of the scholarly or popular books on trauma and cinephilia consider them in relation to each other. And yet, this relationship has insistently recurred in mainstream popular culture since at least the late 1960s. In this chapter, I examine five mainstream texts that make a distinct connection between domestic trauma and cinephilia: an episode of the television show *Dragnet 1969* (season 3, episode 20, Burglary-DR-31, 1969), the popular horror films *Fade to Black* (Vernon Zimmerman, 1980), *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* (Tom Mixx, 2011), and the high profile but financially unsuccessful black comedy *The Cable Guy* (Ben Stiller, 1996). Each of these cultural documents represent a prominent white, male character whose childhood experiences of domestic trauma (abandonment, neglect, and sexual and physical abuse) lead him to become both an avid cinephile and a criminal (in *Dragnet*, a serial thief, in *The Cable Guy*, a stalker and thief, and in the rest of the films, a vicious serial killer). Importantly, in each of these texts, the criminal incorporates his or her cinephilia into his crimes. Often, the crimes become perverse renditions of what scholars like Paul Willemen, Christian Keathley, and Thomas Elsaesser have described as “cinephilic production”: the product that emerges when a cinephile is inspired to write or create in response to his or her passionate cinephilic response to a film.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Elsaesser, *Cinephilia and the Use of Disenchantment*; Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*; Willemen, “Through a Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered.” The most canonical acts of “cinephilic creation” are Andre Bazin’s writings, the films produced by the members of France’s New Wave in the 1950s and 1960s, and the writings by those filmmakers in *Cahiers de Cinema*. Films by Brian DePalma (especially his homages to Hitchcock, including 1973’s *Sisters*, 1976’s *Obsession*, 1980’s *Dressed to Kill*, and 1985’s *Body Double*), Quentin Tarantino (1997’s *Jackie Brown* and *Kill Bill*, from 2003 and 2004), and Todd Haynes (1990’s *Poison* and 2002’s *Far*

American popular cultural texts have not suggested there to be anything inherently threatening about domestic trauma or cinephilia. Pop cultural depictions of domestic trauma are often marked by an effort (if not always successful) to explore it in a sympathetic and complex way (*Sybil* [Daniel Petrie, 1976], *The Prince of Tides* [Barbra Streisand, 1991], *A Thousand Acres* [Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1997], *Antwone Fisher* [Denzel Washington, 2002])⁴⁶. Similarly, most popular culture texts don't suggest there to be anything inherently threatening about cinephilia. Movies like *Play it Again, Sam* (Herbert Ross, 1972), *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977), *September 30, 1955* (James Bridges, 1977), *Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985), and *Matinee* (Joe Dante, 1993) tend to treat it as a harmless, wistful, and charming (if neurotic) diversion or characteristic. However, when these two characteristics come together in popular film and television, the combination always seems to be represented as dangerous or criminal. Furthermore, I would argue that "the criminal cinephile" is one of the most (if not *the* most) prominent, recurring stereotypes of cinephiles in popular culture. It seems telling that the texts that I discuss in this chapter re-tell virtually the same story in multiple media (film and television) and genres (the detective show, comedy, and horror films), and over multiple decades (from 1969 through 2011). I hope that my discussion of various different genres, media, and time periods demonstrates how interwoven the notion of the "traumatized cinephile criminal" is throughout American culture. This chapter argues that this is no accident, and traces the historical referents that lead to this, on one level, mysterious recurrence.

From Heaven) are more recent, highly publicized, American examples of cinephilic production. Later chapters in this dissertation will discuss less mainstream forms of cinephilic production that, unlike the films referenced above, directly engage with domestic trauma and its relation to cinephilia.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that popular culture's collective depictions of *any* topic or kind of person is always wrought with contradictions. For every *Sybil* there is a Norman Bates, and for every Clarisse Starling there is a Buffalo Bill.

In this chapter's final segment, I use the heavily mediated case of the West Memphis Three (three men whose love of horror films and gothic appearances were used to convict them for the brutal murder of three young boys) to demonstrate that many members' of American culture's tendency to focus on and legitimize highly cinematic forms of abuse can lead them to villainize abuse survivors who find their own experiences represented in genre films, and to overlook and ignore more common, ordinary forms of abuse. I do not, with this chapter, wish to make an argument about whether films do or do not influence violence. I think that evidence suggests that, like any environmental factor, they may contribute to aspects of human behavior, including crime, but coming to a conclusive argument either way is both beyond the scope of my project, and likely impossible. The purpose of this chapter is to historicize and theorize the ways in which the relationship between trauma and cinephilia has become intertwined with the ever-controversial topic of media's potentially influential relationship to real life violence, and how this intertwining has informed both mainstream understandings of cinephilia and trauma, and the lives of actual trauma survivors.

In order to fully understand why the linkage of cinephilia, domestic trauma, and crime has been so prominent in mainstream popular culture since the 1960s, I argue that we must first trace four historical trajectories that took place contemporaneously and which fed into each other continuously, but have usually been written about separately in scholarly and popular discourse: the development of psychology and psychotherapy in the post-WWII American society and its increasing popularity and incorporation into mainstream popular culture (from news magazines to Hollywood films); the increased concern in American culture regarding juvenile delinquency; the cultural blaming of the media for crime and juvenile delinquency, which began shortly after moving pictures debuted in the early 1900s, had one of several upsurges in the 1950s (most

prominently with The Kefauver Trials, a massive government funded investigation into juvenile delinquency, one prominent unit of which involved media influence), and continues today; medical professionals' acknowledgment of child abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, which began when C. Henry Kempe and his associates at Colorado General Hospital created the diagnostic entity "Battered Child Syndrome" in 1962, and inspired a deluge of publicity and mainstream attention which continues today. All of these histories came together when psychologists began to focus on the influence of popular media (especially film and television) on violence, aggression, and crime, a project which was spearheaded in the mid-1960s and has been taken up by many psychologists, using various methodologies, throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s⁴⁷. Many of these studies were then discussed in mainstream forums, including popular books and newspaper articles.⁴⁸

In this chapter, I will outline each of these historical trajectories, noting especially developments that specifically relate to what came to be known as the relationship between domestic trauma, cinephilia, and crime in the mainstream imagination. I will then focus on the five main texts under discussion. I contextualize these media texts by placing them in their historical and cultural context not to demonstrate that they reflect or allegorize cultural events and anxieties that took place before and during their production and release, but to demonstrate that they were directly part of the many conversations that took place, in various forums and

⁴⁷ Linda Heath, PhD, et al, "Effects of Media Violence on Children: A Review of the Literature," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 46 (April 1989), 376-79.

⁴⁸ For a few examples, see: Elizabeth Poe Kirby, "Media Violence Takes it on the Chin," *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1978, L4; H.J. Eysenck and D.K.B. Nias, *Sex, Violence, and the Media* (St. Martin's Press, 1978); Jon Nordheimer, "Rising Concern With VCR's: Violent Tapes and the Young," *New York Times*, May 18, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/18/us/rising-concern-with-vcr-s-violent-tapes-and-the-young.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

media, involving psychology, trauma, crime, and film spectatorship during the post-WWII period. I will describe how each television episode and film makes direct reference to the historical and cultural trajectories described in the first section, and I will then discuss the ways in which each document represents the relationship of trauma, cinephilia, and crime.

None of the texts under discussion use the word “cinephilia” to describe their protagonists’ and antagonists’ obsessive love of film. However, I will argue that each of the film-obsessed characters in these texts engages with films in ways that various scholars have described as cinephilic. Similarly, while the films’ understandings of trauma and traumatic subjectivity seem, on one level, to be shallow, sensationalized, and pathologized, placing the characters and their cinephilia in conversation with scholarship on trauma yields rich results, demonstrating that the films’ (perhaps unintentional) understandings of domestic trauma in relation to cinephilia and crime—while routinely problematic—are in some ways richer and more true to contemporary discussions of trauma than more prestigious, “truth-based” documents (like newspaper articles and psychological studies) that concurrently hinted at similar connections between cinephilia and crime.

In the final section of this chapter, I argue that, in stigmatizing the cinephilia that some people experience in the wake of domestic traumas, institutions like censors, the government, psychologists, and nuclear families also stigmatize people who experience cinephilia in relation to their post-traumatic subjectivity, but do not have criminal tendencies. This dissertation will demonstrate that domestic trauma survivors often find their affective truths, and understand their traumatic experiences, through engagement and identification with sexually violent films, genre films, and low brow films: the very types of films that those who believe in a connection between film spectatorship and crime describe as dangerous and deserving of censorship. The

shame that these attitudes encourage among the people who affectively identify with these films is, I argue, inseparable from the shame that they might feel in the wake of their traumas (much like the shame associated with, for example, a sexual fetish related to a trauma history). In making an effort to censor and repress films that show ugly affects and events similar to those experienced in the wake of domestic trauma, such groups encourage a collective silence. They demonstrate a collective desire to repress, rather than process, traumatic experiences. By making an effort to repress film bodies, those who condemn a connection between trauma, the spectatorship of disreputable films, and crime also make an effort to repress the bodies of trauma survivors, and the traumatic subjectivities contained therein.

I. The historical trajectories of domestic trauma and cinephilia in mainstream American culture

A. The popularization of psychology after WWII:

Many scholars and popular commentators agree that, “especially in the last hundred years in the United States, there has been an amazing advance in [psychotherapy’s] prevalence, status, and influence,” and that “psychotherapy has become emblematic of the post-WWII era.”⁴⁹ Cushman points out that, in the 1940s, there was a shift from “ego psychology” (which insisted that “there is one basic developmental pathway and one set of universal adaptive ego processes”) to object relations theory. Unlike ego-psychology, which assumed that human beings were born with a set of neurosis that they enacted throughout their lives, object relations theory explored the ways in which people’s problems were formed through their interactions with the people

⁴⁹ Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 1996), 6.

around them. Object relation theory began with Melanie Klein's definition of "projective identification theory":

The process by which the infant is thought to project certain split-off fragments of herself into the mother with such intensity that the child actually identifies the mother with the split-off and projected quality, and treats the mother as though the projected feeling is a natural, and inherent, aspect of the mother's subjective state. In various ways the mother is maneuvered into experiencing the projected feelings as if they are actually her "real" thoughts and feelings, or to behaving in ways consistent with the projected feelings.⁵⁰

Ronald Fairbairn, a practitioner and theorist of object relations theory who was influenced by Klein, took issue with her assertion (related to those of ego-psychologists) that internal objects were inherent, unavoidable psychic structures that the infant projected on to the parent. Fairbairn argued instead that internal psychic objects are

memory-fantasy structures caused by painful or confusing parenting. Individuals, he believed, form imaginary objects when the *real* parenting is inadequate or dangerous, in an attempt to avoid the pain caused by inadequate parent-child interaction, and to provide a substitute parent through imaginary interactions.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., 199.

⁵¹ Ibid., 252.

Donald Winnicott expanded further on Fairbairn's object relation theories. He argued, in even more complex ways, that infants' psychic structures were predominantly formed by the adequacy or inadequacy of their guardians' parenting skills, and that experiences of domestic trauma could be replayed in varying ways throughout a person's life. Cushman writes:

Winnicott explained psychological regression as an attempt to return to a time when the environmental container failed, in order to redo the old unsatisfactory scenes. Psychoanalysis could cure patients, according to Winnicott, by providing the parental nutrients that had been missing or were distorted in earlier parent-child experiences. If the care is properly provided, Winnicott thought that the self would be able to break out of the regression and grow again in a natural, unimpeded way.⁵²

Winnicott also devised another notion that seems to have highly influenced the popular texts that are central to this chapter. He suggested that, when parents are inadequate, and a person does not process and heal from the resulting traumas by finding alternate, corrective objects in therapy, he or she would act out. Cushman writes that

Antisocial behavior, for instance, was thought of as an unconscious attempt on the part of the adolescent to force the world to offer proper psychological boundaries,

⁵² Ibid., 256.

boundaries that unfortunately had been nonexistent in the earlier parent-child relationship.⁵³

Alternately, if un-treated, people who had experienced domestic trauma from parental inadequacy might create their own “internal objects.” Such people would try to satisfy their needs by connecting with and/or projecting on to non-parental objects in the outside world.

Cushman writes:

Internal objects receive their content, Winnicott thought, when the mother’s failures in empathy are extreme, causing the infant intolerably intense emotional responses to a sudden awareness of separateness. To protect himself against these feelings, the infant would imagine a microworld, peopled by internal objects whose functions were identical to the infant’s own psychic trait of omnipotence. The objects, which Ogden referred to as “unconscious omnipotent internal objects,” are fantasized for defensive purposes; they are not inherent givens.⁵⁴

Alternately, the person may be able to make an effort to fulfill his or her needs by deriving the absent parental objects from fantasy objects in the outside world:

With the newly developing external-object-mother exerting more influence, occasionally the child is able to create transitional objects. These are magical creations, neither all internal nor all external, that bridge the gap between the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

mother's absence and her presence. They help the child to hold herself, to nurture and soothe herself in the absence of the real mother, and thus to better tolerate the inevitable frustrations and psychological separations in life.⁵⁵

These notions became prominent core beliefs of much mainstream psychoanalysis and family sociology in the post-war period. They also became prominent themes or notions in texts that popularized psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, like consumer magazine articles and mainstream fiction films (Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is one classic example that likely influenced all of the texts under discussion in this chapter). Janet Walker writes:

The growth and entrenchment of professional American psychiatry in the years following World War II were attended...by an upsurge in popular accounts of the ideas and practice of the discipline. In fact, historian Nathan Hale calls the popularization itself a characteristic of the American scene. Of course, psychiatry had been the subject of popular attention before World War II, showing up in fiction and nonfiction sources. But it was during and after World War II that psychoanalysis came before the public through mass popular outlets at an unprecedented rate. Magazine articles and "spreads," such as *Life* magazine's 1957 series on psychology by Ernest Havemann and the *Atlantic* collection on psychiatry in education and religion, began to be ubiquitous (Figure 2).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., 257.

⁵⁶ Janet Walker, *Couching Resistance: Women, Film, and Psychoanalytic Psychiatry* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 6.

It seems likely, then, that the notion that children “form imaginary objects when the *real* parenting is inadequate and dangerous” highly influenced the popular media texts that I discuss in this chapter, in which characters engage in an unhealthy way with fictional media objects when real parenting is inadequate or dangerous. These characters make qualities from people and conventions that they see in the media their central internal objects and/or use them as objects that help them to “hold [themselves], to nurture and soothe [themselves] in the absence of the real mother, and thus to better tolerate the inevitable furtations and psychological separations in life.” In accordance with Winnicott’s theories, the characters’ engagement with these “substitute objects” often leads to antisocial behavior.

Cushman argues that

the language and habitual behaviors of the postwar era have shaped the cultural frame of reference to the point that the essence of child development and psychotherapy have become, and still are, the consuming of the proper objects and the liberating of the enchanted interior, the two mainstays of postwar American advertising.⁵⁷

These language and habitual behaviors are also, in various ways, two mainstays of the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia, especially in the texts that I will discuss in this chapter. If, as Cushman points out, consuming of objects (from, according to Cushman, the mother to advertised products to movie stars) is the most fundamental part of the collective postwar psychological make up, and one that is inherently intertwined with the avoidance of,

⁵⁷ Cushman, 257.

impairment of, or healing from trauma, it is not surprising that people's (and, especially, trauma survivors') consumption of film and media has become so controversial and prominent in the post-war cultural imagination.

B. Crime and the dangers of media influence

Connections between film spectatorship and crime have been made since the first films became available for public consumption (articles about social anxieties that films would incite crime can be found in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* beginning as early as 1908⁵⁸). In *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, James Burhart Gilbert writes:

From its beginnings in darkened nickelodeons and Vaudeville halls, through its flowering inside the lavish palaces of the 1920s, the movie industry was frequently charged with corrupting American morals, particularly the morals of youth. More than any other form of modern mass culture, films attracted this condemnation. (Gilbert, 162)

The controversial Payne Fund Studies, released in 1933, make some of the earliest, and probably most prominent, connections between crime and cinephilia. The Payne Fund Studies surveyed children from different demographics (including local school children, boys and girl scouts, and people in juvenile detention centers) and found that juvenile delinquents were more likely to be

⁵⁸ Anonymous, "Say Picture Shows Corrupt Children," *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1908, 4; Anonymous, "Picture Shows All Put Out of Business: Mayor Revokes Their Licenses Pending Inquiry Into the Public's Safety," *New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1908, 1; Anonymous, "Can Show Crime Films," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1910, 119.

passionate about the movies, and attended them more frequently, than their counterparts. These studies were published and widely discussed by the public. Gilbert writes:

In 1934 the release of several films that exploited questionable material brought matters to a head. A variety of influences impinged on the industry. Release of the Payne Fund Studies of children and film in 1933 supplied ammunition for those who charged that films created delinquency. As Henry James Forman stated in *Our Movie Made Children*, crime films in high delinquency neighborhoods were ‘agents provocateurs’ and ‘a treacherous and costly enemy let loose at the public expense.’ As he concluded: ‘*The road to delinquency, in a few words, is heavily dotted with movie addicts*, and obviously, it needs no crusaders or preachers or reformers to come to this conclusion.’⁵⁹ (emphasis mine)

This atmosphere of pressure on movie studios created one of the major factors leading to the increased enforcement of the production code.

There was a strong resurgence of concern regarding the influence of media on juvenile delinquency in the late 1940s and 1950. During this period, due to a number of factors (including teenagers gaining capital and agency after taking the jobs of soldiers who went to war, the increasing prominence of independence wrought by automobiles, and the popularity of rock and roll), teenagers appeared to be creating a powerful youth culture that involved rebellion against normative mainstream social structures like the nuclear family, and its standards of propriety. This youth culture appeared to signal an upsurge in juvenile delinquency. Trying desperately to

⁵⁹ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 164.

understand the reasons behind these sudden changes in America's young, many Americans came up with two: broken homes and non-traditional families (with, for example, working mothers), and the media. Gilbert writes:

Volatile public reaction only compounded the complicated problems of interpreting teenage behavior. Parents, leaders of youth serving organizations, high school teachers, community leaders, government officials, and academic experts cast about for explanations. But in the early 1950s, at the height of concern about delinquency, one theory caught hold of the public imagination until it became an issue in national politics. For several years, debate raged over whether or not mass culture, particularly media in the guise of advertising, comic books, films, and other consumer entertainments aimed at youth, had misshaped a generation of American boys and girls.

This idea gained momentum from its intersection with another growing belief about youth: juvenile delinquency had bounded upward after 1940. From the middle of World War II, a great many Americans, led by federal law-enforcement officials, concluded that broken families, mobility, and absent-working mothers had caused a spurt in delinquent behavior.⁶⁰

So many different forms of discourse contributed to the increasing national interest in the mass media's effects on juvenile delinquency, that its exact origins remain unclear. Certainly, the publication of psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*, an attack on comic

⁶⁰ Ibid, 13.

books and media that treated them as perpetrators assaulting the morals and character of America's youth, was an early and potent influence. It was followed by heavy newspaper discourse, sensationalist films such as *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), and the 1955 book *Delinquent Boys* by Albert Cohen, which also drew attention to connections between delinquency and media.

As a result of this extensive, passionate national discourse, the federal government organized a senate subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency in 1953. Although mass media was listed as one category of concern and investigation, it became central due to an overwhelming outpouring of concern from experts and unsolicited letters, from Chair Estes Kefauver's interest in the topic, and his desire to use it as a platform on which to gain a Presidential nomination.⁶¹ Gilbert writes that this committee was greatly energized in 1955, when Kefauver, a Senator, assumed chairmanship, and homed in on the "growing argument over delinquency and the mass media."⁶² As this chapter has demonstrated, commentators and average citizens had made connections between crime, juvenile delinquency, and film spectatorship for decades. However, Kefauver greatly increased the prominence of these connections by publicly communicating their importance to the government, thus institutionalizing them.

Here, after all, was a major federal investigatory board that appeared to agree that media caused delinquency. Here was an opportunity to press for legislation

⁶¹ Gilbert writes: "Of responses to the initial questionnaire sent out to 'grass roots experts' about 50 percent placed some blame on films and comic books for delinquency. Of the thousands of unsolicited letters, nearly 75 percent reflected concern over comic books, television, radio, and the movies, 150.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 143.

regulating comic books, television, and the movies. And from another perspective, the investigations provided a forum for censorship opponents to muster their expert witnesses.⁶³

Although the committee also raised concerns about other causes of delinquency, including lack of recreation, poor schools, and broken families, debates over mass media were central between 1954 and 1956. Experts testifying included, prominently, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, Children's Bureau Representatives, experts in criminology, comic book publishers, and television, radio, and film industry executives. "What had, until then, been an unorganized debate that progressed fitfully, from one sensationalized episode to another, now focused, for a short time at least, on the possibility of national action."

The Kefauver investigations on media and delinquency increased public concern about this connection exponentially. Furthermore, Kefauver's investigations gave what had been mostly forceful conjecture and debate increased legitimacy. "By televising the hearings and airing the accusations of media critics, [Kefauver] lent credence to their ideas. The prestige of the Senate was also enlisted to legitimate the issues, just as it was in the investigations of organized crime and communist influence in government."⁶⁴

Gilbert writes that, while Kefauver expanded a forum for heated debate on these issues that lasted "well into the 1960s," this cycle of debate about violence, media, juvenile delinquency, and crime petered out at that point.⁶⁵ However, what might be described as a new cycle was initiated again in the late 1960s, as the result of several factors. In 1967, after a long,

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 149.

slow decline in power and influence, Hollywood's production code was finally abolished, partially as a result of the popularity of sexually explicit non-American films. At the same time the mainstream American film industry was suffering. Because of the end of vertical integration after The Paramount Consent Decree, the loss of huge numbers of viewers to television, and the high profile failure of several big budget epics like *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963) and *Hello Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969), the American film industry was in need of a change. The American film industry's desire to cater to a more hip, youthful audience, and differentiate themselves from television, led to the production of what have become known as the seminal films of the "New Hollywood" period. Films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), and *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971) were both financially successful and highly controversial because of their violent and sexual content.⁶⁶ The end of the production code, the industry's desire to differentiate movies from television, and the industry's desire to cater to a more youthful and racially diverse demographic also led to the rising popularity of sexually explicit and/or violent exploitation films (several of which appeared on television after their theatrical releases), and pornography.⁶⁷ These changes in media provoked much controversy and concern. In 1967, Lyndon Johnson initiated The Pornography Commission, the first of three President's Commissions related to sex, violence, and the media. The Commission was formed in response

⁶⁶ See Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2002); Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Paul Monaco, *The Sixties, 1960-1969* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2003); David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ For more info about exploitation films on television, see James Arena, *Fright Night on Channel 9: Saturday Night Horror Films on New York's WOR-TV, 1973-1987* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012).

to public concern: “Congressmen were receiving more letters from their constituents about unsolicited pornography sent through the mail than they were about the war in Vietnam.”⁶⁸

Concern about the media’s influence on violence exploded again in 1968, after the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. All of these factors—but, most directly, these assassinations—led Lyndon Johnson to initiate a Presidents’ Commission Investigation on Violence. Several branches of this investigation focused specifically on the correlation of violence and the media. One, in particular, focused on the possible influence of violence in television, the results of which were published in 1972. Although the methodologies and results of these commissions, and their re-interpretation by the mainstream press, were problematic and controversial, several articles in the mainstream press (including *The New York Times*) stated that—while there was no consistent or definitive link between violence and media and violence in society, violence in media could inspire violence, especially if the perpetrator of violence combined consumption of media with other behavioral/mental/environmental problems.⁶⁹ The accuracy of the Commissions’ findings is of little importance to my argument. However, the information (accurate or in-accurate) disseminated by the mainstream press likely influenced the content of the films discussed later in this chapter.

Notable later controversies included the release of the film *Boulevard Nights* (Michael Pressman, 1979), about gangs in California, which was said to incite a gang murder outside the theater in which it was exhibited.⁷⁰ This event resulted in national publicity and the early closing of the film. After the theatrical release of the film *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980), copycat

⁶⁸ Eysenck & Nias, 91

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Charles Schreger, “Gang Movies Stir Controversy: On *The Warriors* and *Boulevard Nights*,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1979, G14; Lee Grant, “Producer Hits ‘Nights’ Closing,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1979, E17.

murders of gay men took place at the bars in which it was shot.⁷¹ Feminist organizations like Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) famously protested screenings of films including *Snuff* (Michael Findlay et al, 1976) and *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980), fearing that their depictions of sexualized violence would lead to more rapes and murders of women. *Dressed to Kill*'s producer, Samuel Z. Arkoff, happily incorporated the protests into the film's publicity.⁷²

In the 1980s, mainstream American cinema and television's increasing permissiveness, and the growing popularity of home media devices, led to further waves of anxiety. Concurrently, waves of copycat murders allegedly inspired by the popularity of slasher films like *Halloween*, the *Friday the 13th* series, the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, and the *Scream* series (often by people who professed cinephilic adoration of the films) provoked more national controversy and concern (these cases will be discussed in more detail later, in my discussion of *Scream* and *The Human Centipede II*).

The post-war youth culture crisis, the Kefauver trials, and the on-going social concern about the relationship between film spectatorship, crime, and juvenile delinquency firmly established the mass media's influence on crimes (especially the crimes of young people) as a popular concern in American culture. Some issues that were raised during this period (i.e. the blaming of crime on a combination of mass media and broken homes) hinted at the connections between film spectatorship, crime, and domestic trauma made in all of the texts discussed in this chapter. However, two more historical trajectories took place that solidified and led to a clearer articulation of this relationship: the introduction of child abuse and neglect as major mainstream

⁷¹Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 238.

⁷² John Kilgore, *Hollywood Vs. Hardcore: How the Struggle Over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 277.

concerns in the early 1960s, and an upsurge in psychological studies investigating connections between media consumption, crime, and emotional problems that began in the early 1960s.

C. The “discovery” of child abuse:

In Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Howard F. Stein’s article *Child Abuse and the Unconscious in American Popular Culture*, they point out that

During the 1960s child abuse and neglect, long grappled with as a vexing and chronic social problem by generations of child welfare and social workers, was suddenly “discovered” and expropriated by a more powerful profession: medicine. When C. Henry Kempe and his associates (1962) at Colorado General Hospital created a new diagnostic entity—the “Battered Child Syndrome”—the American public finally sat up and took notice.⁷³

Just as the Kefauver investigation granted much legitimacy and public attention to the debates over media’s influence on crime, the medical community’s institutionalization of child abuse led to a tremendous outpouring of mainstream attention and publicity regarding the subject. The medicalization of child abuse led to state reporting laws, federal funding, programs, and professionals devoted to the study and treatment of such abuse. The National Center for the Treatment and Prevention of Child Abuse was established in 1974, “and a whole research industry flourished with specialized journals, research centers, national and international societies and conferences all focused upon child abuse and neglect.” Scheper-Hughes and Stein

⁷³ Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Howard F. Stein, “Child Abuse and the Unconscious in American Popular Culture,” *The Children’s Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 178.

point out that national incidence studies which began in the 1970s reported sharp increases in annual reports of maltreatment. The American Humane Society reported that the total number of reports documented nationwide more than doubled between 1976 and 1983.⁷⁴ Cushman writes that the steep increase in reports continued throughout the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.⁷⁵ Recent revelations of massive abuse scandals in the Catholic Church and at Penn State University suggest that the trend has continued in the 2000s.

Not surprisingly, this vast increase in national concern about child abuse caught the attention of the media. Scheper-Hughes and Stein write that

The media (newspapers, television, radio, films, popular books) played an important role in sensitizing the American public to some of the more bizarre and sadistic examples of child maltreatment. The magazine stories and “docu-dramas” broadcast into homes across the nation created a social climate and consensus that allowed for a very dramatic increase in public interventions in the private lives of citizens.⁷⁶

Dragnet featured a “very special episode” about child abuse the same season as “DR-31,” which deals more with the traumatic effects of neglect and abandonment. Similarly, *Fade to Black* and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* exploit the national attention to child abuse that took place at this time, through their representations of lonely men who become crazed cinephiles in the wake of incest and other forms of abuse.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁵ Cushman, 340.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 79. For an insightful analysis of several of these programs, see Walker, *Trauma Cinema*: 49-82.

D.) Mental health practitioners' exploration of media influence:

The historical trajectories described above—the increased popularity of psychology and object relations theory after World War II, the controversies surrounding juvenile delinquency and media that reached their fruition in the 1950s, and the increasing public awareness of child abuse—came together in 1961 and 1963, when a series of psychological studies examined the ways in which media representations of violence, sex, and sexual violence could effect children. The influential Bobo doll experiments initiated by Bandura et al. laid the groundwork for these studies.⁷⁷ In the Bobo doll experiments, young children were shown videos on a television screen in which people behaved aggressively toward inflated dolls. Children were then allowed to play with Bobo dolls. The studies found that children who watched the films were more likely to interact aggressively with the dolls than children who did not. In their article “Effects of Media Violence on Children: A Review of the Literature,” Heath, Bresolin, and Rinaldi write: “The effects of media violence have been examined by many researchers, using many methodologies, in many countries.” Their review of the literature cites 54 articles published describing a similar number of studies, ranging from 1961 to 1987.

Somewhat counteracting Gilbert's assertion that the controversy over media's influence on crime faded at the end of the 1960s, Heath, Bresolin, and Rinaldi point out that, in the 1970s and 1980s (the periods in which *Fade to Black* and *Scream* either take place or comment on), the various aforementioned social and industrial factors increased the urgency of psychologists' exploration of such concerns. They write:

⁷⁷ Heath, Breslin, and Rinaldi, 376.

Recent developments in the entertainment industry lead to even more alarm about negative effects from media messages. First, the development and wide availability of video-cassette recorders and cable programming have expanded the amount of violent programming available to children. Second, improved special effects allow more realistic depictions of violence. Finally, the popularity of fright (or “slasher”) movies among adolescents has led to a plethora of films in this genre.⁷⁸

These studies strongly, repeatedly suggest that domestic traumas may be strongly intertwined with the relationship between media spectatorship and crime. The fact that domestic trauma becomes a particularly prominent part of the “crime/film spectatorship” equation after 1960 makes sense given that, as was aforementioned, it was in the early 1960s that child abuse first appeared as a major issue on mainstream radar.

Several studies conducted throughout the 1980s found that children whose parents used physical punishment were more likely to become aggressive after consuming violent media.⁷⁹ In the aforementioned 1982 study, Eron found that “parental attitudes consistent with sociopathic beliefs contribute to children’s aggressiveness.”⁸⁰ Heath, Breslin, and Rinaldi place a theory by Berkowitz written in 1984 in conversation with a study by Heath in order to explain a possible psychological and cognitive reason that domestic trauma and film spectatorship together may induce crime. They write:

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Eron, L, 1982; Singer JL, Singer DG, 1986

⁸⁰ Heath, Breslin, and Rinaldi, 378.

Berkowitz has suggested that the theoretical framework of cognitive neoassociationalism could profitably be applied to media effects. Briefly, this theory posits that memories are stored on networks and that the recall of one memory from the network facilitates recall of other memories on the same network (known as “priming”). Heath et al have suggested that children who observe violence in the home might code violent media messages on different networks than children who live in nonviolent homes (for example, “real-life” networks instead of “fantasy” networks). Real-life problems could then prime violent media messages for those children but not for others.

In the study by Heath et al, conducted in 1986,

the authors studied men convicted of violent crimes and a comparison sample composed of men who grew up in the same neighborhoods as the offenders. Again, the television exposure measure was based on retrospective self report, with respondents indicating on *TV Guide* summary sheets which shows they had watched between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Results indicated an interactive effort among physical abuse by the mother, physical abuse by the father, and exposure to television. Respondents who scored high on any two of these three variables were much more likely to be convicted of a violent crime than were respondents who scored high on no or only one variable. The authors suggested

that the observation of violence in the home might alter the way in which televised images are stored in memory.⁸¹

Psychological studies linking film and media spectatorship to violence, domestic contexts, and trauma were also brought to mainstream consumers in books, newspaper and magazine articles, and on television news.⁸²

This section has described the ways in which connections between film spectatorship, crime, and, eventually, domestic trauma, have been situated as related to one another in and because of various contexts and forms of discourse. In particular, I've focused on the ways in which these relationships were formulated in mainstream discourse by the government, the mainstream press, news media, various social welfare institutions, doctors, and psychologists. In the next section of this chapter, I focus on the ways in which the relationship between domestic trauma, cinephilia, and crime manifested itself in a popular television show and four mainstream films. Importantly, in the next section, I transition to the ways in which this relationship was fictionalized. Although in the next section I discuss fictional media, I feel that the discourse presented by these films is as much part of the history of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia in mainstream culture as the "non-fictional discourse" discussed above.

II. Criminal cinephilia in American fictional media, 1969-2007

None of the discourse about film spectatorship described above ever uses the word "cinephilia" to describe what its subjects experience when watching (and, sometimes,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Eisenck & Nyas; Poe Kirby; Nordheimer

murderously re-enacting) films, although occasionally books or articles reference “obsessed film fans.” However, the fictional media discussed in this section—all of which seems clearly informed by, and often refers to, the historical developments discussed in the last section—show characters who demonstrate signs of what has been theorized by scholars as cinephilia, cinephilic tendencies, or cinephilic perception. This section will discuss how filmmakers have spun the social anxieties discussed in the last section into widely disseminated depictions of cinephilia that takes place in relation to trauma (which, as will be discussed in later chapters, is a very real phenomenon—although one that often takes less pathologized/stigmatized forms than the fictional and non-fictional discourse in this chapter suggest). It perhaps makes sense that these media texts, all part of sensational, low brow genres (the very genres condemned by many in the last section), would take anxieties over spectatorship and trauma leading to violence and aggression and convert “spectatorship” into the more extreme *cinephilia* and “violence and aggression” into grotesque, over the top violence and aggression—that is, after all, what genre filmmakers are wont to do. Furthermore, the authors and filmmakers of the texts in this chapter go to great lengths to demonstrate the ways in which their criminals’ cinephilia and their traumas directly inform (and are even part of) the crimes that they commit. Unlike most of the mainstream discourse about trauma, cinephilia, and crime that has circulated through various media, which make generalized or quantitative statements suggesting that trauma can inform cinephilia and crime, these films also focus on intimate examples of domestic trauma, and the ways in which they become intertwined with unique, individualized forms of cinephilic perception.

I will first discuss the ways in which each of these texts incorporates the various strands of historical, social, and cultural context that I’ve outlined above. I will then put each text in

conversation with scholarly definitions of trauma and scholarly definitions of cinephilia to examine the ways in which this combination is imagined—and reconfigured from more documentary sources—in mainstream fictional texts of this period. The fact that these texts are from different genres, media, and time periods speaks to how enduring this conceived combination is, and how much it has been intertwined in many aspects of mainstream culture and mainstream cultural discourse.

The film and television industry quickly learned to capitalize on the controversies presented by teen culture and juvenile delinquency. The media texts in this chapter can be considered examples of this trend, which flourished concurrently with and after the Kefauver trials, initially including films like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nichola Ray, 1955), and *Blue Denim* (Philip Dunne, 1959). In typical Hollywood fashion, these films glamorized the most sensational elements of juvenile delinquency, while still condemning it. Gilbert writes:

Hollywood's double vision, which it applied to every controversial depiction of sex, crime, and violence, was now focused on the issue of delinquency.

Hollywood understood that America both deplored youthful misbehavior and celebrated it. Thus, in the movies it made, delinquents were punished for their transgressions and wrongdoing was criticized by the ever-present voice of morality. Yet delinquents themselves were pictured with enormous sympathy. And the new youth culture that many Americans identified as delinquent was explored with careful and loving detail... In a similar way, other mass media learned to exploit this precarious but profitable tactic of pushing a controversial

social issue as far as it was safe to do, risking controversy, but still reaping the financial rewards of public interest and outrage.⁸³

Dragnet was a perfect example of this mass media tendency. Indeed, one could argue that the third season of *Dragnet* (from which one of this chapter's central texts sprang) was a part of the tail end of the cycle that Gilbert describes. Several episodes are devoted to juvenile delinquency, teen drug use, and other threats of the 1960s counter-culture (which, as Cushman and others have persuasively argued, was the natural follow-up to the delinquency concerns of the 1950s). With *Fade to Black*, *Scream*, and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)*, mainstream American filmmakers obviously capitalized on controversies over media and violence that were largely initially incited by the Kefauver trials, and continued throughout the following decades. Like the first films in the "juvenile delinquent cycle," in varying degrees, the texts in this chapter condemn their criminal cinephiles while, at the same time, offering them a degree of sympathy.

A. Misguided heroes: *Dragnet: DR-31* (1969) & *Fade to Black* (1980)

In this section I hope to demonstrate that the following fictional texts directly derived their depictions of criminal cinephilia from discourse that circulated in "real life" at the time. Therefore, it is perhaps appropriate that I begin with "DR-31," episode 20 of the third season of *Dragnet 1969*. Jack Webb, the creator of *Dragnet*, was highly concerned with suggesting that episodes from his TV series were torn from headlines and police files. In his article " 'The story you are about to see is true': *Dragnet*, Film Noir, and Postwar Realism," R. Barton Palmer writes:

⁸³ Gilbert, 177.

Webb decided to make authenticity the watchword of the new series that [Police officer Marty Wynn] suggested could easily find its material in the public records (names and other particulars, of course, would need to be changed in order to avoid lawsuits). In other words, the realism he was after (which could be pursued more deeply in the television version of the show) would depend not only, in the manner of Hollywood, on creating an effect of plausibility, with a view toward convincing the viewer to suspend disbelief...*Dragnet*, instead, engaged viewers with what seemed to be the accurate, objective depiction of the ‘truth’ of police work through re-enactment of the investigation of what is ostensibly (and usually truly is) an actual case.⁸⁴

It is uncertain whether the writers of “Burglary-DR-31,” which recounts the case of a young man obsessed with superheroes and superhero movies who re-enacts his beloved objects in his crimes, based it on a real incident. However, the star of the episode has noted that, several years after the show aired, he read about a real person very similar to the episode’s protagonist. “I remember reading in the paper about a kid that was pretty much down that line, and they found him dead in a freezer. He had shut himself in a big freezer—the kind that lift up, not open outward—and his life almost read like the same character. It was kind of startling.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ R. Barton Palmer, “‘The story you are about to see is true’: *Dragnet*, Film Noir, and Postwar Realism,” *Television and Criticism*, ed. Solange Davin and Rhona Jackson (Chicago: UC Press Books, 2008), 68.

⁸⁵ Michael J. Hayde, *My Name’s Friday: The Unauthorized but True Story of Dragnet and the Films of Jack Webb* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2001), 215.

In “Burglary-DR-31,” Sergeant Joe Friday and Officer Bill Gannon are alerted to a series of thefts that have taken place in Los Angeles’ movie theaters, memorabilia stores, and production companies. The thief, who they come to describe as “Superfan,” solely steals memorabilia related to super heroes like Super Flame, Commander Jupiter, and Captain Lightning. In particular, Superfan seems to have a special love for Captain Lightning. As Friday and Gannon’s search continues, a witness tells them that they saw a thief wearing a cape and other super hero accoutrements, who ran “like lightning.” Friday and Gannon finally capture Superfan, in full costume and claiming to be “The Crimson Crusader”. After some tough interrogation, Superfan finally confesses that his real name is Stanley Stover, and that he became obsessed with movies (and then comic books, television shows, and memorabilia) about super heroes after his father abandoned him, leaving him with a life filled with pain. He states that he became obsessed with super heroes because “they’re great men. They can fly and walk through walls, and nothing can hurt them. Nothing...They weren’t just my heroes. They were friends.” He confesses, to Friday and Morgan’s horror, that he sewed his own super hero outfit and made a climbing rope out of his mother’s old dresses and gloves.

“Burglary-DR-31” makes numerous references to the various historical trajectories that I described in the previous section. References to juvenile delinquency, the negative effects of media, and 1960s counter-culture abound. The centrality of comic book characters that also appear on television and in films immediately recalls the Kefauver trials. Sergeant Friday asks a robbed theater owner: “Is there anyone you expect might have done this? Maybe some youngster you’ve been having trouble with?” When Friday and Morgan inform the somewhat elderly publicity head of “Continental Studios,” a production company whose Captain Lightning memorabilia archive was pillaged, about Superfan, he suggests: “It must be some nutty kid, there

are a lot of them around these days. It had to be a kid, the only photos he took were of Captain Lightning.” When Friday admits that he hasn’t heard of Captain Lightning, Morgan fills him in:

You really don’t remember Captain Lightning? He was sensational. Could make himself invisible. The bad guys never had a chance. Captain Lightning was the sort of fella a boy could look up to, you know what I mean? We had heroes in those days. Now the movies are full of what they call anti-heroes. Today in the movies a cowboy wearing a white hat rides into town and the first thing he does is shoot a dog or rob a bank. It’s no wonder kids are confused.

The show similarly refers to and demonstrates the continuing popularity of psychology and pop psychology during this period. Indeed, the characters on the show repeatedly conflate “juvenile delinquency” and “mental illness”. The head of publicity at Continental Studios offers his diagnosis of a suspect, who came to the studio hoping to buy memorabilia, and reacted ragefully when his request was denied:

Guys like that always strike as kind of strange. Getting so excited about Captain Lightning. A lot of nuts around these days. I’d say he was a real pistachio...I don’t know maybe I’m wrong, but I got the feeling this guy’s entire thrust centered around this comic strip character. I mean he got so upset when I told him he couldn’t have the pictures. To tell you the truth I was afraid he was going to have a breakdown right then and there. He really teared up and started to sob...I told him not to worry about it, that Captain Lightning wasn’t the only thing in life.

And he said “He is to me!” Then he turned and walked out. I felt sorry for the guy, he really had his heart set on getting those pictures. What do you think, Sergeant? Sounds a little psycho, doesn’t he?

The show combines and emphasizes these historical anxieties in a rich and complex way in its representation of what appears to be Stanley Stover’s domestic trauma informed cinephilia. “Superfan” is immediately established as a conundrum in 1960s American culture: a person whose obsessive love of film and fetishization of film memorabilia resembles the cinephilic, even if his lower than low brow tastes do not resemble what was pre-dominantly thought of as “cinephilia” at that time (exemplified by, for example, the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics and their followers). When Sergeant Friday and Officer Morgan go to investigate a bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard that specializes in film and TV books and memorabilia, the owner of the bookstore expresses confusion regarding the items that Superfan chose to steal. He states:

I’m not complaining mind you, but as close as I can figure with just a spot check, I got off pretty lucky... Whoever it was didn’t touch a copy of *Wonder Stories* or *Amazing Stories*, and they go for several dollars each. And I got some books that are true collector’s items, autographed first editions. Any collector would have gone for those first. *I don’t understand it.* (emphasis mine)

In his obsession with tacky Super Hero movies and the collection of cheap memorabilia, Superfan resembles a prototype of Thomas Elsaesser’s “second generation” of cinephiles, who confer

a new nobility on what once might have been mere junk. The new cinephilia is turning the unlimited archive of our media memory, including the unloved bits and pieces, the long forgotten films or programs into potentially desirable and much valued clips, extras, and bonuses...⁸⁶

While Elsaesser states that this type of cinephilia has been incited by the rise of DVDs and websites like YouTube, Stanley Stover's obsession with collecting memorabilia to keep the memories of his favorite movies alive, and his love for media that is widely considered "mere junk," places him in this category of cinephiles. Importantly, the episode makes a point to establish that Stover's love for film and super heroes transcends mere fandom. The head of publicity at Continental Studios states that Superfan became especially upset when the publicist told him that the studio doesn't sell their archival memorabilia to the public, and recommended that he go to "some of those bookstores and poster shops on Hollywood Boulevard." He says: "He said he wasn't interested because anyone on the street could buy those pictures. He said he was a collector, not a typical fan. Those were the words he used." Stover makes an effort to distinguish his love for media as specialized and cinephilic.

In the climactic final sequence of "DR-31," the reason behind Superfan's "strange behavior" is finally revealed, along with his real name. When Friday and Morgan first take Superfan into custody, he insists on calling himself "The Crimson Crusader." It is unclear whether he realizes that this persona is fictional, or whether he truly believes himself to be inhabiting the role. When Friday asks his real name, Superfan responds: "You know I can't tell

⁸⁶ Elsaesser, "Cinephilia and the Uses of Disenchantment," 31.

you that. You gentlemen should know more than anybody that I can't disclose my true identity.”

This line suggests that, like Bruce Wayne or Clark Kent, Stoney Stover might believe himself to be The Crimson Crusader and Stanley Stover at the same time. This sequence gives a perverse new twist to Antoine De Baecque's assertion that cinephilia is “life organized around film.”⁸⁷

Stanley describes his life as “a life organized around film” when he states: “I really admired those super men. I always went to their movies and bought their comic books. It was my whole life. Nothing else seemed very real or important. Just them.”

As Friday and Morgan interrogate Stover, it becomes clear that his cinephilia has become conflated with his crime, referring to the ways in which the line between film spectatorship and crime seemed increasingly blurry during the time immediately preceding, and during, *Dragnet's* airing.

Friday: Why did you steal all those things?

Stanley: I'm a collector.

Friday: We call it stealing. You broke into a movie studio, a bookstore, you damaged half a dozen theaters. Now is that your idea of fighting crime,

Stanley?...We want straight answers. We want to know why you've been stealing all this Captain Lightning stuff. What makes it so important that you were willing to risk jail for it?

Stanley: I wanted them. They were important to me.

⁸⁷ Keathley, 12.

As Friday and Morgan delve further into Stanley's motive, they discover that the "importance" of these stolen objects is rooted in his childhood trauma. As Stanley gives a narrative of his cinephilia, Friday eventually asks: "What about your parents?"

Stanley: I never knew my father. He left home when I was a baby. It was just me and my mother. She supported me and gave me money, but we didn't have much. I remember being on County Relief. My mother figured I bought all this stuff or traded it with other kids I guess, like a hobby.

Morgan: You never heard from your father?

Stanley: No, he left after I was born.

Friday: And how old were you?

Stanley: A year, but I guess he didn't like me very much. It was awful as a kid being the only one in class without a father. Maybe if I'd been tall and strong and a good athlete, that wouldn't have mattered that much. But I was always fatso and butterball to other kids. They beat me up and threw my books in the garbage can. It wasn't the pain I couldn't bear. What made me cry is that I hadn't done anything to anyone...It was only in the movies when I could stop being me. When Super Flame or Commander Jupiter captured a gang of outlaws single handed, that was me up there on screen doing it.

Stanley's symptoms seem very much aligned with the tenets of object relations theory, and what Fairbairn described as:

memory-fantasy structures caused by painful or confusing parenting... Imaginary objects [that individuals form] when the *real* parenting is inadequate or dangerous, in an attempt to avoid the pain caused by inadequate parent-child interaction, and to provide a substitute parent through imaginary interactions.⁸⁸

Stover's engagement with media resonates even more strongly with Winnicott's elaboration of Fairbairn's theory:

Internal objects receive their content, Winnicott thought, when the mother's failures in empathy are extreme, causing the infant intolerably intense emotional responses to a sudden awareness of separateness. To protect himself against these feelings, the infant would imagine a microworld, peopled by internal objects whose functions were identical to the infant's own psychic trait of omnipotence. The objects, which Ogden referred to as "unconscious omnipotent internal objects," are fantasized for defensive purposes; they are not inherent givens. Stanley's "defensive objects" certainly function identically to what might be described as a regressive "psychic trait of omnipotence".

Stanley: They can fly and walk through walls, and nothing can hurt them. Nothing... And when I'm the Crimson Crusader I'm one of them, and nothing can hurt me... When Super Flame or Commander Jupiter captured a gang of outlaws single handed, that was me up there on the screen doing it.

⁸⁸ Cushman, 252.

Although the show was most likely adapting its notions about domestic trauma and the subjective experience of trauma from the popularization of object relations theory psychology, Stanley Stover's post-traumatic subjectivity is also strongly reminiscent of more contemporary descriptions of the experience of domestic trauma. Stolorow's assertion that "traumatic subjectivity is not just the result of an incident but of an inter-subjective context that is traumatic" suggests that the traumas that inform Stanley's cinephilia and his crime spread beyond the actual traumatic event of his abandonment by his father, and might extend to the cruelties that came from "being the only one in class without a father" and his mother's apparent resulting financial struggles. Stanley's embodiment of a supernatural fictional character (The Crimson Crusader), based on fictional characters like Captain Lightning, calls to mind the stories of psychiatrist Judith Herman's sexually abused clients, who "routinely described themselves as outside the compact of ordinary human relations, as supernatural creatures or nonhuman life forms. They think of themselves as witches, vampires, whores, dogs, rats, or snakes."⁸⁹ Similarly, Stanley's comments that nothing seemed real or important to him other than super heroes, and his imagined identity as a super hero, is reminiscent of psychologist Robert Stolorow's description of his own experience of trauma after his wife's death in *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographicals, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections*:

The significance of my everyday professional world had collapsed into
meaninglessness. The conference and my friends and colleagues offered me

⁸⁹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 105.

nothing; I was ‘deadened’ to them, estranged from them. I felt uncanny—‘like a strange and alien being—not of this world.’⁹⁰

After Stanley makes his confession and reveals his motive (which is also, it seems worth noting, his trauma narrative), he takes Friday and Morgan to his small, pathetic bedroom, which contains nothing but a child’s cot and all of his stolen pop culture memorabilia, arranged in a shrine. As Friday and Morgan look around in awe, Morgan and Stanley exchange the following dialogue:

Morgan: You stole all of this?

Stanley: It’s not really so much, when you think about it.

Morgan: What do you mean?

Stanley: Would your entire life fit into one small room?

Stanley’s experience of his beloved objects resonates with Cvetkovich’s notion that cultural objects can be ‘repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.’” In the final sequence of “Burglary-DR-31”, the audience (and Sergeant Friday and Officer Morgan) are movingly presented with an archive of Stanley’s feelings. She writes that her book’s focus on trauma

⁹⁰ Stolorow, 40.

serves as a point of entry into a vast archive of feelings, the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer culture...The memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary for the fact that they are invested with emotional, even sentimental value.⁹¹

The throughline of the episode “Burglary-DR-31” is that Morgan and Friday are initially presented with a person who is stealing seemingly “arbitrary” objects with no apparent relation to a motive (I return to the bookstore owner who couldn’t understand why the thief didn’t take more valuable books). After the pieces are put together, they realize that Stanley’s motive is a trauma, and that these objects—like the fetishized cinephilic objects of most of the people discussed in this dissertation—are embedded with many forms of Stanley’s “love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more.” One of the surprising points of the episode is that what seems like many to be cultural detritus could actually be a priceless archive of feelings. Unfortunately, unlike Cvetkovich’s descriptions of archives in her groundbreaking book, *Dragnet’s* filmmakers present Stanley’s archive as sad and pathetic, rather than empowering and healing.

“Burglary-DR-31” demonstrates that a profound similarity shared by the definitions of traumatic subjectivity and cinephilia is the need to share your experience, which sometimes manifests itself as creative production. As was discussed earlier, Willemsen defines cinephilic perception as the tendency to experience “moments which, when encountered in a film, spark something which then produces the energy and desire to write, to find formulations to convey

⁹¹ Cvetkovich, 8.

something about the intensity of that spark.”⁹² Stanley’s dressing up and acting like a super hero is partially his way of finding “formulations to convey something about the intensity of that spark” of intense desire, pleasure, and wish fulfillment that he found at the movies. Stover’s cinephilia also resembles Keathley’s definition of cinephilic perception, and particularly his appropriation of Barthes’ notions of “the studium,” “the punctum,” and “*jouissance*”. It might be argued that Stanley’s desire to dress up as a superhero and recreate scenes from his favorite movies is a way of capturing the *jouissance* that he experienced watching super hero films (“When Super Flame or Commander Jupiter captured a gang of outlaws single handed, that was me up there on the screen doing it...Coming home [from the theater, the busses] were so dark and cold and lonely. I was someone special watching the movie, but coming home I was just fatso Stover again.”). However, it must be noted that Stover’s cinephilia, like the cinephilia of most of the characters and real people described in this dissertation, expands upon Willemen and Keathley’s definitions of cinephilia by insisting that cinephilia—especially cinephilia that is tightly intertwined with issues of identity and psychological difference—can and often does take place in relation to a film’s representations (in Stanley’s case, the film’s main characters), rather than just in relation to that which exceeds representation. Stanley might be considered a prototypical example of Elsaesser’s “second generation of cinephiles,” who “re-master, re-purpose, and re-frame” beloved pop culture in order to meet their emotional needs or that of their group. Stanley draws upon cinematic conventions to enact his cinephilia, and steal his beloved memorabilia).

Cvetkovich argues that the need to tell one’s story and describe one’s experience in order to process domestic trauma can also inspire creative production, including performance and the

⁹² Willemen, 235.

creation of archives. The individual quality in Stanley that creates that spark, that leads to his *jouissance*, that inspires him to re-mix, re-master, re-purpose, perform, and archive is his trauma: his need for a father figure that was never met. However, unlike cinephilic producers ranging from the *Cahiers du Cinema* critic-filmmakers to the underground lesbian videomakers described by Cvetkovich, Stanley's cinephilic creation and his misguided attempts to process his trauma combine and manifest themselves as crimes.

The closing of "Burglary-DR-31"'s narrative seems, once again, highly inspired by Object Relations theory. Cushman writes:

Winnicott explained psychological regression as an attempt to return to a time when the environmental container failed, in order to redo the old unsatisfactory scenes. Psychoanalysis could cure patients, according to Winnicott, by providing the parental nutrients that had been missing or were distorted in earlier parent-child experiences. If the care is properly provided, Winnicott thought that the self would be able to break out of the regression and grow again in a natural, unimpeded way. Antisocial behavior, for instance, was thought of as an unconscious attempt on the part of the adolescent to force the world to offer proper psychological boundaries, boundaries that unfortunately had been non-existent in the earlier parent-child relationship.⁹³

At the end of the episode, Stanley brings Friday and Morgan to the "archive of feelings" in his bedroom so they can take back all that he has stolen. While they are in his bedroom, he hears his

⁹³ Cushman, 256.

mother say “Stanley, dear, are you home?!” Tears in his eyes, Stanley cries “Oh, God, how I wish I were Captain Lightning. Any time he wanted to he could make himself invisible.” He then turns around and cries against his “life-sized” poster for *Captain Lightning versus The Martian Devils*. Joe Friday puts a paternal hand on Stanley’s shoulder and escorts him away from the poster, as the show’s famous theme song plays and the message: “The story you have just seen is true. The names were changed to protect the innocent. On May 10th, the trial was held in Department 184, Superior Court of the State of California, for the County of Los Angeles. In a moment, the results of that trial.” We return to a sad looking Stanley, dressed in a suit in front of a wall. A voiceover states: “It was the order of the court that Stanley Stover remain in the Los Angeles County Probation Department for two years, during which time he received extensive psychiatric care.” Stanley’s cinephilia, his cinephilic production, and his archive of feelings (all presented here as examples of pathology and antisocial behavior) are, we may assume, cries for help. The show seems to want to viewer to believe that the world offered, to quote Cushman, “proper psychological boundaries.”

In the episode’s most powerful image, the camera zooms in on the poster for *Captain Lightning versus the Martian Devils* after Stanley is escorted away from it. Stanley’s tears stream down from Captain Lightning’s eyes, the affective “context and reception” of the object and the object becoming one, as Stanley—through his affective expression—“re-mixes, re-masters, and re-purposes” his favorite character one last time. It seems unfortunate, given the scholarship that has been written about the subversive and reparative potential of cultural consumption and archive creation, that in order to process Stanley’s trauma, he must return his archive to the state and forsake his *jouissance*-inspired costume for a drab, ill-fitting suit.

Although it is not known whether the makers of the rest of the films in this chapter were inspired by this episode of *Dragnet*, it establishes several trends that permeate what might be called the criminal cinephilia subgenre: the characters all experience a blending of reality and fiction/fantasy that is characteristic of traumatic subjectivity, and the characters all engage with filmic *representations*, forcing us to re-think Willemsen and Keathley's definitions of cinephilia as excluding representations. Finally, the characters' cinephilia takes place not just in movie theaters, but in front of TV sets and in their own archives of paracinematic materials.

In 1979, the year Vernon Zimmerman's *Fade to Black* went into production, sex and violence in the media, and their influence on young people, remained a hot topic in public discourse. In 1978, *Sex, Violence and the Media*, written by psychologists H.J. Eysenck and D.K.B. Nias, was released by the major publication house St. Martin's Press, and received attention in the mainstream press. The book condensed the histories of psychological research on the effects of media sex and violence on the minds of adolescents, and on crime and "real life" violence. The authors argued that the three were conclusively inter-related. Reviewing *Sex, Violence, and the Media* in *The Los Angeles Times*, Elizabeth Poe Kerby wrote:

The voices on the private line between television tycoons these days are frightened. The fear is that someone, once and for all, will show unequivocally that violence in television and films may be linked to violent crimes. Can censorship be far behind?

Until recently, the media moguls had little to fear, for even though there is a substantial literature of reports and surveys of all kinds that link crime with TV

and film violence, many informed people believe the evidence is contradictory or, at best, ambiguous. This is no accident.

Now come two psychologists from London University Institute of Psychiatry who have written a book reviewing the entire scope of literature on violence in the media. They conclude the evidence is not contradictory. The problem has been that presidential commissioners and many others who have tried to describe research on the subject have mucked up the job. To confuse further, we had fancy footwork in official studies, sociologists working on psychological problems, lawyers and educators trying to interpret psychological research they couldn't understand and even, heaven forbid, psychologists who didn't know what they were doing.

When all these problems are pushed aside, the authors say, existing research, although not perfect, contains enough work of high standard to arrive at a firm conclusion. Aggressive acts can be evoked by viewing a violent scene portrayed on film, TV, or in theater. And, they say, there is ample evidence that media violence increases individual aggression.⁹⁴

The book, and Poe Kerby's article, acknowledge the argument that individual components—such as a criminal's home environment/personal traumas—must be taken into account. However, Poe Kerby states that “this volume demonstrates that such differences can be described in predictable ways.” (In other words, somebody who has experienced domestic trauma is more likely to be

⁹⁴ Poe Kerby, L4.

incited to violence by a media text—but that does not discount the fact that media texts influence violence). In the book, Eysenck and Nias write:

Another belief, quite widespread, is that perhaps only emotionally disturbed, or otherwise vulnerable people are affected by TV violence and pornography. However, just a few violent or depraved individuals can do a great deal of harm, and furthermore it may be said that it is not an argument against the eradication of a potent source of violence in society to say that there are other sources; In that argument none of these sources would ever be eradicated.⁹⁵

Also in 1979, as *Fade to Black* went into production, *Boulevard Nights* and *The Warriors* (Walter Hill), both films about urban street gangs, stirred up a great deal of controversy when violent crimes began to take place in and around theaters showing the films.⁹⁶ On March 30, 1979, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that Tony Bill, the executive producer of *Boulevard Nights* at Paramount Studios, was furious that the film had been pulled from The Alhambra Theater in San Francisco after Dianne Feinstein, having consulted with the San Francisco Chief of Police Charles Gain and the Alhambra's owner, recommended strongly that the film be closed. At the theater, a fight between rival gangs resulted in the stabbing and shooting of four people. The film was also cancelled at The Mission Drive-in in Pomona, CA, when on the same night one person was stabbed and two people were shot. In the article, titled "Producer Hits 'Nights' Closing," Bill argued that violent movies were being disproportionately blamed for

⁹⁵ Eysenck and Nias, 24.

⁹⁶ Canby, Vincent. "When a Tame Film Inspired Violence." *New York Times*, March 4, 1979; Schreger, Charles. "Gang Movies Stir Controversy." *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1979.

crimes during this period, even used as a scapegoat, while institutional figures like Mayor Feinstein turned away from other issues.

The executive producer of “Boulevard Nights” has charged San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein with making “a very destructive move” in asking that the film be removed from a theater playing it in her city.

“The people who should see this film, including members of gangs, would be better served if the movie continued to play,” said Tony Bill. “She might as well close down Candlestick Park (the baseball stadium) because there are fights there, or the taco stands in the Mission District because there are fights there, too.”

“To say that our film in any way contributes to the cause of gang violence and the pervasive nature of conditions that cause it is just stupid,” said Bill. “Mayor Feinstein is just wishing the conditions in her own city would go away...I suspect she would rather not face the gang problems in her own city...I refuse to accept the contention that a movie is the cause rather than a reflection of what is happening in society.”⁹⁷

Raising the other side of the argument, the article quoted Feinstein’s deputy press secretary, who pointed out that “There seems to be an awful lot of rhetoric coming from those who want to sell this film,” and that several Los Angeles groups, including local chapters of MECHA (a statewide

⁹⁷ Grant, E17.

organization of Mexican students) and the Coalition of Chicano Community Workers, were demonstrating against the film.

Given this cultural climate, it makes sense that producer Irwin Yablans—who formulated the concept for *Fade to Black*—associated cinephilia with violence and crime. In an interview with Adam Rockoff, author of *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986*, Yablans stated: “I just sat down one day and thought about the ultimate film buff...I thought about what he would do, and it just seemed natural that he would want to seek out revenge on people by using all his movie heroes.”⁹⁸

From 1978-1980 (the period leading up to *Fade to Black*'s 1980 release), there was also considerable mainstream discourse about domestic trauma *and* domestic trauma's representation in mainstream media. On February 16, 1978, an article appeared in *The Los Angeles Times* titled “Pornography: A Link to Sex Crimes?” The article interviewed various people, including members of Women Against Violence Against Women (an organization founded in 1976 to protest the release of the exploitation film *Snuff*), members of the police force, and psychologists on both sides of the debate regarding whether or not pornography (and increasing sexual violence and dehumanization of women in pornography) could incite sexual violence. Psychologists on both sides agreed that there was more concrete evidence linking childhood sexual and physical abuse with adult crimes than pornography consumption.⁹⁹ On October 14, 1979, in a *Los Angeles Times* article titled “Incest: the latest hot taboo,” Paul G. Levine reviewed a miniseries titled *Flesh and Blood* about an incestuous affair between mother (Suzanne Pleshette) and son (Tom Berenger), based on a novel by Pete Hamill. He wrote that the story

⁹⁸ Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2002), 96.

⁹⁹ Betty Liddick, “Pornography: A Link to Sex Crimes?,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 16, 1978, C10.

“may have a more direct impact on American perceptions of Oedipal relations than did the collected works of Sigmund Freud...Where one medium goes, others inevitably follow.” He also reviewed a book titled *Brother and Sister*, about a brother and sister dealing with traumatic affect after engaging with each other sexually during childhood. Hammill alludes to popular culture’s tendency to pathologize those who have experienced domestic trauma, stating that: “like ‘Reefer Madness,’ the product of another generation’s taboo, [the book is] capable of turning its susceptible victims into psychopathic murderers.”¹⁰⁰ On October 22, 1979, an article by Diane Elvenstar titled “Survivors Speak Out: Incest: A Second Reality for a Child” appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*, describing an exhibit of artwork by Ariadne, a social art network that hosted and created an exhibit titled “Bedtime Stories: Women Speak Out About Incest,” which opened at the Women’s Building in Los Angeles on November 15, 1979. The exhibit was created by a group of feminist incest survivors responding to the frequently fetishized pop cultural depictions of incest, such as the miniseries *Flesh and Blood* and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Luna* (1979), in which Jill Clayburgh plays an opera singer who seduces her son in order to cure him of his heroin addiction. The article states that a group of survivors meeting in the Women’s Building in Downtown Los Angeles:

feel a violent crime is being glamorized for profit. It doesn’t coincide with their experiences...The four women resent the implication that mothers are temptresses...and that mother-son incest is a common occurrence. According to

¹⁰⁰ Paul G. Levine, “Incest: The Latest Hot Taboo,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 14, 1979, O14

the speakers, in 97% of cases of incest it's a little girl who is victimized by a father, uncle, grandfather, older brother, or male family friend.¹⁰¹

Into this atmosphere emerged *Fade to Black*, a horror film/character study about Eric Binford (Dennis Christopher), a young, movie-obsessed man in Los Angeles. Triggered by loneliness and the incestuous overtures of his aunt (whom, it is revealed towards the end of the film, is actually his mother), Eric goes on a killing spree dressed as his favorite movie characters, all the while trying to seduce a young Marilyn Monroe impersonator. Meanwhile, he is followed by the police department and a social worker who are “starting a new program to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents.”

Fade to Black opens with a scene in which cinephilia and domestic trauma take place in the same domestic social space. The camera fades in on Eric Binford rapturously watching an old movie on television. The camera pans around his vast collection of movie memorabilia and paraphanelia, ranging from a projector and video cassette tapes (before they reached the height of their popularity), to posters of Old Hollywood classics, to a cut out of Meryl Streep's 1980 *Newsweek* cover, proclaiming her “a film star for the ‘80s.” The camera's loving emphasis of Binford's overwhelming collection of movie memorabilia seems an effort to draw the audience's attention by revealing an exotic or pathological atmosphere. Shortly after the audience has been introduced to Binford and his obsessive relationship to films, his shrew-like Aunt Stella storms into his room in a wheel chair, berating him with comments like “Your mother was a star in Hollywood and she died giving birth to you! You're worthless, just like your father was!,” and insisting that he is responsible for her paralysis (Eric reminds her that she was paralyzed when a

¹⁰¹ Diane Elvenstar, “Incest: A Second Reality for a Child,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1979.

babysitter called her home from a party when he, four years old, was sick. She got into a car accident on the way home). After concisely introducing us to Eric's past traumatic events, and letting the audience know that Eric has been raised in what Robert Stolorow might describe as a traumatic "inter-subjective context" of consistent invalidation, Stella finally beats Eric with her cane.

Eric's story is told in parallel with that of Jerry Moriarty, a social worker hired by the Los Angeles County Police Department to run a juvenile delinquent rehabilitation program, who eventually begins to help the police to track down and understand Eric. Through Jerry, *Fade to Black* makes direct reference to the contemporary concerns about media, crime, domestic trauma, and popular psychology described above, which eventually come together in Eric's breakdown and killing spree. In his first scenes, Jerry butts heads with Sergeant Gallagher, a stereotypical police officer, whose father "got shot to death by some doped up kid in a dark alley." Later, Jerry and Officer Anne Oshenbull, watching television in bed after becoming lovers, have a conversation about changing gender roles, generational conflict, troubled youth, and the media:

Jerry: Look at this clown. He reminds me of Gallagher.

Anne: Gallagher is an okay guy. He just doesn't agree with your methods, that's all.

Jerry: Well that's easy for you to say, Annie. You're a cop, I'm not a cop, he won't listen to me. To him I'm some throwback to the hippie wars.

Anne: But people hate anything that's different. Listen, I had a partner and he refused to get in the patrol car with me because I'm a woman. You know what he said? He said that "he didn't join the Snatch Squad."

Jerry: Why did you join the force?

Anne: For money. No. I joined because, listen it's like you said. You know, last week a girl in San Diego picked a rifle up, killed her neighbors, and claimed she saw it on TV.

Violent news images on TV are cross-cut with the rest of the conversation.

Jerry: That's what I'm talking about. How about the teenager who stabbed his friend 22 times and said it wasn't like on television, the knife only went in a little ways. It just bugs me. I'm obsessed with the subject and it freaks me out because we're planting these crazy images inside these children's heads.

In what seems to be intended as the punch line of this scene, its final shot records a local newscaster telling the audience to "Please stay tuned for *Stage Coach* starring John Wayne," alluding to Eric Binford's obsessive consumption of violent Old Hollywood movies on TV. Indeed, *Fade to Black* also refers to the long history of pre-Kefauver concerns about violence in the media through the films that Eric most worships. Gangster films, violent Westerns, and horror films all provoked the ire of those who believed there to be a relationship between violence and delinquency from film's emergence in the early 20th century.

After the aforementioned scene establishes the cultural context of the film's events, the film cuts back to Eric's bedroom, where his domestic traumas continue. Eric asks Aunt Stella for a loan so that he can take his new love interest, Marilyn O'Connor, a Marilyn Monroe look-a-

like, out to a movie. Stella leeringly responds: “On one condition, that you come straight home right after the movie. I want my backrub tonight.” As Stella states this, the movie makes her desires clear, with background music that combines notes symbolizing both eroticism and dread. The score is accompanied by the camera’s cross-cutting between Stella, looking at Eric knowingly with strong sexual connotations, and Eric, his face bathed in shadows. Stella takes the money from her bra and gives it to Eric, who seems to take it with a look of apprehension and fear. The film seems to suggest that this is not the first time that Aunt Stella has made such overtures. Tellingly, the film suggests that Eric must submit to domestic trauma in order to feed his cinephilia.

Although *Fade to Black* resembles “Burglary-DR-31,” it builds upon the episode’s depiction of the interrelationship between cinephilia and trauma by actually showing Eric experiencing his cinephilia, which often resembles scholarly definitions of cinephilia, while also suggesting the need to expand upon them. Again invoking De Baecque’s definition of cinephilia, Eric lives “a life organized around film”—which, throughout the film, is depicted as a pathological inability to distinguish between fiction and reality that is likely related to his ongoing domestic traumas. Eric’s condition, which resembles DeBaecque’s description of cinephilia, also strongly resembles Cathy Caruth’s definition of post-traumatic stress disorder. Caruth writes:

While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive

hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience...¹⁰²

Throughout the film, Eric's "living the life of film" is signaled by film clips that remind Eric of his life experiences as they are happening and/or influence his behavior and way of reacting to life's events.

In one early example, which marks a prominent plot point in the film, Eric encounters a girl named Marilyn O'Connor in a diner. She bears a remarkable resemblance to Marilyn Monroe (Linda Kerridge, whose resemblance to Monroe was heavily touted in the film's publicity materials), although she has an Australian accent and wears the hair, makeup, and jeans/tee-shirt ensemble of an early 1980s beach bum residing in Venice, CA.¹⁰³ Eric flirts with her and she responds, and Zimmerman cross-cuts to a hazy, Old Hollywood fantasy sequence in which Marilyn O'Connor, made up like Monroe and wearing a costume similar to the hot pink dress that she wore in *Niagara* (1953), does a spot on rendition of Monroe's "Happy Birthday" to John F. Kennedy. It seems notable that Eric "re-mixes, re-masters, and re-purposes" two seminal pieces of moving image media starring Monroe in his romantic fantasy. While these fantasy sequences (which sometimes consist of actual film clips) are certainly intended in the film to develop Eric's pathological cinephilia, they also resemble "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event[s]" of his traumas. Eric, like many trauma survivors trying to consciously or unconsciously process their traumas, repeatedly makes efforts to reconcile his intrusive fantasies with the "actual events of his life," to break down the wall between fantasy and reality in order to create consistency among them. In

¹⁰² Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 4.

¹⁰³ Pressbook for *Fade to Black*, accessed at Margaret Herrick Library

the aforementioned sequence, he hopes to do this by entering a relationship with “Marilyn Monroe,” and beginning a relationship that is consistent with his own sexual desires, rather than those forced upon him by his aunt.

Marilyn accepts a date with Eric but later stands him up, shortly after which Eric “cracks,” beginning his cycle of cinephilia inspired crimes. I find it important to remember that this rejection came directly after his aunt’s promise of sexual abuse. Given that, formally, the film suggests a change in Eric at the moment of his Aunt’s suggestion, I would argue that the film presents Eric’s descent into cinephilic crime as directly intertwined with the promise of another domestic trauma.

After Marilyn misses their date, we see Eric back in his bedroom, watching a 16mm print of Robert Aldrich’s *Kiss Me Deadly* projected on his wall, seemingly physically overcome by lusty *jouissance*. Aunt Stella enters the room and begins to berate him during the infamous scene in which Tom Udo (played by Richard Widmark) pushes an elderly woman in a wheelchair down the stairs to her death, but Eric ignores it. There is a close-up of Eric’s eye as he seems to experience “a cinephiliac moment.” Finally, his aunt, furious that the film has won Eric’s attention, pushes over his projector, igniting Eric’s fury that she interrupted the film during what he describes as “the best part.” Zimmerman presents the moment in which Udo pushes Mrs. Rizzo down the stairs as a moment “which, when encountered in a film, spark[s] something which then produces the energy and desire to write...find formulations to convey something about the intensity of that spark.” After Stella breaks Eric’s projector, he formulates the intensity of the spark he felt during the scene by completing it through a re-enactment in which he pushes Stella down the stairs and murders her. The shots from *Kiss Me Deadly* are juxtaposed with Eric having the “intense, fetishistic experience of bodily pleasure” that is associated with *jouissance*

as he re-enacts a scene that, because of his traumatic relationship with Stella, is particularly poignant to him. After Stella has fallen down the stairs, Eric seems blissful at his embodiment of Richard Widmark. Imitating his voice and his laugh, Eric cries “20th Century Fox presents *Kiss of Death*, starring Victor Mature, Brian Donlevy, Colleen Grey, with Richard Widmark, Tayllor Holmes, Howard Smith, Karl Malden.” He laughs giddily, having given “credits” to his murderous act of cinephilic production.

At this moment, reality and film become completely inseparable to Binford, as he continues ghoulishly “living a life organized around film” by first dressing up as his favorite film characters (Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*, James Cagney in *Public Enemy*, Hopalong Cassidy), taking on the name Cody Jarrett (the character played by James Cagney in 1949’s *White Heat*) and changing the street-sign on his street to the street name of the street on which Jarrett lived. We witness him experiencing more cinephiliac moments. While dressed as Bela Lugosi, Binford goes to see *Night of the Living Dead* (1967). Tears fall down his cheeks when the zombified Karen Cooper murders her mother. This scene in *Night of the Living Dead* seems to hit Eric like a *punctum*, becoming poignant for reasons that are based on Eric’s autobiography as much as they are on the events of the film.

Christian Keathley writes:

It could be argued that the history of film historiography has been an ongoing project of locating these alternate points of entry, nearly all of which began with some individual’s experience of the movies, often in which that person watches differently, notices something, and becomes curious about what he or she sees.

Thus begins the construction of a “counter-factual” history that may ultimately become part of the “real” history.

Cinephiliac moments are more points of entry, clues perhaps to another history flashing through the cracks of those histories we already know.¹⁰⁴

Eric seems to see an “alternative history” flashing through the cracks of *Night of the Living Dead*: his own history. This history is one of post-traumatic affect in addition to events.

Throughout the film, Eric continues to “re-mix, re-master, and re-purpose” his favorite films and characters in order to make them meaningful to him. Over and over again, he recreates (in a somewhat low rent way) the *mise en scène* of scenes from movies in order to murder those who torment him: a co-worker who makes fun of him loses a one-sided game of Russian roulette with Hopalong Cassidy; a model who rejects his sexual advances is murdered in the shower *Psycho*-style, then bitten on the neck by “Dracula”; a producer who (in a particularly far-fetched plot twist) steals one of Eric’s ideas for a movie, and then stops returning his calls, is gunned down by “Cody Jarrett,” as are his entourage and hairstylists. Before Eric strikes, Zimmerman frequently cross-cuts to the scenes from movies that seem to play in Eric’s head before he commits his crimes.

It seems plausible to understand these sequences as further efforts by Eric to reproduce the spark that he experiences when encountering cinephiliac moments (especially given the film’s propensity to cut to clips from the moments to which Eric is highly cathected). In addition, as with Stanley Stover in “Burglary-DR-31,” Eric’s desire to dress like his beloved stars, re-enact his favorite scenes from their films, and in some instances reproduce their *mise en scène* in order

¹⁰⁴ Keathley, 134.

for him to live within it seems plausibly similar to the notion of cinephilic *jouissance* set forth by Keathley. Through his re-enactments, Eric seems eager to re-enact various types of “intense, fetishistic experience[s] of bodily pleasure” that he experiences watching films: either the omnipotence that he feels watching James Cagney (reminiscent of the antisocial, regressive omnipotence described by object relations theorists), or his intense sexual desire for Marilyn Monroe. Importantly, Eric’s criminal cinephilic production and his experiences of cinephiliac moments and *jouissance* seem directly related to his traumas: He wants to kill those who persecute him and contribute to the traumatic inter-subjective context in which he lives (his sexually, physically, and emotionally abusive aunt; the co-workers who mock him for his difference), and break the trauma cycle by having a corrective sexual and romantic experience (a happy Hollywood ending) with “Marilyn Monroe.” Eric’s tortured relationship with sexuality, film iconography, the blurring of fantasy and reality in his life, and the feelings associated with *jouissance* is made clear when, in the midst of his killing spree, Zimmerman includes a sequence of Eric masturbating to a poster of Monroe that hangs over his bed, shouting “You bitch!” At the end of the sequence, he collapses in tears, crying “I’m sorry, Marilyn!”

Indeed, Eric saves his most elaborate scene re-construction for his seduction of the elusive Marilyn O’Connor, whom he lures to an abandoned photo studio with the promise of a part in a movie. She arrives to find that the studio’s been decorated in order to meticulously reproduce the *mise en scène* of a key scene from *The Prince and the Showgirl*, and that Eric is fully dressed as The Regent (played by Lawrence Olivier in the original film), a methodology taken both to seduce Marilyn and to allow Eric to become absorbed by a Hollywood happy ending to counteract his earlier traumas. Albeit, he achieves this ending by drugging his love

interest. Eric's happy ending is not to be, and the police bust in on Eric's romantic dinner, taking Marilyn into custody as Eric makes his escape.

The film's final sequences most vividly demonstrate its contradictions as a representation of domestic trauma and cinephilia. The scenes represent Eric at his most over the top, histrionic, and "psychotic." Yet, at the same time, the dialogue given to the character of Jerry the social worker seems intended to garner sympathy for Eric by revealing more of his traumas, and by explaining that the culture surrounding Eric—and not Eric himself—is most responsible for his pathological cinephilia. In the midst of Eric's killing spree, the police begin to suspect him and go to his house. When they see that he's covered his street sign with one demarcating the street from *White Heat*, the captain and Jerry have this very telling interaction, which literalizes the film's representational contradictions:

Captain: I think we got ourselves a real wacko here.

Jerry: Captain listen to me. Binford is not crazy, he's a victim of society. Believe me!

Captain: Oh, that's beautiful. The man runs around in a Dracula and a Mummy outfit killing people, but he's okay.

Later, after Eric's final escape from the police, Jerry and Anne chase Eric in Anne's patrol car, and Anne explains the recent development that "Stella Binford was Eric's mother, not his aunt. It seems that she got knocked up back when a scandal like that could ruin her dance career. You know she never told Eric the truth." Jerry accentuates the extra layer of perversity that this information has added to their knowledge of Eric's traumas by stating, "Christ, Binford never had a chance. Poor little weasel."

Eric is finally found in Grauman's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. When Anne asks why Jerry thinks he ended up there, he overtly makes the connection between Eric's "pathology" and the scholarly language used to describe cinephilia that I have made here. He responds: "Because his whole life is a movie." Eric is finally entrapped on the roof of Grauman's Chinese, where he cries "I'm Little Caesar! I'm the man who knew too much! Top of the world!" Zimmerman further signals his final "loss of sanity" with quick inter-cutting of a montage of brief clips from films that we've seen, or that Eric has referenced, previously. Finally, a squad of policemen shoot Eric down. The film's end credits roll over a final pan around Eric's bedroom, the overstuffed shrine to his cinephilia. A melancholy song titled "Heroes," sung by Marsha Hunt, plays in the background. Its lyrics suggest the tragic element of Eric's trauma informed cinephilia:

They were true/Never lied/For us all/Heroes do not have the right to die/Hope is
born/Cause they lived/To us all/Heroes have so much to give/They play a part in
all our lives/They made us believe that all the hopes we had would never
die/Where are all of our heroes now?/Why did they decide to go just when we
need them, now?/Children dream/Mothers weep/For they know/Heroes really are
not ours to keep.

Like "Burglary-DR-31," *Fade to Black's* similarly melancholy ending—a recreation of its opening shots of Eric's bedroom—seems intended to leave the audience with an understanding that Eric's strange collection actually constitutes an archive of feelings. The melancholy ending suggests that an archive of Eric's confused feelings, contained by films, stars, and memorabilia,

is all that remains of him. *Fade to Black* and “DR-31,” alternately pathologizing, pitying, sympathetic, and oddly moving, could hardly be described as “positive representations” of people whose cinephilia is informed by their trauma. However, in their efforts to make fairly nuanced stories of individuals from the sensational headlines and psychological studies making connections between trauma, cinephilia, and crime without fully exploring the social and interpersonal contexts that might inspire such connections, these media texts were small steps pointing towards representing the non-criminal ways in which people have used cinephilia to more successfully process their traumas.

B. Home, video, horrors: *Scream* (1996), *The Cable Guy* (1996) & *The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence* (2011)

Scream, *The Cable Guy*, and *The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence*, all of which garnered considerable attention from the media at the times of their releases, directly refer to and indeed are structured around anxieties that began to mount in the 1980s regarding the concurrent increase in popularity of home video players (which first hit the market in 1978)¹⁰⁵ and graphically violent horror films (which, many have argued, took a turn for the more explicit and disturbing after the notable success of *Night of the Living Dead* (1967), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), and *Halloween* (1978))¹⁰⁶ Although there was a considerable amount of coverage devoted to these anxieties in the media, a rich and seminal example is a story on the popular news show *20/20* called “VHS Horrors.”¹⁰⁷ The story opens with histrionic horror movie music and a montage of gory clips from horror films such as *Evil Dead II: Dead By Dawn* (Sam

¹⁰⁵ For more about the history of VHS, read see Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*.

¹⁰⁶ See Karlyn, Rockoff, Magistrale, Nowell

¹⁰⁷ Note: Although I’ve been unable to find a date for the *20/20* special, the prominent display of *Evil Dead II: Dead By Dawn* (1987, Sam Raimi) and *The Stepfather* (1987, Joseph Ruben) on a new release display in footage of a video store suggest that it aired in 1988.

Raimi, 1988) and *Splatter University* (Richard W. Haines, 1984), and shots of kids looking at horror video boxes at the video store. A threatening voiceover, that could be narrating the trailer of a horror film, asks: “Are your kids renting a movie this weekend? Horror films like these are the most popular choice. Graphic orgies of blood and violence.” A slasher movie expert states: “They want 15 murders in an hour and a half.” The narrator cries: “Children mesmerized!” A 12 year old named Michael Koenig, with large glasses, says “I like the, um, gore,” and chuckles. The narrator seems to respond: “But are they harmless? With reports that life may now be imitating art, Bob Brown shows what the kids are watching. VCR Horrors!” As the narrator states this, the camera zooms in on a newspaper article with a headline that reads: “Police probe ‘horror-flick’ tot stabbing.”

The story, further introduced by a seemingly horrified Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs, emphasizes many of the points that had been made about media and violence since the 1950s. Dr. Dan Linz, listed as a UCLA Professor of Psychology (he is currently a Professor in the Department of Communications at UC Santa Barbara), discusses a four-year study on viewers’ responses to pornographic and violent films titled *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications*, in which they found that:

Linz: Where we put [test subjects] in a situation where they had to make a judgment about a female victim in another context, let’s say a rape victim, or a victim of battering, we found that those people who were exposed to these teenage slasher films were less sensitive to that victim than subjects that were exposed to other kinds of films or who were exposed to no films at all.

Shots of kids laughing at *Evil Dead 2* and discussing their love for horror films and violence are juxtaposed with shots of disturbed parents watching the extraordinarily violent, disturbing, misogynistic cannibal film *Cannibal Ferox* (1981), and reacting with disgust.

However, the news story distinguishes itself from earlier media discussions of violence in the media in two primary ways: the grotesque violence of the “delinquent crimes” described, and the program’s discussion of a collective increasing concern with video violence’s invasion of the domestic space. Two violent crimes (an attempted murder and a murder) are described, one in Boston, MA and one in Becksville, TX, in which the perpetrators (five years old and a high school senior, respectively) confessed that they were influenced by the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, the *Friday the 13th* series, and the *Faces of Death* series, all at their peak popularity in the 1980s.¹⁰⁸ The piece’s narrator, and those interviewed, continually emphasize that the VCR has become a special threat. The narrator states:

Saturday Matinees aren’t what they used to be. To begin with, kids don’t have to go to the movie theater. They can bring their movies home from the video store. And some of the most popular kinds of tapes to watch don’t resemble the old Hopalong Cassidy or Superman movies. The kids call them slasher or splatter movies, and they get together to watch them at gross out parties...It is the explosion of the video rental market that fuels the modern horror film.

¹⁰⁸ These are only two of multiple “copycat killings” that were reportedly influenced by *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and other slasher films during this period, all of which, collectively, seem to have partially inspired the events of *Scream*.

A parent states that, because her child viewed and acquired these films under her nose, she was unaware of their content: “I considered myself an informed, concerned parent and mother, as we all do, and I had no idea that it was at the depth of this absolute mutilation.”

Home videos were especially controversial because unlike films playing theatrically, they were not subject to the same legal rules and regulations regarding children’s admission to R rated films: video stores were not legally prohibited from renting R rated films to minors. The narrator announces that these parents are fighting to enact state legislature that will require video stores to prominently place ratings of movies on boxes, and to create a new rating called “RV” (suggesting that the movie contains graphic and/or sexualized violence).

An article that appeared in *The New York Times* on May 18, 1987 (around the same time as the 20/20 special), titled “Rising Concern With VCR’s: Violent Tapes and the Young,” deals with many of the same issues as the television special, noting that

[The Junior League, a] Westchester County women's organization has taken a stand against easy access to violent films; it is helping other leagues around the country in urging laws that would force video stores to display the M.P.A.A. ratings on the tapes they rent or sell.

Such requirements have been passed in Maryland, Tennessee and Georgia and legislators are considering them in New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. In Ohio, a bill was introduced this week that seeks to prohibit the

sale or rental to people under 18 of videocassettes that depict animal killings or human autopsies.¹⁰⁹

Interviewees suggest that the increase in working mothers and single parent homes may also be to blame for children's increasing spectatorship of violent VHS tapes. They suggest that, like sex offenders, violent VHS tapes seduce kids when their parents aren't looking:

...Mrs. Pomeroy, the Junior League officer, argues that with more women working and more single-parent homes, many parents are not around to supervise what movies their children watch. Even when adults are present, she said, they may not be aware of a film's content.

The slasher movies feature "disturbing graphic violence ranging from rape to hanging girls on meat hooks," she said in a telephone interview, but some parents "feel they are just scary movies they saw as kids like 'Frankenstein' or 'Phantom of the Opera.'

Park Elliott Dietz, a University of Virginia professor of psychiatry who served on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, makes the assertion that, while imitation of horror films is a threat, even more potent is the possibility that horror movies may traumatize their spectators. He states: "Some violent films inspire imitation but the cases, while persuasive, are small and limited...A second and larger reaction on the viewer are nightmares, irrational

¹⁰⁹ Jon Nordheimer, "Rising Concern With VCR's: Violent Tapes and the Young," *New York Times*, May 18, 1987, accessed December 5, 2010 at www.nyt.com.

fears and the intrusive recollection of horrifying scenes." He points to a common anxiety that horror films promote a melding of sexuality and violence, and may encourage those things to blend in the minds of their spectators.

He said he is most concerned by the possible psychological changes fostered by repeated exposure to films that pair sexual arousal with sexual violence, a mainstay of the current stream of "slasher/horror" movies aimed at teen-age audiences. He suggested that aberrant behavior may be a product of juvenile exposure to this genre but it may not become manifest until the viewers, principally young males, are in their 20s.¹¹⁰

Scream, which was released in 1996 but is (on many levels) a direct homage to the slasher films of the 1980s discussed in the above news media, tells the story of a group of teenagers in affluent Westboro, CA who find themselves stalked by a vicious killer. The killer first calls victims on the phone and harasses them by chatting about horror movies (the now seminal question, "What's your favorite scary movie?"), and slowly reveals that they are the "victim" in a real scene that is constructed to be like one in a horror movie. The killer further torments them by, in various ways, making their behavior adhere to that of cliché victims in slasher films from the 1970s and 1980s.

After the murder of initial victim Casey (Drew Barrymore, whose surprise death early in the film pays homage to *Psycho*), focus switches to Sidney, a teenager still recovering from the rape and murder of her mother one year before the movie's narrative begins. She grapples with

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

whether or not to lose her virginity to her boyfriend Billy (Skeet Ulrich), all the while being triggered by the murders taking place around her. Meanwhile, the murders become a topic of jubilant gossip among her friends, sassy Tatum (Rose MacGowan) and class clown Stu (Matthew Lillard). Horror movie fanatic Randy (Jamie Kennedy), who works at the local video store, tries to solve the murders using his knowledge of the genre. Throughout the movie, the safe distance that Sidney's friends feel regarding the murders evaporates as one by one they become targeted by the killer. Finally, the "killer" is revealed to be Billy and Stu. In their climactic entrapment of Sidney, Billy reveals that he raped and killed her mother, and intends to kill her, because her mother had an affair with his father and was thus to blame for his mother's abandoning him. "Maternal abandonment," Billy informs Sidney, "causes serious deviant behavior."

Scream comments on and, in some ways, manifests all of the anxieties articulated by 20/20, *The New York Times*, all of their interview subjects, and the various historical trajectories discussed above. It repeatedly makes reference to "lost youth" that have been corrupted and desensitized by the media. When police first arrest Billy Loomis as a suspect after Sidney is attacked (but escapes) from the killer in her home, the town Deputy asks the Sergeant "Do you think he did it?" The Sergeant responds, "20 years ago I would've said not a chance. With these kids today, damned if I know." After two teenaged boys jokingly dress up like the killer and chase people down the school hallways, the school principle (tellingly, played by Henry Winkler, known for playing "The Fonz" on *Happy Days*), exclaims: "You make me so sick. Your entire havoc-inducing, thieving, whoring generation disgusts me!" When the principle suspends the students and they proclaim that his punishment is "not fair," he responds: "You're absolutely right. It is not fair. Fairness would be to rip your insides out, hang you from a tree so we can expose you for the heartless, desensitized little shits that you are."

The film is structured around notions of domestic trauma and the popularization of psychology. In one of the film's central storylines, Sidney struggles to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder in the wake of her mother's brutal sexual assault and murder, and her resulting reluctance to respond to Billy's sexual advances. In one sequence, after the couple has a fight, she proclaims: "I'm sorry if my traumatized life is an inconvenience to you and your perfect existence!" *Scream* is also notably self-conscious about the ways in which survivors of domestic trauma tend to become pathologized by the media, and the ways in which victims tend to be blamed and silenced by social stigma. In a powerful scene, Sidney, hiding out in a bathroom stall, hears two cheerleaders discussing the possibility that she is the murderer:

Cheerleader 1: She was never attacked, I think she made it all up.

Cheerleader 2: Why would she lie about it?

Cheerleader 1: For attention! The girl has some serious issues. And what if *she* did it?

What if Sidney killed Casey and Steve?...

Cheerleader 2: Cut her some slack. She watched her mom get butchered.

Cheerleader 1: And it fucked her up royally. Think about it. Her mother's death leaves her disturbed and hostile in a cruel and inhuman world. She's delusional. "Where's God?," etc. Completely suicidal. One day she snaps. She wants to kill herself, but she realizes that teen suicide is out this year and homicide is a much healthier therapeutic expression.

When her friend asks where she "gets all this," she responds "*Ricki Lake*," referring to the popular, sensational syndicated talk show which aired from 1993 to 2004. In her insightful

chapter on *Scream*, Kathleen Rowe Karlyn argues that Sidney's father's status as a possible suspect "taps into heightened cultural awareness of violence and sexual abuse in the home and fathers as figures of potential risk to their daughters."¹¹¹ Billy's motive is one of domestic trauma: maternal abandonment as the result of adultery.

Finally, the film makes constant reference to the enduring popularity of slasher films from the 1970s and 1980s among teenagers, the ways in which it was fueled by the advent of the VHS tape, and controversies about violence and the media. Nobody goes to the movies in *Scream*, but VHS tapes are ubiquitous, and all of the teenagers in the film seem passionately invested in their prurient possibilities. In the film's first murder sequence, Casey informs the killer "I'm about to watch a video" (savvy viewers will note that one of the videos she holds is *Halloween*). The blue VCR screen on the television set as the murderer terrorizes her and chases her around the house takes on an ominous quality, almost as though it is a participant in the act. Randy works at the video store and describes an upswing of horror movie rentals that has taken place after the murder. Before Tatum comes to Sidney's house for a sleepover, she mentions that she's going to stop by the video store to rent *All the Right Moves*: "If you pause it at just the right place, you can see [Tom Cruise's] penis!" At a party that Stu throws when school is cancelled because of the murders, everybody sits around drunkenly watching *Halloween*. It seems to be the ubiquity of VHS tapes, and the ability to watch the same movies, and the same types of movies, again and again, that encourages qualities of cinephilia in practically all of the main characters of the film: Their profound knowledge and understanding of genre conventions, which characters in the film must rely on both to kill and to survive. It is VHS tapes that allow *Scream*'s murderers,

¹¹¹ Karlyn, 107.

and some of its survivors, to “live lives organized around film,” in what Karlyn calls “an age when the movies and life are indistinguishable”.¹¹²

The functions of cinephilia, domestic trauma, and their relations to one another are rich and complex in *Scream*. Certain contemporary theories of traumatic subjectivity that take place in the wake of domestic trauma resonate strongly with the events and affects of the contemporary slasher film. James Cassese writes: “Trauma shatters beliefs in trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity, and, in many cases, conceptions of the future.”¹¹³ His description of the psychological condition of trauma survival sounds remarkably like the experiences of protagonists in horror films (including in *Scream*). While much of the discourse about horror films, crime, and trauma in the 1980s made the assertion that horror films could traumatize people, or lead people to traumatize others (through various forms of sexual and non-sexual violence), *Scream* is the first media text to make the provocative assertion that a person may be drawn to horror films in the first place because the events and emotions that they represent, contain, and inspire resonate with the domestic traumas that he or she has already experienced.

Re-watching *Scream* with the knowledge of Billy’s guilt, and his motive, reveals that all of his murders are intended to shatter “beliefs in trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity, and, in many cases, conceptions of the future” for those around him, in the same way that his beliefs and conceptions were shattered when his mother left. He does so by re-enacting 1970s and 1980s horror movies, which, as Robin Wood and others have argued, often purposefully demythologize domesticity and suburban life, revealing (in a perhaps exaggeratedly histrionic way) their repressed dangers and violence. The film’s affluent suburban town is “rocked” by Maureen

¹¹² Ibid, 106.

¹¹³ James Cassese, *Gay Men and Childhood Sexual Trauma: Integrating the Shattered Self* (Harrington Park Press, 2000), 8.

Prescott's murder, and the ensuing revelations that this "seemingly perfect" wife and mother might have had many lovers.¹¹⁴ In *Scream*, safe suburban homes become torturous cinematic funhouses, one by one. In a telling sequence, after the town police chief announces a town-wide curfew in response to Casey's murder, Craven shows shots of idyllic suburban institutions being disturbed: small shop owners close their windows, a mother urgently hurries her small child to get up off the grass in the park and head to the car, picnic basket in hand. Billy's "cinophilic production" is the careful construction of real life situations that adhere to the narrative and even formal conventions of horror films, in which his victims are "the stars" or "the objects." Through his murders, Billy collectively traumatizes the small suburban town, insisting that everybody confront the dark truths that can lurk there, as—in his perception—his mother forced him to when she abandoned him.

Scream draws attention to the fact that many horror movies, especially slasher movies, are about domestic trauma. If Billy's analogy of his trauma with the traumas of horror movie characters seems extreme, it speaks to the intensity of post-traumatic affect, and the ways in which post-traumatic affect can inspire un-expected cross-identifications between survivors and characters and events in films. It speaks to the fact that the affects created by a story in which people are brutally murdered may be similar to those experienced by a boy whose mother abandoned him, even if the narrative details are vastly different. Billy's distorted association of his own domestic traumas with the more brutal domestic traumas associated with horror films becomes overt and thematized in an argument that he has with Sidney about her inability to deal with her own (more horror-film like) experiences of domestic trauma.

Billy: You haven't been the same since, since your mother died.

¹¹⁴ For a reading of the film's depiction of motherhood, see Karlyn.

Sidney: Is your brain leaking, my mom was killed. I can't believe you're bringing this up.

Billy: It's been a year.

Sidney: Tomorrow. One year tomorrow.

Billy: Well I think it's time you got over that. I mean, when my mom left my dad I accepted it. It's the way it is. She's not coming back.

Sidney: Your parents split up. This is not the same thing. Your mom left town, she's not lying in a coffin somewhere.

Billy: Okay, okay, I'm sorry. It's a bad analogy. It's just that I want my girlfriend back...

Sidney: I'm sorry if my traumatized life is an inconvenience to you and your perfect existence.

Scream makes the assertion that, rather than (or, in addition to) traumatizing spectators, horror films may be appealing to and resonant with spectators because they represent the affect of being traumatized. It seems telling that Billy does not only wish to traumatize those around him, but to traumatize them by making them experience what it's like to be in a horror film. In the climactic battle between Billy and Sidney, when she proclaims "You sick fucks, you've seen too many movies," and Billy retorts with the famous line "Now Sid, don't you blame the movies! Movies don't create psychos. Movies make psychos more creative!," he both references the ongoing debates on violence and the media described here, and overtly characterizes his crimes as perverse.

Karlyn insightfully states that:

The trilogy finally highlights the place of popular culture in teen lives by making knowledge of it the defining characteristic of those who live and those who die. Indeed, in today's world, it is hard to dispute the implications that understanding media is a crucial survival skill.¹¹⁵

I agree with this assertion to a large extent. In particular, Randy's cinephilic knowledge of horror movies helps Sidney and Gayle survive when, after Billy is apparently dead, he warns her not to get too close, because "this is the moment where the supposedly dead killer comes back to life for one last scare." When this inevitably occurs, Sidney shoots Billy dead and proclaims, "Not in my movie." Sidney realizes that she must utilize the practices of cinephilia to win a battle with a criminal cinephile. Sidney finally survives by "re-mixing, re-mastering, and re-purposing" generic conventions to suit her own needs.

Karlyn points out that Sidney's experiences as a girl existing in American culture, resemble in some ways, conventions of the gothic. She writes:

Recent work on female adolescence, such as Mary Pipher's, explores how coming of age "kills off" young girls' confidence and strength, implying that for them, the boyfriend (or desire for a boyfriend) is a "killer." *Scream* literalizes the metaphor. Drawing on literary and cinematic traditions of the Gothic, it captures a heterosexual girl's sense of boys as mysterious and unknowable entities who, like the killer, can wear masks that disguise their true identity. For the generation that gave a name to date rape, *Scream* shows how easily a trusted friend can become a

¹¹⁵ Karlyn, 103.

potential rapist. The high school principal... touches Sidney to reassure her but in a way that conveys a creepy sense of entitlement. Heterosexuality can be deadly for growing girls, and adult masculinity is not only mysterious and unknowable, but also capable of manifesting itself in ways that are potentially psychotic. Sidney doesn't know who the killer is, and—as the film-savvy character Randy reminds the other teens—everyone in the film, including her absent father, comes under suspicion.¹¹⁶

I concur with this, but add that the movie demonstrates that all of Sidney's perceptions (perhaps typical for teenage girls) are exacerbated by her experiences of domestic trauma, and the fact that, for her, trauma has shattered "beliefs in trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity, and, in many cases, conceptions of the future." Karlyn points out that Sidney, like many final girls, inhabits an empowered "male gaze" that allows her to survive the film. She writes: "Like Sidney, the Final Girl is boyish in name and demeanor, using an active, male gaze to study the situation and hunt the killer."¹¹⁷ I read Sidney's active gaze, and her tendency to "study the situation" (when, at the same time her best girlfriend Tatum ignores and thus becomes a victim of it), as related to what has been theorized as the "active gaze" of post-traumatic stress. This active gaze resembles—not, I think, coincidentally—the "active gaze" of the cinephile.

Cassese argues that the concurrent experiences that attend trauma survival—the need to contain affect that cannot be contained, and the feeling of living in a dangerous world without boundaries—may lead trauma survivors to be unusually observant (like, I would add, cinephiles), and to live with the feeling of constantly being under observation (like, on several

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 103.

levels, subjects/objects in films). He writes that domestic trauma seriously impinges a trauma survivor's ability to trust: "He may trust no one, or indiscriminately trust everyone."¹¹⁸ Trauma-survivors often become hyper-vigilant, overly sensitive to social cues or the possibility of danger.¹¹⁹

It seems useful here to offer further elaboration of Keathley's notion of "panoramic perception," touched upon in the introduction to this dissertation, since it is a phenomena that seems strikingly similar to post-traumatic hypervigilance. Keathley writes that the cinephile's obsessive love for film and constant viewing habits gives her an excess of perceptual energy during the film viewing process that allows her to experience "panoramic perception." He defines panoramic perception as

the inclination to fix on marginalia in the images or landscape that pass before the viewer's eyes. Because the continuity system organizes film images so that they are perceived by the viewer not as random, but as related and thus legible, 'panoramic' does not necessarily describe the perceptual habit of the ordinary film viewer but, I would argue, only that of a select viewer, one best exemplified by the cinephile.¹²⁰

Thus, both trauma survivors and cinephiles possess an excess of perceptual energy that allows them to involuntarily observe more than what is obvious or standard about their surroundings (be they "real" or on a large movie screen). *Scream* suggests that it is this sort of hyper-perceptual, panoramic vision/viewing practice that allows its killers/cinephilic producers to recreate the

¹¹⁸ Cassese, 10.

¹¹⁹ Herman, 35.

¹²⁰ Keathley, 44.

narratives and mise en scène of horror movies so meticulously in life (Stu says that, in preparing to enact their killings, they “Watch[ed] a few movies, [took] a few notes. It was fun.”). Indeed, the horror setpieces that Billy and Stu create *are* panoramic, adapting the necessary flat, rectangularly framed visual setpieces of films like *Halloween* to fit the three-dimensional world in which they live, and in which they entrap their victims. At the same time, having a hyper-perceptual, “panoramic” vision of the world around her, induced by her post-traumatic stress, allows Sidney to meet Billy and Stu’s dangerously panoramic gazes (unlike the film’s victims, who take for granted the safety of their upscale suburban surroundings).

Taking this into account, I’d like to suggest that Sidney’s ability to survive is not just based on her knowledge of horror movie conventions (she says early in the film that she doesn’t like horror movies because of those conventions), or her status as a woman living in a dangerous and misogynistic world, although these factors contribute to her survival. I would argue that her ability to survive, to constantly observe what is around her and take on an empowering, active, gaze is also the result of her post-traumatic hyper-vigilance, which allows her to understand and exist within the dangerous world of the horror film that, in so many ways, replicates post-traumatic affects and experiences (the world that Billy re-creates, re-produces, and re-mixes for his victims from his own traumas, because that is the only way that he knows how to make his traumatic affect visible). In *Scream*, post-traumatic hyper-vigilance and cinephilia of horror films serve similar functions, in committing crimes and in surviving them.

Scream immediately became embroiled in the debates over the media and its influence on violence. The film’s opening was cancelled in Japan after somebody who was allegedly “obsessed with horror movies” grotesquely murdered a young boy.¹²¹ In particular, local tabloid

¹²¹ Box Office Round-Up, *Screen International* (accessed at Margaret Herrick Library)

shows drew parallels between the case and an episode of a popular Fuji television drama, “igniting national debate about copycat killing.”¹²² This event inspired the Culture Convenience Club video store chain to become the first to impose a ban on the rental of horror films and certain other films with “adult content” to customers under the age of 15.

Unfortunately (and, perhaps, not surprisingly) *Scream* spawned a disturbing number of copycat murders, similar to those inspired by the slasher films of the 1980s (which, in turn, inspired *Scream*). On May 1, 2004, The Times (London) reported the case of a French teenager who murdered a 15-year-old-girl while wearing the iconic mask from the film.

...Julien, who has seen *Scream* over and over again, told a friend that he wanted to ‘see what it was like’ to kill someone, the court heard...

“Was he mentally ill?” Maitre Dominique asked. “No, the psychiatrists do not seem to think so. Was he suffering from a lack of education at home? We do not think so. Was this caused by repeatedly watching the film *Scream*? No, the film mainly served to provide the elements necessary to stage the murder.

The defence barrister said: “We cannot neglect the fact that *Scream* played on Julien’s personality. In the final months preceding these events he retired into a virtual world. His parents did not realize it. His parents did not understand him, he was miserable and he was withdrawn.”

Between 1998 and 2002 (the year after *Scream 3* was released on video), newspapers around the country reported crimes that were inspired by the film. The last article, which appeared in The

¹²² Hollywood Reporter, June 17, 1997, Accessed in the *Scream* clippings file at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

Observer (London) in 2002, reports on “France’s third teenage murder in two years linked to the influence of the *Scream* horror film trilogy,” stating that the case has “sharpened fears about the impact of screen and video game violence and the young.” These events inspired France’s Culture Minister, Jean-Jacques Aillgon, to set up an inquiry team to advise whether a new category of film censorship should be introduced for horror videos which, the article stated, “account for more than half of video rentals by children.” After the murder, police said that Julien, who “watched the *Scream* video over and over again after returning from school to his home,” seemed “to be having a virtual experience...Even though he committed the stabbing, he does not seem to see it as a real event.” His lawyer, Elisabeth Daus-Rioufol, said that Julien was “very intelligent and the product of a pleasant, problem-free childhood. But he considered his life monotonous, and underwent it like a ghost.” Like the criminal cinephilic producers discussed throughout this chapter, she states that he “had conceived the attack ‘like a film script’ over the past year.” The article includes a list of *Scream*-related killings that took place from 1999-2002: three in England, three in France, four in the United States, and one in Belgium.

None of the articles I’ve found make reference to domestic trauma in the cases of these copycat killers. Motives range from the murderers’ boredom to their not wanting to do the dishes. Thinking of these cases in connection with these films and articles that link domestic trauma, film spectatorship, and violence, I cannot help but wonder if, in some of these instances, the possibility of domestic trauma might have been overlooked in the journalists’ efforts to solely blame the media, and feed the old but evergreen cultural anxieties that lead people to pick up newspapers. I find it particularly questionable that a reporter has not further investigated the possibility of domestic trauma when a murderer is described as living life “like a ghost,” which sounds suspiciously like living life in a dissociative state.

In June of 1996, five months before *Scream* appeared in theaters, Ben Stiller's *The Cable Guy* presented the relationship between domestic trauma, cinephilia, and crime as black comedy. The "cinephilia" experienced by Chip Douglas (played by Jim Carrey) might more accurately be described as "mediaphilia," as Chip has built his entire personality around his obsessive love of all media that appears on television, including, prominently, movies. In *The Cable Guy*, Chip becomes pathologically obsessed with one of his customers, Steven. The movie spoofs the then-popular "person from hell" thrillers like *Fatal Attraction* (Adrien Lyne, 1987), *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1992), and *The Temp* (Tom Holland, 1993). Chip and Steven become friends after Chip illegally gives him free movie channels. However, Steven realizes that he's in over his head when Chip begins violently terrorizing his friends during a basketball game, calling him 10 times a day, and vengefully cutting off his cable when Steven fails to return his calls. As in all person from hell movies, Chip continues to raise the stakes. He drags Steven to a restaurant called Medieval Times, and volunteers them to dangerously re-enact an episode of *Star Trek* in which Kirk and Spock must "fight to the death." He gives Steven an over the top, expensive, stolen entertainment center, lands Steven in jail, and then loudly insists on re-enacting the scene from *Midnight Express* (Alan Parker, 1978) in which Turkish prisoner Billy's girlfriend desperately puts her breasts against the visitor's window. Finally, Chip and Steven have the expected suspenseful climax atop a giant satellite dish.

Chip seems less like an actualized person than a sociopathic compendium of media references. Vivian Sobchack writes that

the Cable Guy is the ultimate production of mass-mediated culture. His 'real name'—'Chip Douglas'—is only televisually authentic (he also calls himself

“Larry Tate” and “Ricky Ricardo”); indeed, he has nothing but TV to ground his identity, and both the character and the film overtly and darkly criticize (to a disturbing degree for most audiences) the virtuality of mass-mediated being and its real consequences.¹²³

In addition to suggesting that Chip’s sociopathic tendencies stem from the highly mediated postmodern world of the mid-1990s, *The Cable Guy* suggests that Chip has “nothing but TV to ground his identity” because of childhood trauma. In a pivotal sequence, Chip sits in his truck, spying on Steven’s apartment building after Steven has failed to return his calls. He listens as Steven and his ex-girlfriend watch *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, 1993). Chip listens to dialogue from the film in which Jonah, the son of Sam (Tom Hanks), tells his father that he knows that women scratch men’s back and scream during sex because he saw it on cable (a comical suggestion of the common cultural anxiety that television, and, more specifically, sexually provocative movies shown on television, perpetrate the premature sexualization of children). As the dialogue plays, the camera zooms in on Chip’s eyes. The film flashes back to footage of Chip as a child, entranced by the television and surrounded by junk food and a smoking ashtray. He and his mother have the following conversation:

Mom: Okay baby, mommy’s gotta go now.

Jim: When will I get a brother? You said I was gong to get a brother to play with!

Mom: Yeah, well, that’s why mommy is going to happy hour. Now listen, you just sit there with Mr. Babysitter and he’ll take good care of you. Sweetie, don’t

¹²³ Sobchack, 291.

sit so close to that thing, it'll rot your brain!

Young Chip switches the channel from a scene of brothers fighting to one from Clint Eastwood's 1971 film *Play Misty for Me*. The film, about a woman who terrorizes a disc jockey after they have a one night stand, served as a prototype for the "person from hell" cycle of the 1980s and '90s, and shares a highly similar plot structure to both *Fatal Attraction* and *The Cable Guy*. In the sequence, Evelyn (Jessica Walter) has followed Dave (Clint Eastwood) to an important meeting with a potential employer and embarrassed him after he fails to return her phone calls. They exchange the following dialogue:

Evelyn: Why didn't you take my call?

Dave: Where does it say that I have to drop what I'm doing and answer the phone every time it rings?

Evelyn: Do you know your nostrils flair out into little wings when you're mad?

Dave: Come on Evelyn, I gotta go.

The Cable Guy suggests that childhood trauma (in another scene, Chip alludes to experiencing intense childhood physical abuse), combined with his television viewing of *Play Misty for Me*, laid the groundwork for Chip's way of relating to other people, and his tendency to turn his life into a stalker movie. Later in the film, Steven's friend discovers that Chip was fired from the cable company for stalking his clients, and that Steven's experience is far from unique. In the film's climax, before Chip attempts dramatic suicide and eventually surrenders to the police, he cries (while lullaby music plays on the soundtrack):

I just wanted to be your friend. But I screwed it up. What's that?! Come again?!

Oh, I see. You want me to quiet down and chill out in front of the TV for a while, is that it?

He laughs maniacally.

You were never there for me, were you mother?! You expected Mike and Carol Brady to raise me! I'm the bastard son of Clair Huxtable! I am the long lost Cunningham! I learned the facts of life, from watching *The Facts of Life*! Oh God.

In *The Cable Guy*, Chip's pathology is informed not just by media content, but by the unique amalgam of identity and genre fragmentation that appears on television as one switches channels (a phenomenon that resonates with trauma's ability to lead to a person to feel "shattered," and to experience relatively sudden, drastic mental and emotional shifts, which the trauma survivor-filmmakers also grapple with, in less pathologized ways, in the third chapter of this project).

Sobchack argues that, in all of Jim Carrey's work as a comedian and actor, his performance style is a physical manifestation, an embodiment, of cinephilia. She writes:

Carey's controlled deployment of his body and voice to exaggerate and deconstruct what is already a highly mediated and exaggerated moment of "spontaneous" masculine bodily action is not just grotesque and very funny. It is also quite astonishing in its critical attention to the reflexive and incredibly self-conscious manipulation of both physical behavior and mass-mediated discourse in what has come to be called "postmodern culture" (however one defines it, a

culture particularly marked by its constant use of quotation, sampling, and recycling of both identities and texts).¹²⁴

If, in all of his work, Carrey embodies cinephilia, constantly remixing, re-framing, and remastering film and TV clips for his own crazy uses, *The Cable Guy* demonstrates what happens when this tendency is filtered through popular culture's notion of post-traumatic pathology, and cultural anxieties about what happens when media influence comes into contact with mental illness. If this dissertation grapples with the sometimes fine line between cinephilia that leads to regrettable, sometimes dangerous behavior ("acting out") and cinephilia that leads to productivity and healing ("working through"), Jim Carrey and Chip Douglas stand next to each other, but on opposite sides of that line. Sobchack writes: "Indeed, albeit in a much more deeply self-conscious and certainly less sociopathic and malevolent form, Jim Carrey *is* the Cable Guy." She quotes critic Michael Atkinson, who writes:

The movie is nothing less than the self-interrogation of a postmodern superstar. Who is the Cable Guy, whose lonesome adult person is a raving juggernaut of broadcast reflexes and received media myth, but Carrey himself?...On the surface a familiarly absurd study of misplaced obsession, *The Cable Guy* is really Carrey's self-lacerating self-portrait under pressure, a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God vision of what the man could have very well become with just a little less wit, luck, and satire smarts.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Sobchack, 276.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 291.

Sobchack argues that Chip is distinguishable from Carrey because he is “the ultimate production of mass-mediated culture...Both the character and the film overtly and darkly criticize (to disturbing degree for most audiences) the virtuality of mass-mediated being and its real consequences.”¹²⁶ *The Cable Guy* suggests, perhaps, that in the 1990s most people in American culture were mediaphiles whose passionate attachment to media, and whose mediated ways of being, were informed by common traumas ranging from the individual (disconnection from families; the television as babysitter; abuse) to the collective (traumas ranging from war to sensationalized crimes, and the media’s tendency to barrage audiences with them, which *The Cable Guy* repeatedly satirizes). In the film’s last scene, while Chip is falling to his possible death, Stiller cross-cuts to scenes of people ranging from a single man to a stereotypical nuclear family hypnotized by the televised court trial of a former child star who brutally murdered his twin brother. When Chip crashes into the satellite, the cable goes off, and the people seem to blossom like plants given water, connecting with each other and picking up books to read instead.

The notion that ‘90s postmodernism signaled the presence of collective post-traumatic cinephilia may partially explain why two such high profile genre films on the subject were released within months of each other in 1996. However, audiences were far less comfortable seeing the relationship between trauma and cinephilia played out in a comedy that commented on the phenomenon more critically and overtly than *Scream*. *The Cable Guy* was notoriously financially unsuccessful, and Jim Carrey’s first big flop.

Tom Six’s *The Human Centipede*, a horror film about a doctor who wishes to make science history by creating a human centipede (three people, connected from mouth to anus, who

¹²⁶ Ibid.

share a digestive tract), garnered a surprising amount of mainstream attention because of its perverse concept. The film was referenced on popular television shows like *South Park* and *The Colbert Report*, and became a popular punch line among radio shock jocks. By the time *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* premiered in the United States, Six and his film were infamous enough to garner interviews with Dave Izkoff in *The New York Times*' Arts & Leisure section, and on its Artsbeat blog. The sequel received further notoriety when, the previous summer, The British Board of Film Classification banned it (making it one of only 11 BBFC banned films in the history of British cinema), proclaiming that: "There is little attempt to portray any of the victims in the film as anything other than objects to be brutalized, degraded and mutilated for the amusement and arousal of the central character, as well as for the pleasure of the audience."¹²⁷ The board also stated that it " 'poses a real, as opposed to a fanciful risk' of harming its viewers."¹²⁸

The Human Centipede II follows the misadventures of Martin, a short, overweight parking lot attendant who lives with his mother in a working class neighborhood in London. Martin, a survivor of physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by his mother, his father, his psychiatrist, and his neighbor, is obsessed with the original *Human Centipede*. He watches the film obsessively on his laptop, and keeps a secret, cherished scrapbook of clippings about the film, its reception, its maker, and its stars. The main plot of the film centers around Martin's efforts to create his own 12 person Human Centipede in a dirty warehouse. Whereas in the original film its villain was a surgeon, who attached his victims with careful precision and sterile

¹²⁷ Dave Izkoff, "A More Perfect Union: Tom Six Discusses *Human Centipede II*," *New York Times*, ArtsBeat Blog, September 21, 2011. <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/21/a-more-perfect-union-tom-six-discusses-the-human-centipede-ii/?ref=movies>

¹²⁸ Dave Izkoff, "Your Worst Nightmare? Not Anymore," *New York Times*, September 30, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/movies/the-human-centipede-2-from-the-director-tom-six.html?pagewanted=all>

scalpels, Martin uses the materials at his disposal: notably, a staple gun and duct tape. The film chronicles his intense disappointment and fury when his Human Centipede fails to live up to his filmic fantasies.

Six, the writer, director, and co-producer of both *Human Centipede* films wrote that he came up with the idea for the sequel when, at various film festival Q & As after screenings of *The Human Centipede [First Sequence]*, people asked him if he feared that the film would inspire copycats: “I was traveling around the world at festivals and every time I came to be asked the same question, ‘what if some maniac out there copies your idea?’ I was playing with the idea already and then I thought 100% this is gonna be the sequel. He calls his film “very much a satire on tabloid notions of people copying violence.”¹²⁹

While *Scream* perhaps unintentionally suggests that horror movies represent, on both narrative and affective levels, various elements of domestic trauma, and may then be particularly resonant for trauma survivors (not just “traumatizing people,” as many psychiatrists feared they would, but mirroring back the experiences that people who had already experienced traumas had known), *The Human Centipede II* makes this connection overtly. After the opening scene, in which Martin rapturously watches the opening scenes from *The Human Centipede [First Sequence]* at work, we see him suffering a disturbed sleep. The sounds of his dream register on the soundtrack: a baby crying and a man’s voice saying “Stop crying, dear. You’re just making daddy harder.” He wakes up and realizes that he has defecated on himself. In a scene strongly reminiscent of Eric Binford’s first interaction with Aunt Stella, his harridan mother yells at him and humiliates him before getting supplies to clean him up. After she leaves he takes out his *Human Centipede* scrapbook and looks at it lovingly, a serene expression crossing his face.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

In the following scene, in a sequence that both references the popularization of psychology and psychiatry after World War II and mocks it dismissively, Martin and his mother consult with his psychiatrist, a man with a long, Freud-like beard. She cries: “He keeps on talking about a centipede with twelve people. What does that mean?” The doctor responds: “The centipede can be considered a phallic symbol. Centipedes are very powerful creatures. Their bite can be very painful. Maybe he’s connecting the pain that the centipede inflicts, with the pain inflicted on him through use of psychological and sexual abuse by his father.” His mother traumatically responds: “I miss my husband, and it’s *your fault* that he’s in prison!,” pointing at Martin. At the same time, the doctor puts his hand lecherously on Martin’s leg.

Again, *The Human Centipede II*’s notions about criminal cinephilia seem strongly influenced by the popularization of Winnicott’s interpretation of object relations theory (which is suggested in this film not just by Martin’s behavior, but by his psychiatrist’s outdated, 1920s “look”). Particularly salient in *The Human Centipede II* are the notions that psychological regression is an attempt to return to a time when the environmental container failed, in order to redo the old unsatisfactory scenes. Martin, who cannot speak and defecates himself, seems to be perpetually stuck at the age of his childhood trauma. Similarly, Martin’s criminal cinephilia resonates strongly with Winnicott’s suggestion that:

Internal objects receive their content...when the mother’s failures in empathy are extreme, causing the infant intolerably intense emotional responses to a sudden awareness of separateness. To protect himself against these feelings, the infant

would imagine a microworld, peopled by internal objects whose functions were identical to the infant's own psychic trait of omnipotence.¹³⁰

The film suggests that he views the original film's villain, Dr. Heiter, as a "corrective father figure". His criminal cinephilia is presented by the film as a desire to recreate his childhood trauma by taking on the role of the abuser, rather than that of the victim, reflecting an omnipotence within himself. His psychiatrist states that Martin is "connecting the pain that the centipede inflicts, with the pain inflicted on him through use of psychological and sexual abuse by his father," and the film suggests that this is the case. However, when he thinks of "the pain the centipede inflicts," it is not the pain inflicted by an actual centipede, but the pain inflicted on those who become the human centipede. However, the fact that the film's scenes of victimhood resonate with his experiences strongly, but he chooses to identify with and eventually enact the role of perpetrator, seems to suggest his desire that both roles exist within himself.

Finally, Six presents the original *Human Centipede* (Martin's DVD of the film and the movie diegesis itself) and Martin's beloved scrapbook of *Human Centipede* memorabilia as transitional objects:

Magical creations, neither all internal nor all external, that bridge the gap between the mother's absence and her presence. That help the child to hold herself, to nurture and soothe herself in the absence of the real mother, and thus to better tolerate the inevitable frustrations and psychological separations in life.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Cushman, 256.

¹³¹ Ibid., 257.

Throughout the film, Martin responds to events that are traumatizing (or that seem to trigger memories and feelings related to his childhood traumas) by turning to *The Human Centipede*. After the sequence in which his mother accuses him of sending her husband to prison and his doctor molests him, we see him watching one of the most brutal scenes in the film. After his mother lures his burly neighbor into their apartment to beat and bloody him, we see him watching another of the film's brutal scenes. After he is victimized, he soothes himself by watching the victimization of others. When his mother finds his scrapbook and rips it up, he hugs a picture of Dr. Heiter and cries, before finally brutally murdering her.

While cinephilia inspires all of the antagonists of the texts in this chapter to “criminal cinephilic production,” Martin more literally fulfills Willemen's definition that cinephilia entails experiencing a spark that inspires one to write about what one has experienced. In *The Human Centipede II*, the cinephilic “desire to write” manifests itself in the most perverse way imaginable. In *The Human Centipede*, Dr. Heiter is seen presenting diagrams to his victims explaining to them how they will be surgically attached. In *The Human Centipede II*, Martin watches these scenes while furiously drawing diagrams of his own, in preparation to create his own human centipede, the event that makes up the gory second half of the film and constitutes his ultimate act of re-appropriative cinephilic creation.

Like Stanley Stover, Eric Binford, and Billy Loomis, Martin aims desperately to shatter the line between movies and his life. Over and over again, he tries to intimately engage with the film: collecting memorabilia relating to it and drawing diagrams from it. He licks his fingers and touches his laptop monitor while the *The Human Centipede [First Sequence]* plays and becomes excited when this action distorts the screen, making him a part of the action. We see him affectively and corporeally connecting to the movie's most appalling moments by masturbating

to them. Finally, he kills the owner of an abandoned warehouse and begins to bludgeon customers in his parking garage one by one, preparing to make a human centipede of his own. Throughout the film, Martin plays out a pattern: something happens that triggers his trauma, he goes to *The Human Centipede* to find soothing, and then he commits a disgusting crime.

Much of the gory second half of the film's plot centers around the fact that Martin is unable to adequately recreate the conditions of the original film, in which a professional doctor carried out the operation with surgical precision in an immaculately clean mansion. Martin is a poor man with a dirty warehouse, who must rely on items like crowbars, staple guns, string, and rusty needles to "re-appropriate, re-master, and re-purpose" the film (his recreation resembles a much more sordid version of one of the more seminal cinephilic creations of the late 2000s, 2009's *Star Wars Uncut: Director's Cut*, in which "Casey Pugh asked thousands of Internet users to remake *Star Wars: A New Hope* into a fan film, 15 seconds at a time. Contributors were allowed to recreate scenes from Star Wars however they wanted."¹³² *Star Wars Uncut: Director's Cut* remakes one of the seminal glossy, high budget Hollywood films with varyingly low budget resources to tremendously creative effect. The film garnered an unusual amount of mainstream attention and won a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Achievement in Interactive Media. It seems as though Six may have been satirizing and referring to such YouTube fan creations (referenced by Elsaesser in the aforementioned article) as much as he wished to satirize the endless debates about media copycat crimes. Abandoning the glossy sheen and slick, impressively stylized cinematography of the original *Human Centipede*, *The Human Centipede 2* is shot in gritty, grainy black and white, and its scenes of Centipede creation are shot with a shaky camera that seems to emphasize a lack of resources and control that permeates the film.

¹³² Description of *Star Wars Uncut: Director's Cut* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ezeYJUz-84>

Because of the “re-mixing, re-purposing, and re-mastering” that Martin must utilize in the creation of his centipede, much gore and filth ensues. Martin is constantly devastated as his centipede recurringly fails to live up to the depiction in the movie (for example, many of its “component parts” die as he is “performing the surgery,” making him cry). When Martin, in an unlikely twist, lures Ashlynn Yennie (an actress who played a role in the original *The Human Centipede*) to his warehouse, telling her agent that he’s a representative of Quentin Tarantino (another famous cinephile producer), he is infuriated to find that she is a cheery diva, who is all too eager to discuss how the effects in the original *The Human Centipede* were “faked.”

In a cynical twist, that seems strongly aligned with American culture’s increasing collective cynicism about media’s all-encompassing presence and power, Martin is the only criminal cinephile discussed in this chapter who is not somehow contained—either arrested and given psychological treatment, or killed for his crimes. After each member of the centipede dies, we see Martin in the film’s last shot, back where he was at the beginning, watching the opening scene of *The Human Centipede* and listening to the crying baby of one of the customers he killed. The trauma cycle has repeated. As in all trauma cycles, the cycle’s completion keeps the trauma from resolution. It seems notable that, in all of the media texts described in this chapter, trauma survivors participate in cinephilia and crime (perhaps more precisely, cinephilic crime) in misguided efforts to process their traumas. However, in fact, their criminal cinephilia keeps them trapped within their traumatic subjectivity. They act out, rather than working through—even if their acting out often involves an unusual amount of work. In the films discussed in this chapter, the only way for a person’s cinephilic trauma cycle to end is through arrest or (in most cases) death: in other words, containment.

III. Collective dissociation: American culture's obsession with the cinematic as represser of ordinary domestic trauma

One of the most highly publicized cases of trauma interacting with cinephilia and crime in American culture from the 1990s to the present day is that of The West Memphis Three. Because of space constraints, I cannot go into great detail about a case that has received enormous publicity and analysis in the last decade. However, I will summarize it briefly, as I believe that it clearly illuminates a phenomena signaled by the texts discussed in this chapter. In 1994, teenagers Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley Jr., and Jason Baldwin were convicted of the sexual assault and murder of three young boys who lived in their hometown, West Memphis, AK. Misskelley and Baldwin were sentenced to life in prison, while Echols was sentenced to death. During the trial, prosecution asserted that the children were murdered as part of a satanic ritual. As evidence of this, the prosecution pointed to the boys' fondness for death metal music, horror novels (particularly those of Stephen King), and horror films. In her book *Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three*, Mara Leveritt points out that much was made about the fact that Echols took on the name Damien, which was associated with the character in the film *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976), who is finally revealed to be the Antichrist.¹³³

Since 1994, much research and publicity has gone into efforts to release and exonerate the West Memphis Three, including several books and four documentaries, the *Paradise Lost* trilogy (Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky, 1996, 2000, and 2011) and *West of Memphis* (Amy Berg, 2012). In 2010, sufficient evidence (including newly examined DNA evidence) was presented to inspire the judicial system in AK to release the men from prison. Although no perpetrator of the crimes has been convicted at this time, overwhelming evidence (presented in

¹³³ Mara Leveritt, *Devil's Knot: The True Story of the West Memphis Three* (New York: Atria, 2003), 131.

the documentary *West of Memphis*) suggests that the murderer of the young boys was, in fact, Terry Hobbs, one of their stepfathers, a man with a long, documented history of domestic and sexual violence whose DNA was revealed (retroactively) at the scene of the crime. In his recent autobiography, Damien Echols reveals that his affection for horror movies was, in fact, rooted in his own childhood domestic traumas.

I believe that the case of the West Memphis Three, in which the judicial system and many members of a community were so persuaded that the highly cinematic interests and signifiers of these teenage boys indicated their criminality (even in the absence of enough credible evidence), illuminates a cultural phenomenon of which the films discussed in this chapter are a part. In her book *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest*, Armstrong examines the period in the late 1980s and 1990s when thousands of people (sometimes coached by questionable therapists) began to come out as survivors of Satanic ritual abuse in epidemic proportions. She suggests that focusing on highly cinematic, baroque depictions of Satanic ritual abuse, which she describes as “horror-movie stuff presented in sense-surround,” became a convenient way for many in American culture to look away from average, everyday abuse.¹³⁴ She writes that the phenomenon was “a truly epic distraction from the humdrum business of ordinary men allowed to molest children in the normal, everyday, routine course of events. In fact, as dialogues, speculation, and passion zoomed over what was variously called satanic, cult, or ritual (or ritualized or ritualistic) abuse, incest plain and simple was left behind to eat its dust.”¹³⁵ The case of the West Memphis Three, a part of the satanic ritual abuse scandal, startlingly illustrates Armstrong’s point, and demonstrates a disturbing

¹³⁴ Louise Armstrong, *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1994), 243.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

connection between collective responses to abuse and their effect on individuals. In American culture, many mainstream institutions gravitate towards vilifying the cinematic in an effort, conscious or subconscious, to render more ordinary evils, and more ordinary traumas, invisible. “Bad object” movies often contain the affects and content associated with domestic trauma, and mainstream American culture works hard to contain and repress both “bad object” movies and domestic trauma. In the case of domestic trauma, this containment sometimes entails stopping it from happening. However, just as often, as Armstrong convincingly argues and as the West Memphis Three demonstrate, it entails silencing or vilifying those to whom it has happened.

Sometimes, as this dissertation hopes to make clear (and as has been suggested by the aforementioned media texts), the only ways in which trauma survivors can see their affects and/or their traumas expressed is by watching “bad object” media. American culture often wants to silence such media as well. Throughout the first century of cinema, many (in particular, conservative) people have passionately vilified films because they revealed parts of society and culture that they did not want to exist, and blamed films for inspiring those parts of society and culture. An editorial titled “Our Un-American Films,” printed in *The Los Angeles Times* on November 17, 1920, responds to a British article arguing that American films present an inaccurate portrayal of American values by glorifying greed, crime, and other sins. The article argues that films present greed and criminality as the American norm, and justice and virtue as exceptional. The author makes the (perhaps overly optimistic) argument that, in real life, the opposite is the case.

“So many American films,” declares the writer, “glorify crime and hold up justice and virtue as exceptional and remarkable, with the general implication that no one

is decent as a matter of course, that even heroes and heroines can only rise to common decency under peculiar stress, and that the average individual is prone to dubious conduct, invariably justified and excused in the story, so long as everything comes out all right in the end.¹³⁶

The article cites numerous films to defend its argument. It remarks on American audiences' and filmmakers prevailing fondness for "crook" interests and belated reforms, and their everlasting insistence upon wealth and prosperity as the chief essential reward of virtue.

Where virtue and common decency are portrayed they are always treated as exceptional, as something calling for particular praise and remark, whereas surely the average American, like the average Englishman, accepts these rather as normal conduct and anything else as abnormal. It is certainly to be regretted that so much of the film business in America is in the hands of an element that regards the most ordinary principles of good conduct as abnormal and remarkable, where it is only the contrary which could surely surprise and astonish average individuals.

The fact that the critic considers these films un-American brings a germ of comfort but the criticism is often justified.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Anonymous, "Our Un-American Films," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 20, 1920, I14.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

The article goes on to appeal for “cleaner and more wholesome stories in which the normal ethics of good conduct are accepted as a matter of course rather than heralded as unusual, and in which all forms of crime and law-breaking are held up to scorn and contumely, repaying the inevitable penalty and shame, which they actually do in all normal communities.” It appeals for a “discontinuance of those films which ridicule the police and the law and allow criminals, by luck and eleventh-hour repentances, to win the same final rewards as the consistently decent living.”¹³⁸

I find this article intriguing both for its over-arching assumptions about “American normalcy,” and its concern about what kinds of American values are shown to audiences through their projection on-screen. The article disavows the commonality of crime in American culture (certainly a reality at the time), while also disavowing the films that somehow—according to the author—present crime as a “false reality.” It subtextually suggests that movies *increase* crime and immorality, by showing such elements of our culture in a more public forum.

For the purposes of this chapter, I find it productive to put this newspaper article, and its assumptions about “normal American values,” in conversation with a chapter in Carla van Dam’s *Identifying Child Molesters: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Recognizing the Patterns of the Offenders* titled “The Social Climate That Helps Foster It: Turning a Blind Eye.” Van Dam outlines a history of the various ways in which child abuse and sexual abuse were routinely repressed and made invisible by prominent institutions who, for various reasons, did not want to project an image of “American normalcy” and “American social values” that included abuse and domestic trauma to society at large. She writes:

¹³⁸ Ibid.

In the United States, Terman's (1938) studies and Hamilton's (1929) work revealed child sexual abuse incidence rates consistent with those published today. Hamilton (1929) found that 37 percent of females and 27 percent of males had been sexually abused. Later, other data (Kinsey et al., 1948; Gagnon, 1965) again revealed that child sexual abuse occurred to about 25 percent of the population. The social scientists of that era, however, feared public dissemination of such data would generate a hue and cry that would interfere with their social agenda of greater relaxation of sexual mores. As a result, such researchers as Kinsey ignored the data, and university programs continued to teach students that incest only occurred in about one out of one million cases.¹³⁹

With domestic trauma, as with crime, there is—for various reasons--an ongoing collective anxiety about representing it and making its existence known to the general public. Anybody reading, watching, or listening to the news in 2012 witnessed this taking place in the scandal at Penn State, where it was revealed that several administrators at the college brushed Jerry Sandusky's recurring perpetration of sexual abuse aside in order to maintain the prominence and respectability of their football team and, thus, their university.

Throughout cultural history (especially, perhaps, during and after the Kefauver hearings) there has been a recurring battle between media industries and parental groups: media representatives claim that they are merely representing the crime and sensationalism that already exists in society, while parent groups argue that the media creates them. A telling exchange took

¹³⁹ Carla van Dam, *Identifying Child Molesters: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Recognizing the Patterns of the Offenders* (London: Routledge, 2011), 123.

place between Jack L. Warner and audience members during the Kefauver trials that centered around *Rebel Without a Cause*. Gilbert writes:

While he was discussing a movie about the “juvenile delinquency of parents”—he was interrupted several times by angry members of the audience. These interjections by unscheduled witnesses accused Warner Brothers of producing films that glorified drinking, smoking, and gangsterism. This hostile audience-witness repartee continued with the next witnesses.¹⁴⁰

I suspect there are kernels of truth in both sides of the argument, or blame game. However, I find it provocative that respectable citizens of society seem to become most enraged when a film like *Rebel Without a Cause* blames the juvenile delinquency of children and teenagers on problems in the home. Gilbert writes that much of the criticism against the media was penned by:

local groups or individuals associated with respectable opinion...service and business organizations, judges, school teachers, librarians, and so on. And much of it blamed forces outside the community such as mass culture, which appeared to undercut the strength of local institutions...

In 1956, for example, a writer told Kefauver of the terrible problem of delinquency in her town. “I am a mother of a teenage boy,” she confessed, “a juvenile delinquent to be exact...It is definitely what they see on the screen in

¹⁴⁰ Gilbert, 158.

movies, on TV, reading those foul pocket books (comic books) that are sold in every drugstore, bookstore, or the corner news stand.”¹⁴¹

There seems to be great investment by the community in disavowing *any* responsibility for the problems of their children, and placing all of the blame on media, or people who consume too much media. I would argue that it seems clear that both problems within communities (like domestic trauma) *and* the media likely influence young people’s behavior, and that community members’ desire to disavow *any* responsibility for problems within their community, to blame it all on the media, is directly aligned with the collective impetus that results in the silencing of survivors of abuse: that allows abuse to happen. The films discussed in this chapter illustrate how films and domestic trauma can often stand in for each other, both for trauma survivors *and* in the collective imagination, and that this “standing in” can serve many different—sometimes opposed—purposes.

Robin Wood’s discussion of the American horror films of the late 1960s and 1970s and its relation to society and culture shines further light on the films discussed in this chapter: the functions that horror and science fiction movies serve in them, their function in relation to our society and culture, and their engagement with domestic trauma. In “The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s,” Wood mobilizes two phenomena that I find essential to our understanding of these films and their function in society in relation to spectatorship and domestic trauma: surplus repression, and the other. Wood writes that:

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 155.

Surplus repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists (“bourgeois” even if we are born into the proletariat, for we are talking here of ideological norms rather than material status)—that is, *if* it works. If it doesn’t, the result is either a neurotic or a revolutionary (or both), and if revolutionaries account for a very small proportion of the population, neurotics account for a very large one.¹⁴²

The Other is a figure who is not successfully assimilated into society through surplus repression.

Wood writes that:

Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with (as Barthes suggests in *Mythologies*) in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself.¹⁴³

Thinking about Wood’s notions of surplus repression and the other may illuminate some reasons why *Dragnet*, *Fade to Black*, *Scream*, and *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* vilify trauma survivors (much like, according to Wood, the media vilifies people of color, queer people, poor people, and feminists as dangerous others). They do not and cannot successfully fit into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalist society. The trauma survivors in the media described in this chapter are forced to see the nuclear family as evil, dangerous, or

¹⁴² Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 64.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

inadequate. Several of their lives are characterized by early, confusing, non-reproductive, sometimes non-heterosexual sexuality. Several of them cannot make enough money, and must steal. They are overweight, queer, and bullied. They cannot fit into the system, so they become the most excessive and dangerous kinds of neurotics: threats to society who must clearly be repressed.

Wood argues that genre films (it should be noted that *all* of the cinephiles in this chapter are strongly attracted to genre films), but especially horror films (three out of the five cinephiles described in this chapter are both *in* and *particularly attracted to* horror films) dramatize the conflict between repression and the other. He writes:

One could, I think, approach any of the genres from the same starting point; it is the horror film that responds in the most clear-cut and direct way, because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster. One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression.¹⁴⁴

The characters in these films identify with horror movies, gangster movies, and other low-brow genre films because they represent versions of their traumas and/or the affects associated with them, and they represent those who fulfill the same identities as they do in

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 68.

society (dangerous others). They also identify with movies that, like them, do not fit into the system. The movies themselves are shamed, “othered” bodies, constantly in danger of repression. I find it very telling that, three of the five the criminal cinephiles in the media texts discussed in this chapter succumb to death before they are able to realize that their compulsive propensity towards crime is rooted in un-processed domestic trauma. These movies demonstrate that there is a fine and blurry line between the ways in which trauma survivors and the ways in which “dangerous others” are perceived. There is a fine and blurry line between society’s desire to suppress perpetrators and society’s desire to suppress victims: none of them fit into the collective American fantasy of what America should be.

In their article, “Child Abuse and the Unconscious in American Popular Culture,” Scheper-Hughes and Stein argue that certain perpetrators of child abuse (often themselves victims) are purposefully othered, villainized, and stereotyped in popular culture so that more convenient institutionalized forms of child abuse can take place. They write:

We have displaced the guilt onto selected ‘criminal’ scapegoats so that righteous anger is spent in punishing these “bad” individuals, rather than in providing jobs and health care and social welfare programs that could reduce “poor peoples’ crimes” (including domestic violence) and thereby increase the survivability of minority infants and babies. In so doing Americans ignore and deny the institutionalized forms of child abuse which they are supporting in public elections, local and national. What is being repudiated, as well, is a whole century of insight which western culture has gained from the psychoanalytic revolution, including a denial of unconscious motivation in adults *and* children, and in their

actions, thoughts, and behaviors toward each other. This has resulted in a ruthless punitiveness toward “sleazy” child abusers and child molesters, unrelieved by compassion and understanding. We have, then, a classic case of victim-blaming. “The more children Reagan sacrificed,” writes Lloyd deMause, “the more local newspapers discovered...’an epidemic of child abuse sweeping the city’ [*New York Post*, October 5, 1981, p. 3] (1981: 2).”¹⁴⁵

I would argue that these media texts are a part of this collective cultural tendency towards rendering abuse survivors as over the top, grotesque, singular perpetrators. I would also argue that this cultural tendency towards vilifying certain stereotypical, not necessarily realistic or accurate types of perpetrators/traumatizers (including both stereotypical, cinematic “sleazy abusers,” outsiders and goth horror movie lovers like the West Memphis Three, and “bad object” films that allegedly traumatize their young audiences) also conveniently allows culture to fail to see and/or ignore less obvious, more “integrated” perpetrators, in order to avoid disrupting institutions highly valued by the culture, like a college football team, a university, the Catholic church, schools, homes, suburbia, and the nuclear family. I would argue that this phenomena was exemplified during the West Memphis Three trials, in which the judicial system was overly eager to contain/imprison/kill teenagers who embodied cinematic traits that went against “the social order,” to the extent that they failed to dig deeper into a seemingly obvious scenario that

¹⁴⁵ Scheper-Hughes and Stein, 182. Although I agree with Scheper-Hughes and Stein’s point that the media misrepresents trauma perpetrators partly in order to distract people from more ordinary forms of abuse, their notion that child abuse is a “poor person’s crime” is inaccurate and highly problematic. In her book *Unspeakable: Father-Daughter Incest in American History*, Lynn Sacco points out that people and institutions in the eighteenth century were ready to criminalize incest *until* they discovered that it was taking place between fathers and daughters among the upper classes, and not just among the poor and people of color. That said, their assertion that poverty *can* contribute to the presence of child abuse in a family seems reasonable.

seemed harmonious with the social order, in which the actual crimes likely took place: the home, and nuclear family, of one of the murdered boys.

Robin Wood writes that:

The 70s crisis in ideological confidence temporarily released our culture's monsters from the shackles of repression. The interesting horror films of the period, without a single exception, are characterized by the recognition not only that the monster is the product of normality, but that it is no longer possible to view normality itself as other than monstrous.¹⁴⁶

The protagonists of the movies discussed in this chapter experience normality as monstrous, and are as a result enormously attracted to movies that do the same (and encourage their spectators to do the same). In the texts described in this chapter, both the cinephiles and the movies they love disrupt normality by experiencing, communicating, and/or representing trauma. The cinephiles described unsuccessfully try to process their trauma through neurosis and crime (in a society that offers few overt options, because of its tendency to silence trauma survivors and render domestic trauma invisible). As a result they, like their experiences of trauma, must be silenced and contained. As a result, these films, which consistently render trauma survivors (*and* cinephiles who have experienced trauma) as perpetrators, stigmatize trauma survivors and thus contribute to the silence around trauma.

The fact that this plot convention has appeared repeatedly over more than four decades raises the question, why haven't there been even *more* films and television shows dealing with

¹⁴⁶ Wood, 85.

this subplot (if there are, I was unable to find them in my research)? It can be difficult to assess why the entertainment industry decides to make or not make media dealing with a specific topic, especially when the topic is as highly specific as the relationship between trauma, cinephilia, and crime. In the absence of enough evidence to make a definitive conclusion, I will hypothesize that filmmakers (and, more likely, those in charge of film studios) might have erred away from this topic because, as this chapter has demonstrated, it has dangerous implications for the industry. The film industry has grappled with various influential organizations who tried to censor lucrative media content because of its alleged capability of influencing violence, crime, and normatively unacceptable forms of sexuality. At times, the groups have won. The mainstream American film industry has long been invested in its argument that media *does not* influence violence and crime. Furthermore, when a sort of cross-genre film cycle about the relationship between cinephilia, trauma, and crime seemed to be dawning in the hyper self-reflexive mid-1990s, the films were met with problems ranging from copycat killings to extreme audience disinterest. It seems possible that the fact that people in the film industry have many good reasons *not* to make movies about the relationship between domestic trauma, cinephilia, and crime further emphasizes the topic's enduring, burning relevance. Throughout the decades, despite the difficulties and ambivalences surrounding it, the topic still keeps coming up in mainstream fictional media, almost like a trauma that refuses to go away, regardless of efforts to keep it repressed.

I begin my dissertation with these mainstream histories, and these mainstream cultural texts, because I feel that it's important to provide the cultural, social, and historical background in which the somewhat more sub-cultural relationships between trauma and cinephilia that I discuss in the rest of my dissertation take place. I feel that the cinephilia encouraged by

therapists working with trauma survivors in the next chapter, and the cinephilia and post-traumatic subjectivity experienced by the independent filmmakers, authors, and spectators discussed in the rest of my dissertation respond, in various ways, to the mainstream culture described in this chapter: a culture that stigmatizes cinephilia that takes place in the wake of domestic trauma and, in subtle ways, stigmatizes the processing of domestic trauma in general. The cinephiles and trauma survivors who I discuss in the remaining chapters of my dissertation seem very passionate in their desire to speak about their traumas and celebrate the cinephilia that interacts with their traumas, in opposition to a mainstream culture that has often sought to silence and repress such actions.

Chapter Two:

Clinical Cinephilia: Cinema Therapy and Processing Domestic Trauma

In recent decades, the use of popular films in therapy has become an accepted practice among therapists, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and marriage and family therapists. Birgit Wolz, author of *E-Motion Picture Magic: A Movie Lover's Guide to Healing and Transformation*, offers a program that allows professional therapists to become certified in what she calls Cinema Therapy. Since the 1980s, therapists practicing Cinema Therapy have released a number of books describing their methodologies, and suggesting ways in which therapists and lay readers can draw upon mainstream Hollywood films, foreign films, independent films, and made for television movies in order to perform therapy on their patients and/or themselves. Although the books' formats and methodologies differ strongly from one another, they all share an underlying assumption that is well articulated by Bernie Wooder in his book *Movie Therapy: How It Changes Lives*. He writes:

In my experience as a therapist I have found that moments from movies, issues contained within them or relationships between movie characters have helped many of my clients to quickly identify the feelings, and later the reasons, for unconscious unhappiness. So many times a scene has proved a powerful catalyst for unconscious, repressed emotions, and memories. Seeing a mirror image on screen has assisted clients enormously in realizing and communicating troubling

emotions. Using film as an aid to healing they have gone on to lead much more contented and rewarding lives.¹⁴⁷

This chapter will examine Cinema Therapy, and some of the ways in which Cinema Therapists encourage their clients to process their experiences using mainstream feature films. In particular, I will examine the ways in which Cinema Therapy has been used to treat clients who have experienced domestic trauma (including, prominently, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and abandonment). I argue that the viewing practices of clients that Cinema Therapists both prescribe and engage with are remarkably similar to what Cinema and Media Studies scholars have defined as cinephilic viewing practices. My dissertation argues that Cinema Therapy is one of many ways in which cinephilia and the experience of domestic trauma have been aligned with each other in and around American popular culture. I investigate the ways in which this relationship has been acknowledged clinically, by therapists, through an analysis of books and articles that define Cinema Therapy, suggest what films may be considered therapeutically useful for domestic trauma survivors, and offer examples of case studies in which cinema therapy was utilized.¹⁴⁸

Before examining contemporary Cinema Therapy, it seems useful to offer a brief history of the practice. To some extent, this history intertwines with and is informed by the history laid out in the previous chapter.

¹⁴⁷ Bernie Wooder, *Movie Therapy: How It Changes Lives!* (Fountain Valley, CA: Joy Publishing: 2011), xv.

¹⁴⁸ Barbara Klinger talks about the ways in which people use films for various therapeutic purposes in her book, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. However, her subjects use films for therapy fairly casually (for example, she describes people who watch romantic comedies to feel better when they've had a bad day). She does not explore Cinema Therapy that takes place in psychodynamic work with professional therapists, although she makes reference to it in a footnote.

Authors writing about their practices and experiences of Cinema Therapy point out that its basic principles have existed for centuries. Horenstein, Rigby, Flory, and Gershwin, the authors of *Reel Life/Real Life: A Video Guide for Personal Discovery*, point out that Aristotle taught that “tragedy could transform theater audiences by purging the audiences through pity and fear.”¹⁴⁹ Birgit Wolz, Ph.D., author of *E-Motion Picture Magic: A Movie Lover’s Guide to Healing and Transformation* points out that

The use of movies for personal growth and healing carries forward a long-standing connection between storytelling and self-reflection that in all probability dates back to the beginnings of spoken language. Many cultures throughout human history have recognized the transformative and healing effect of the act of telling and listening to stories.¹⁵⁰

However, most practitioners of Cinema Therapy who describe its history argue that it is a direct descendent of bibliotherapy, a form of therapy that Wolz describes as “the use of *engaged reading* in order to gain insight into one’s psyche.”¹⁵¹ Wolz traces bibliotherapy to Ancient Greece, where the door to the library at Themes bore the inscription “The Healing Place of the Soul.” Hesley and Hesley point out that as early as 1840, Sir Walter Galt catalogued fictional and nonfictional literature recommended by psychiatrists for religious and moralistic education to

¹⁴⁹ Mary Ann Horenstein et al., *Reel Life/Real Life: A Video Guide for Personal Discovery* (Kendall Park, NJ: Fourth Write P: 1995), 1.

¹⁵⁰ Birgit Wolz, Ph.D., *E-Motion Picture Magic: A Movie Lover’s Guide to Healing and Transformation* (Centennial, CO: Glenbridge Publishing, Ltd., 2005), 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

hospitalized psychiatric patients.¹⁵² However, the actual term bibliotherapy first made its appearance in psychological literature in 1916, and R.J. Rubin writes that Bibliotherapy did not become a formalized practice until the 1930s.¹⁵³ In the first decades of bibliotherapy, fiction and non-fiction books were assigned. However, Wolz, Hesley, and Hesley argue that after self-help books became influential in the 1970s, nonfiction became the dominant genre in bibliotherapy. It seems likely that, partially because of Cinema Therapy's roots in bibliotherapy, cinema therapists tend to encourage their clients to engage with a film's narrative, rather than its form (as will be discussed in more detail later).

Hesley and Hesley distinguish cinema therapy from bibliotherapy by pointing out that, while bibliotherapists would generally recommend books to clients that would help them understand points that they had come to in therapy, cinema therapists recommend movies hoping that watching them will help the client experience moments of revelation that will help the client to begin to come to therapeutic insights by themselves. They write:

VideoWork...differs from bibliotherapy in terms of strategy. Films are occasionally assigned to reinforce an idea introduced in therapy sessions, but they are more often intended to encourage internal search and insight by the client. As clients watch films by themselves or with a partner or family, they identify corresponding sources or limitations in their own repertoires that may not have emerged in therapeutic conversations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid., 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁴ John W. Hesley and Jan G. Hesley, *Rent Two Films and Let's Talk in the Morning: Using Popular Movies in Psychotherapy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001), 8.

The notion that films can spark within the viewer unexpected knowledge of him or herself is one of the major tenets of scholarly definitions of cinephilia, as will be discussed in the next section. It is intriguing that, with the introduction of cinema to therapy, viewing practices associated with cinephilia became introduced to therapy as well.

Discussions of the therapeutic uses of film (and, in particular, the uses of film in processing trauma) can be traced to Leonce Perret's 1912 film *Le Mystere de Roches de Kador*, which was described as the first psychoanalytic film by the 1995 Pordenone Silent Film Festival. In the film, a psychiatrist tries to treat a young woman, Suzanne, who is left catatonic after her guardian tries to murder her and her lover, Jean d'Erquy, on a beach in order to inherit her fortune. d'Erquy (who survived the attempted murder more emotionally intact) brings her to Professor Williams, a doctor who specializes in a groundbreaking new technique: using film to treat cases like Suzanne's. Williams proposes to help Suzanne process her trauma by replicating it (with as much verisimilitude as possible) on film. In Janet Bergstrom's analysis of the film, she writes: "Once again, we see the lonely beach, but this time Professor Williams commands the space, rather than the evil guardian. He directs the actors (d'Erquy plays himself) and gives directions to the camera operator shot by shot, restaging the scene of Suzanne's originary trauma as closely as he can."¹⁵⁵

In the next scene, the audience watches Suzanne watching her re-enacted trauma.

Bergstrom writes:

¹⁵⁵ Janet Bergstrom, "Introduction: Parallel Lines" in *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Bergstrom (Berkeley: UC Press, 1999), 16.

The curtains are drawn, the room is dark and the spectacle begins. As the film-within-the-film is projected, we are presented with a series of shots alternating between Suzanne's face, reflecting the "luminous vibrations" from the screen, and the filmic reenactment before her. Her face takes on expressiveness as she seems to *see* something, and then, breathing heavily, she seems absorbed by what she is seeing and then greatly distressed when d'Erquy is shot and she watches him struggle to pull her (her double) into the boat to safety. Like a combination of Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* and a literalization of Mary Ann Doane's theses about women spectators being 'too close' to the image, she rises and moves toward the screen like a somnabulist, her arms stretched out to the man/the image she has only been able to recognize there, and then she faints. Reviving (brought back from her cinematic and psychic shadow realms by the doctor's smelling salts), she finally recognizes d'Erquy in person and collapses into his arms, followed by the title (representing the doctor's word): "She is crying, she is saved."¹⁵⁶

The similarities between the cinema therapy represented in *Le Mystere de Roches de Kador* and the cinema therapy described in this chapter are striking. Both forms of therapy involve clients experiencing startling moments of revelation while watching films that connect directly to their own experiences of trauma, and help them to process their trauma. Both forms of therapy involve the client incorporating those moments of revelation into work with a therapist (although the work, in *Le Mystere*, is admittedly brief). However, the fundamental difference between the therapy represented in the film and the therapy described in this chapter is that clients of Cinema

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 17.

Therapy, as practiced by the therapists in this chapter, watch and respond to *fictional films* that resonate with their experiences, instead of non-fiction films made specifically to represent their own lives and traumas.

Wolz writes that the first article to mention cinema therapy appeared in 1990. Unfortunately, she does not cite the article. However, the earliest case study I have found (by Turley and Derdeyn, included in Wolz's bibliography) was published in 1990, and all of the therapists cited in this chapter specify that cinema therapy was practiced informally for years before they chose to write books about it in the 1990s and 2000s. Each of the therapists cited in this chapter points out that the introduction of home video in the late 1970s was fundamental to the increasing use of cinema therapy, which mandates that films be watched in the safety and privacy of the home. In his introduction to Wolz's book, Fischhoff writes:

While films could viscerally depict people wrestling with psychological demons, grand and petty, as a medium, film was unwieldy for purposes of using the issues it dramatized as grist from another mill, the mill of psychotherapy. What was it about the life on screen that touched the life of the viewer off screen? How do you easily explore it? A book or poem that moved you, a painting that touched you, a musical passage that transported you, they could be reread, re-viewed, or replayed to recapture the emotional lightning. But how could the 35mm motion picture, an expensive, non-portable medium, be used to aid psychotherapy. Not well and not easily.

Then, in the late '70s, the VCR and video-cassette revolutionized film duplication, and the door to cinema therapy was opened wide. Easy, inexpensive

access to emotionally provocative film stories became a convenient reality. Freed of screening constraints, film could now be easily recruited to aid the therapeutic process.¹⁵⁷

Cinema therapists seem to provide a “bright side” to the introduction of home video (and, thus, movies in domestic spaces) that counteracts the profound anxieties that home video created for parents and politicians during the same period in the previous chapter. Indeed, several (although not all) of the therapists described in this chapter make reference to the anxieties about film and the media raised in Chapter 1, and position their work in opposition to them.

Wolz writes:

As one measure of just how powerful movies have become, consider how some sociologists, psychologists, politicians, and clerics complain that movies are changing the way society, especially children, view themselves and their world. Such critics point out that in an effort to appeal to the basest elements of human nature, many movies overemphasize graphic violence and sex...

It is obvious that many films play to the lowest common denominators—the base human instincts and desires. Even so, it is practically impossible to number the movies that seek the opposite pole, that strive to inspire the highest human values. The vast majority of movies simply hope to entertain by spinning a good yarn, and even those sometimes end up unintentionally serving as a catalyst

¹⁵⁷ Wolz, viii.

for personal insight into the darker side of the soul. When those dark aspects are brought into the light of conscious awareness, true freedom is possible.¹⁵⁸

Gary Solomon, author of *The Motion Picture Prescription* and *Reel Therapy*, devotes several pages of his first book's introduction to addressing these concerns. He takes the stance of the entertainment industry by arguing that there is not sufficient objective psychological evidence suggesting a link between sex and violence in the media and negative psychological effects on their viewers. Indeed, he argues (perhaps questionably) that keeping children from watching the controversial films that their friends watch (like the new Bruce Willis movie, or *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*) can create feelings of isolation that are just as psychologically detrimental as allowing them to watch the film.¹⁵⁹

It seems possible that the anxieties that surrounded the potential negative psychological effects of films (especially low brow genre films with explicit sex and violence), and cinema therapists' desire to distance themselves from those anxieties, lead them to favor what Wolz describes as "films that try to inspire the highest human values," prominently, prestige pictures and "slice of life" films, and to neglect low brow films or films from "disreputable" genres. This creates problems in their methodologies since, as I will discuss in this chapter, the films that clients are naturally drawn to, through which they develop great psychological insights, often don't fall into such neat and reputable categories.

The cinema therapy books that I will discuss in this chapter differ substantially in format and methodology. Of the therapy books and articles that I consulted, I would argue that they can

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵⁹ Gary Solomon, *The Motion Picture Prescription: Watch This Movie and Call Me in the Morning* (Santa Rosa, CA: Aslan Publishing, 1995), 11.

be divided into two subgenres: therapy books centered around individual case studies (in which the author offers descriptive accounts of the ways in which Cinema Therapy was practiced with a client), and those centered around anthologies of film recommendations or “prescriptions” (in which the authors recommend various films to therapists and/or clients, based on the specific issues with which the client struggles). Even within these subgenres, important nuances distinguish the books from one another.

The book *Rent Two Films and Let’s Talk in the Morning: Using Popular Movies in Psychotherapy* by John W. Hesley and Jan G. Hesley is geared towards therapists. It includes a section titled “VideoWork: Theory and Application,” outlining the theoretical basis of Cinema Therapy and the ways in which therapists can use it successfully in the treatment of their clients. The majority of the book is “An Anthology of Therapeutic Films”: a list of films that therapists may recommend to their clients, based on their specific issues. The anthology is divided into sections including “Family Therapy,” “Couples Therapy,” and “Psychopathology.” Each section contains sub-divisions. For example, “Psychopathology” is divided into categories like “Intellectual Functioning,” “Psychotic Disorders,” “Spouse Abuse,” “Child Abuse,” and “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” *Reel Therapy: How Movies Inspire You to Overcome Life’s Problems* by Dr. Gary Solomon devotes most of its pages to a similar anthology format. However, unlike the Hesleys’ book which emphasizes that Cinema Therapy is most productive in conjunction with professional therapy, the back of Solomon’s book asks “Who needs a therapist’s couch when you can sit in the comfort of your living room and watch the movies recommended by Dr. Gary Solomon, America’s leading cinematherapist.” His book alleges that he and his book can stand in for a paid therapist.

Movie Therapy: How it Changes Lives by Bernie Wooder, UKCP exemplifies the “case study” subgenre. In the book, Wooder offers detailed accounts of his work with eight clients who found that they could access their histories of severe domestic trauma most effectively by examining the movies that most moved them. *Brick by Brick On the Road Through Oz: Recovery from Sexual Abuse Trauma* by G.G. Bolich, Ph.D., the most formally experimental Cinema Therapy book that I’ve encountered, is a step by step guide suggesting ways in which the reader (and presumed sexual abuse survivor) can find healing by making analogies between his or her experience of emotional trauma and the film *The Wizard of Oz*. It is also an autobiographical account of the ways in which the author, a therapist and sexual abuse survivor, found healing through his cinephilic engagement with the film.

Each of these documentations of Cinema Therapy has limitations. Indeed, in many ways, the two subgenres of therapy books with which I engage in this chapter (prescriptive therapy books and case study based therapy books) fall into Sedgwick’s categories of “strong” and “weak” theory—two ways of examining a phenomenon or socio-historical trend that, on their own, each have limitations, but that become highly productive when placed in conversation with each other. According to Sedgwick, strong theory reveals one system underlying a broad (social) phenomenon. I would argue that prescriptive therapy books by Hesley and Hesley, Wolz, and Solomon may be considered “strong theories” of cinema therapy: they suggest that cinema therapy can be reduced to a step by step list of directions, that there are series’ of films that will work for all or most patients with certain emotional issues, and that most cinema therapy clients find the same aspects of films (in particular, themes, characters, and narratives) useful in the same ways.

Weak theory, on the other hand, focuses more on individual experiences within a larger social system. Rather than looking for systems underlying certain forms of behavior, it takes them at face value but examines them carefully. As was discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, Sedgwick argues for a reclamation of weak theory, stating that it is fundamental to scholarly understanding of certain reading strategies and certain works. I argue that the case study books and article that I will discuss in this chapter (like many of the texts that I discuss throughout this dissertation) may be described as forms of weak theory, or as “local theories,” about trauma, and about cinephilia. As such, taking a cue from Sedgwick, I argue that close reading of weak theory is necessary in order to chart trauma and cinephilia, which are so personal, so individualized, so mysterious in nature and hard to pin down. Each of the “case study” texts in this chapter shows different ways in which relationships between trauma and cinephilia manifest themselves. These cases generally vary greatly from case to case, depending on the contexts in which the trauma and cinephilia that they represent take place. They also show us this relationship from different angles. They offer rich, nuanced accounts of the experiences of people whose traumas and cinephilia intertwine (both in and out of therapy).

I argue that, viewed together, prescriptive cinema therapy books and case study based therapy books insist that we cannot account for or explain the nature of the relationship between trauma, cinephilia, and therapy with strong theories. At the same time, in spite of their differences, it is impossible to ignore striking similarities that the individual case studies share with the strong theories set forth by Hesley, Hesley, Solomon, and Wolz. Thus, we can further illuminate individual case studies in which trauma and cinephilia are used and processed in cinema therapy by placing them in conversation with strong theory of Cinema Therapy and, indeed, with other strong theories (including, prominently, cognitive and psychoanalytic theories

of trauma and theories of cinephilia). In this chapter, I specifically place strong theories and weak theories of cinema therapy (as it engages the relationship of cinephilia and trauma) in conversation with each other.

When prescriptive therapy and case study based therapy books and articles are placed in conversation with each other, each of their limitations become productive: the books tend to fill each other's gaps. Together, they provide a rich portrait of the recurring qualities in the relationship of trauma and cinephilia, but also how individualized each case is, and how vastly different trauma survivors' "objects of cinephilia" are from one another. When I began this project people repeatedly asked me "what is your corpus," and "what is the body of films that you are studying." The body of works that I examine in this chapter—the body of cases—demonstrates that it is impossible to put together such a corpus, such a body of films, and that is precisely what I argue and demonstrate here. There is a definite, recurring relationship between trauma and cinephilia in many venues, including the offices and clinics of therapists. However, one of the dominant recurring themes of this relationship is its eclecticism. In a sense, one of the predominant things that is predictable about the recurring instances of trauma and cinephilia that take place in American culture is their unpredictability. However, placing these case studies in conversation with one another offers a rich and complex overview of how this relationship functions in clinical settings.

My research indicates that Cinema Therapy, and the connection between domestic trauma and cinephilia that recurs in multiple areas of culture, have not been discussed or documented in Cinema and Media Studies scholarship. I believe that these areas of study are fundamentally important to the field. The case studies that I'll examine in this chapter allow us to explore the spectatorship of a group whose film spectatorship has never been discussed, even though these

case studies make it apparent that their film spectatorship is of unusually vital importance to them: trauma survivors. These studies virtually establish trauma survivors as an identity group (akin to identity groups based on gender, race, and sexuality), making the experiences and people who are often invisible within society and within academia visible and vital. These case studies suggest strongly that psychological difference, in addition to more frequently discussed issues of identity, can play a vital role in film spectatorship.

In Cinema and Media Studies, psychoanalytic theory has often been used to theorize about film spectatorship. E. Ann Kaplan and Linda Williams' articles debating the ways in which *Stella Dallas* (1933) situates its female spectators are canonical examples of such theory.¹⁶⁰ However, scholars have yet to examine the ways in which film spectatorship plays a part in *actual* psychoanalysis. Indeed, in his chapter "Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories," which surveys the relationship between the two inside and out of the academy, Stephen Heath writes that:

to think about cinema and psychoanalysis today is a substantial undertaking, the histories of the two extending across a century of multiple and complex interactions, one-sided or not. "Cinema and psychoanalysis," moreover, can be a way of enclosing and delimiting a topic that should, on the contrary, be opened up to areas of concern that are not typically taken—by film studies at least—as central. There is need, for example, to consider not just how psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts are represented in cinema but also how the recourse to film

¹⁶⁰E. Ann Kaplan, "The Case of the Missing Mother," *Feminism and Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Linda Williams, "Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama," *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 1 (Fall 1984).

functions in the analytic session, how the analysand's speech and associations and memories may draw and depend on cinema's given sounds and images, its provision of a residue of signifying traces taken up as unconscious material (we watch and grasp films consciously but what counts for us individually in the long run of the psyche may come with quite another urgency, be very different to whatever a film might urge in its images and their ordering, is something only *analytically* calculable).¹⁶¹

Many ways in which film spectatorship has been taken up in psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy are well documented in the books and articles that I will discuss. In particular, the case study based books contain much evidence and analysis of the theoretical phenomena that Heath describes.

The traditional mode of psychoanalytic film theory, the use of a combination of psychoanalytic theory and textual analysis of films in order to formulate theoretical spectator positions, has come under a significant amount of criticism. In *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*, Kristin Thompson persuasively states several influential criticisms of this type of psychoanalytic theory. She criticizes psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship for assuming that spectators are passive receptacles of the film text's intended meanings for them, and that all film spectators' thoughts and feelings are guided by the same psychological structures. She writes:

¹⁶¹ Stephen Heath, "Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories" in Bergstrom, *Endless Night*, 27.

It can be argued that contemporary psychoanalytic criticism, despite its claim to offer a theory of ‘spectatorship,’ is in fact not particularly concerned with the viewer. Most psychoanalytic studies of films simply employ a Freudian or Lacanian model of the text’s internal operations (in which the film is taken as analogous to the discourse of the psychoanalytic patient) in order to interpret the film as an isolated object. The viewer becomes a passive receiver of textual structures.¹⁶²

Thompson also protests that psychoanalytic theories of film spectatorship fail to acknowledge that each spectator’s experience of a film is shaped by his or her own background, the historical context in which he views a film, and the historical context in which a film was made. She writes:

Furthermore, psychoanalytic criticism has posited that viewer as existing largely outside history. If the spectator performs no significant conscious activities in viewing, then he or she is not using experience gained in the world and from other artworks...If the experience of moviegoing perpetually replays for us the mirror phase of entering into the imaginary, or imitates dreaming, or reminds us of the mother’s breast in our infancy (all explanations put forth in recent theory), then it presumably does so in the same way for all viewers and in the same way at all viewings throughout the individual spectators life.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 29.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Neo-formalist film analysis, the type of film analysis championed in Thompson's book, assumes that the spectator is active, and that his or her spectatorship of a film is highly individualized.

She writes:

In the neoformalist approach, viewers are not passive 'subjects,' as current Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches would have it. Rather, viewers are largely active, contributing substantially to the final effect of the work. They go through a series of activities, some physiological, some preconscious, some conscious, and some presumably unconscious... *Conscious* processes—those activities of which we are aware—also play a major role in our viewing of films. Many cognitive skills involved in film viewing are conscious: we struggle to understand a story, to interpret certain meanings, to explain to ourselves why a strange camera movement is present, and so on. For the neoformalist critic, conscious processes are usually the most important ones, since it is here that the artwork can challenge most strongly our habitual ways of coping with the world. In a sense, for the neoformalist, the aim of original art is to put any or all of our thought processes into this conscious level.¹⁶⁴

In Cinema Therapy, which in the cases described here can be considered a psychoanalytic or psychodynamic form of therapy, the spectator is encouraged to be both an active spectator and *examine* her role as an active spectator. In the case studies that I will examine, spectators experience and articulate the series of activities they go through when viewing a film, "some

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 27.

physiological, some preconscious, and some presumably unconscious.” They “struggle to understand a story...interpret certain meanings,” and use all of these experiences to examine the ways in which the film is particularly meaningful to them based on their own experiences, their own backgrounds, and their own places in history. In this paper, I agree with and hope to further substantiate Thompson’s definition of the film spectator. However, I also hope to demonstrate that when we examine the types of film spectatorship that take place as part of the psychoanalytic process, we will find that psychoanalysis still has much to teach us about film spectatorship. Indeed, some of the case studies that I will examine substantiate some of the purely theoretical psychoanalytic theory that came before. For example, a cinephile with an enormous cathection to slasher films, who utilizes this cathection weekly in psychotherapy, relates to them in highly similar ways to the theoretical spectators described in Carol Clover’s book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (this case will be examined in greater depth later).¹⁶⁵

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that the theories and definitions of therapeutic film spectatorship presented by therapists are strongly similar to theories and definitions of cinephilia written by prominent Cinema and Media Studies scholars. In the second section, I compare and contrast the formats of “Anthology” therapy books and case study therapy books. Prescription based books pre-dominantly contain a list of films deemed therapeutic by therapists. Case study based books and articles provide detailed case studies written by therapists about their clients who have survived trauma (sometimes with their clients’ approval and collaboration) and/or about themselves. These case studies problematize and challenge the theoretical spectator positions and therapeutic object choices suggested by the “Anthology” therapy books, suggesting that the therapeutic, cinephilic spectatorship of trauma survivors is more complicated than the

¹⁶⁵ Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

theoretical spectatorship that they describe. In particular, the case studies suggest that trauma survivors' object choices (the films they choose to engage with in therapy in order to process their traumas) are far more unpredictable and eclectic than those in therapy books, which usually recommend highly literal representations of the types of traumas that clients have experienced, and over-emphasize narrative over film form.

I. Cinema therapy spectator positions and cinephilia

Cinema therapists both encourage and inspire their clients to adopt very specific spectator positions that are remarkably similar to those that Cinema and Media Studies scholars have defined as cinephilic. In this section, I put several prominent scholarly definitions of cinephilic perception (those written by Willemsen, Keathley, de Baecque, and Elsaesser) in conversation with spectator positions articulated by Cinema Therapists Bernie Wooder, John W. and Jan G. Hesley, Birgit Wolz, Jeffrey M. Turley and Andre P. Derdeyn, and G.G. Bolich. I will also argue that, in vital ways, Cinema Therapists encourage us to expand our definition of cinephilic perception, and definitions of cinephilia encourage us to expand our notion of what sorts of spectatorship might be deemed Cinema Therapeutic.

Cinema Therapists uniformly encourage their clients to become hyper-conscious of their experiences of "cinephiliac moments" (like those described by Willemsen and Keathley): eruptions in texts that speak strongly to their reality. Cinema Therapy trains spectators to note when they find themselves pricked by a film's *punctum*, and (like the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics), to understand what the *punctum* means to them through critical discourse.

Bernie Wooder writes:

What has been especially helpful in assisting clients to be mindful of their process is when I gave them ‘homework’. I ask them to watch a DVD of a film they have chosen containing scenes which particularly move them. The process I teach them enables them to be mindful of their response and to view these scenes repeatedly, gradually reducing the emotional charge from them. Any further emotional expression that may be needed can be worked on in therapy and can include the discovery of further insights.¹⁶⁶

Birgit Wolz encourages spectators to:

Stay present and alert. Watch your responses with interested, curious detachment. Bring your inner attention to a holistic bodily awareness (a felt sense). This means you are aware of ‘all of you’—head, heart, belly, etc. Once in a while you might notice a certain sensation or emotional response from your subtle, always-present intuitive core.¹⁶⁷

She writes: “I have been occasionally surprised to watch as one of [my clients] experienced an amazing “aha!” of recognition and had an internal shift after watching a movie.”¹⁶⁸

G.G. Bolich identifies the intensely bodily experience of cinephiliac moments, and the highly individualized nature of the punctum, in his description of therapeutic spectatorship. He also

¹⁶⁶ Wooder, xvi.

¹⁶⁷ Wolz, 53.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.

distinguishes therapeutic spectatorship from “normal” film spectatorship, much as Cinema and Media Studies scholars distinguish cinephilia. He writes:

To some degree, we are all acquainted with the kinds of imaginative experience I am talking about. Some of us, though, are better at it than others. This is why two people sitting together watching the same movie may have very different reactions. One has joined the experience on the screen and is being changed by it while the other remains a passive, unmoved observer. Little happens in the body of the passive observer except those changes associated with the posture and inactivity of merely watching.

But look what transpires in the other! The blood pressure may rise and dive, perspiration flows freely, blood flushes the face, and the heart beats wildly. Awareness of peripheral factors—like the bored companion sitting in the next seat—fades as involvement in what is happening on the screen becomes a matter of more intense personal identification. Metaphorical experience is not just in the mind—it happens in the body, too. That is another reason it works so well for those of us wounded in our bodies by trauma. Metaphor can heal both mind and body.¹⁶⁹

Like scholars of cinephilia, cinema therapists often make connections between intense experiences a spectator may have at certain movies and their critical appropriation/processing of both that film and their experiences.

¹⁶⁹ Bolich, 4.

Cinema therapy certainly encourages using cinema to “seize the initiative, [re-appropriate] the means of someone else’s presumed mastery of your emotions, over your libidinal economy, by turning the images around, making them mean something for you...” like Elsaesser’s new generation of cinephiles.¹⁷⁰ However, while the cinephiles that Elsaesser describes tend to re-appropriate through art, film, video, or various forms of critical journalism, cinema therapy clients’ appropriative creation takes place in therapy. The therapeutic process is their act of appropriative creation. It’s striking how often cinema therapists describe the ways in which their clients “re-claim” or “re-write” films to suit their own needs and their own story. John W. and Jan G. Hesley write (once again distinguishing “therapeutic viewing” from “normal viewing,” in the way that scholars distinguish cinephilic viewing):

A third difference between casual and therapeutic viewing has to do with articulating ideas for change derived from the film...If [the client] feels that the film was an encoded communication showing a new way of looking at their problems, what is the message? What new ideas for action emerge during the process of watching the film? How viable are the ideas it contains? If these ideas are potentially useful, how can a client *put them into practice? If the ideas are impractical as they stand, can they be modified so they will work better?*”¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷¹ Hesley et al., 50.

Later, they write: “Our conversation has *re-written the script* in a way that is less dramatic but more useful for the client...Films require serious work and do not come with packaged meanings.”¹⁷²

Turley and Derdeyn suggested that C., their client, might find healing by imagining his own entry in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series:

After the patient expressed his admiration of ‘the guys who make these stories up,’ the therapist suggested C. imagine a film that he might make. First he imagined himself as Freddy, then constructed a scene wherein his uncle, dressed in full military uniform, was Freddy. C. imagined himself as the lone surviving teenager. When Freddy/uncle raises his lethal hand to strike, the boy chops it off. “Then I’d joke: Somebody give the man a hand.” The sadistic humor was followed by complaints about the uncle’s humiliating criticisms and stern emotional distance. “He knows just how to hurt me.” Empathic exploration of C.’s pain exposed his previously unrealized intense wish for approval by and closeness with his uncle and aunt. C. made use of this new emotional experience in family therapy by approaching his guardians more with his pain than with his anger. This allowed them to recognize and express their own more tender feelings for him.¹⁷³

Bolich writes:

¹⁷² Hesley, 77.

¹⁷³ Turley and Derdeyn, 944.

For me, Dorothy's story has been an especially magical one. But I would not wish anyone to conclude it is the only story that has helped me, nor that every story proves useful to me. Nor do I want anyone to think that it is only by analyzing images, such as the tornado or the yellow brick road, that I find help. Dorothy's story is a full-bodied experience in *which I participate as though the events were my own*. Certain images stay with me, of course, and in them I have invested special significance. They have thus become even more my own because I have seen and felt them in ways other than Dorothy does. *As mine, I have the freedom to do with them whatever they permit me to do. You will find the same is true for you.*

Dorothy's experience speaks to us whenever we experience it as our own. This is not a psychotic act; it remains an imaginative act because we remain aware that the two experiences are not the same. We are doing what therapists and fellow survivors do all the time—finding truth in another's story. We act *as if* Dorothy's experience is ours in order to change our own experience. Participating in metaphor becomes a purposeful act.¹⁷⁴

Later, Bolich writes:

It matters not a whit to me that the story of Dorothy told by Frank L. Baum was not written about sexual abuse. Stories tend to take on their own life and spawn meanings never imagined by the first storyteller. What matters very much to me is that in this story of a girl named Dorothy I find meanings that speak to the

¹⁷⁴ Bolich, 7.

experience of something defining my own life and in the lives of many I have known.¹⁷⁵

In Dr. Gary Solomon's book *Reel Therapy*, he suggests that critical autobiographical journaling is a fundamental part of both cinema therapy film spectatorship and the therapeutic process. He writes:

...I ask [the client] to focus on a character—or characters—and story theme or a story idea. I tell them to look for similarities between what they're seeing in the movie and the events in their own life. I also suggest they journal their feelings, their own emotions, as they watch the movies. The journal becomes a useful tool to use in working through problems and issues in the future.¹⁷⁶

Once again, referring to Le Baecque and Fremaux's definition of the cinephile as one whose life is "organized around films," proves useful.¹⁷⁷ It is again striking the extent to which cinema therapists encourage their clients to adapt this seemingly esoteric quality of life, encouraging them to frequently blur the line between film and life in multiple ways. John W. and Jan G. Hesley write that "when clients discover the connections between themselves and a movie and *then alter their insights to fit the real world*, they find that a film can lead them to new and better strategies for living."¹⁷⁸ Bolich writes:

¹⁷⁵ Bolich, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Gary Solomon, *Reel Therapy: How Movies Inspire You to Overcome Life's Problems* (Santa Rosa, CA: Aslan Pubs: 2011), 9.

¹⁷⁷ Keathley, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Hesley, 77.

When Dorothy visits Oz she is not alone. I am there beside her, and I go back often to repeat with her that magical journey along the yellow brick road. Dorothy's story draws me into her experience in such a way as to experience it myself as though it were my own. But even more importantly, in experiencing her story I write my own, and as often as I visit her story I act to rewrite my own. Dorothy's journey has become a vehicle for change in my own life's adventure.¹⁷⁹

After explaining the ways in which clients can better understand their own lives through fiction films, Birgit Wolz suggests that they can also productively alter their lives and their ways of thinking by thinking of their lives as movies, and their experiences as representations that they—like a filmmaker--create. She writes:

The following metaphor can be useful in understanding how questioning our perceptions can lead to growth and healing. In perceiving the world, it is as if our eyes and ears were a camera and microphone. Instead of actually witnessing reality directly, we watch what I call an *inner movie*, on a screen inside our heads. And this screen, it turns out, is often unreliable.

Our inner movie plays the story that we tell ourselves about the world around us and about who we are. Though the content of the inner movie is supposed to primarily reflect outside reality, several personal factors can determine what shows up on our screen...The baggage we carry with us from our past can change how we interpret reality. It is almost as if we were superimposing

¹⁷⁹ G.G. Bolich, Ph.D., *Brick by Brick on the Road Through Oz: Recovery from Sexual Abuse Trauma* (Psyche's Press: 2007), 2.

our old beliefs and habits like an old home movie on top of the scenes currently playing on our inner movie.¹⁸⁰

Wolz compares therapeutic work to conducting textual analysis of one's own "inner movie" in order to decode the ways in which negative core beliefs impact one's inner-representation (she encourages clients to practice typical academic practices of "reading against the grain" of core beliefs and/or finding the oppressive personal ideologies that lie under the guise of what appears to be "real" to the client, much as Laura Mulvey decoded the reactionary ideologies that often lay under the naturalized pleasures of Old Hollywood representations of women).¹⁸¹ Finally, Wolz suggests that, like a YouTube mash-up queering *Back to the Future*, re-arranging and re-appropriating the scenes from one's own life can give them new meanings. She writes:

Allowing for other possible interpretations can open a door to a different story about yourself and your parents, and thus a different movie.

This process can be used to look at any negative belief you hold about yourself and your life circumstances...Review any event in your life. You may discover that there are a number of possible meanings, perhaps indicating that your belief has no definite or inherent meaning.¹⁸²

In this section, I discussed the similarities among the various therapy books that I examine in this process: Namely, they all suggest that similar spectator experiences, which

¹⁸⁰ Wolz, 65.

¹⁸¹ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 1989).

¹⁸² Wolz, 73.

strongly resemble perceptions that have been defined by Cinema and Media Studies scholars as cinephilic, can be therapeutic for clients in dealing with their emotional concerns. In the next two sections, I examine some of the differences among these therapy books and articles. In particular, I examine what are considered to be appropriate object choices for cinephiles and cinema therapy clients, and how those object choices are selected. In addition to considering what sorts of films are explored in Cinema Therapy, I examine what *aspects* of films Cinema Therapists encourage their clients to focus on, and put these in conversation with the aspects of film that, according to the scholars discussed here, dominate cinephilic engagement.

II. Prescription and case study based cinema therapy texts: A comparison

The “spectator positions” articulated by all of the therapy books and articles discussed in this chapter are surprisingly similar. However, the methodologies of the texts differ from one another, as do the authors’ recommendations on how to select a film, and their designation of what films and/or film genres are appropriate, depending on the identity and emotional concerns of the spectator. Two of the first Cinema Therapy books and, according to the authors, the books to establish the field are *The Motion Picture Prescription: Watch This Movie and Call Me in the Morning: 200 Movies to Help You Heal Life’s Problems* by Gary Solomon and *Rent Two Films and Call Me in the Morning* by John W. Hesley and Jan G. Hesley. *Rent Two Films and Let’s Talk in the Morning* by Hesley and Hesley distinguishes itself from Solomon’s book by presenting it as a guide for therapists. Hesley and Hesley make it clear that Cinema Therapy is supposed to be practiced *in conjunction* with a licensed therapist, who both guides the films chosen and the ways in which the film should be viewed. They write:

VideoWork is a therapeutic process in which clients and therapists discuss themes and characters in popular films that relate to core issues of ongoing therapy. In VideoWork, we use films to facilitate self-understanding, to introduce options or action plans, and to seed future therapeutic interventions.¹⁸³

Although Gary Solomon is a practicing therapist, he suggests that his book can *stand in* for professional therapy. The back cover of *Reel Therapy* states: “Who needs a therapist’s couch when you can sit in the comfort of your living room and watch the movies recommended by Dr. Gary Solomon, America’s leading cinematherapist.” However, in spite of these important methodological and discursive differences, the book’s structures are notably similar. Each book begins with a section outlining the ways in which popular films can be therapeutic (summarized in the previous section of this chapter), then proceeds to offer a lengthy encyclopedia “prescribing” films based upon the condition of the patient. I would argue that the “films prescribed” and certain elements of Solomon, Hesley and Hesley’s “encouraged spectatorship” are limiting, in particular for clients who have experienced trauma. In this section, I place “prescriptive” Cinema Therapy books (which also include *E-Motion Picture Magic* by Birgit Wolz, Ph.D.) in conversation with the books *Movie Therapy: How It Changes Lives* by Bernie Wooder, UKCP and *Brick By Brick On the Road To Oz: Recovering from Sexual Abuse Trauma* by G.G. Bolich, Ph.D. I refer to these books as case study based therapy books.

Prescriptive therapy books set up step by step guidelines explaining the ways in which cinema therapy can work, serving as an alternative therapist for the reader or a guidebook for a

¹⁸³ Hesley et al., 4.

therapist to use with his or her clients. One of the purposes of these guidebooks is to come up with a system that will work with most clients, which is based around a list of films that the authors deem appropriate “prescriptions” for clients with certain emotional issues. These books, although flexible, make an effort to create structural, systematic procedures of Cinema Therapy, in which the spectator/client’s object choices are largely made by or in conjunction with the therapist or the author of the therapy book. Case study therapy books, on the other hand, are less instructive and more observant. The therapists who wrote these texts make an effort to demonstrate the value of Cinema Therapy and instruct the reader how to perform it (on a client or themselves) by giving detailed accounts/case studies of clients whom they have worked with successfully using Cinema Therapy. These case studies demonstrate many fundamental similarities with prescriptive therapy books (particularly in their emphasis that the use of film in psychotherapy can help the client to process traumas that are otherwise difficult to process, and in their repeated accounts of the perceptual experiences that spectators have while watching films). However, they also contain notable and important differences that suggest that, in these cases at least, cinema therapy works quite differently in practice than it does in the theories contained in prescriptive cinema therapy books. In particular, the object choices (in other words, films) that clients in the case studies choose to discuss in therapy are far more eclectic and less obvious than those suggested by the authors of prescriptive therapy books (which usually recommend stylistically realistic films whose narratives correspond directly to the lives of their clients). I do not wish to argue that one cinema therapy book/group of cinema therapy books or one cinema therapy methodology is better than another. Rather, I’d like to demonstrate in this section that, viewed together and put in conversation with each other, these different cinema therapy books reveal the eclecticism of the ways in which spectatorship can be therapeutic, and

the ways in which cinephilia and emotional trauma may be related. I discuss the ways in which clients are encouraged to choose and engage with films in five sections: Selecting a film and interpreting/processing a film.

A) Selecting a film/object choices

Hesley and Hesley, Solomon, and Wolz suggest that, the majority of the time, cinema therapy begins when they recommend a certain film to their client that they feel will be relevant to their client's experiences and concerns. For example, Solomon writes:

I had been working with a young woman for some weeks. I was her social worker. She was very nervous about being in therapy; she received little support from her psychologically abusive fiancé and was afraid to come to her sessions. One day she started to tell me a story about something that happened to her the previous week. As I listened, I remembered an old black and white movie that I loved, *The Lost Weekend*. It was clear to me that she was retelling this old movie and living it in her own life. When she was done, I suggested she watch *The Lost Weekend*.¹⁸⁴

Hesley and Hesley write a sample dialogue of how to prescribe a film to a patient:

Susan, I often ask therapy clients to rent movies and watch them. It is helpful to watch how characters handle the problems they are facing, even when the details are somewhat different. Most people enjoy finding connections with films. And

¹⁸⁴ Solomon, *Reel Therapy*, 18.

they usually get new ideas that can be applied to their own problems. I'd like to tell you about a movie that reminds me of your family; it's called *The Turning Point*.¹⁸⁵

Wooder, Turley and Derdeyn, and Bolich, authors of the case study therapy books and articles, take different approaches. According to Wooder's book, after he takes initial personal histories of his clients, he will often ask them if there are any movies that have particularly moved them, or that remind them of poignant personal experiences. Wooder writes:

At the tail-end of a recent session I had asked Mac if any film had moved him by touching on his experiences. He had replied matter-of-factly, though he had never mentioned it before, 'Oh yes, *Watership Down*.' So I decided that I would continue this dialogue with him about the film.¹⁸⁶

Turley and Derdeyn, on the other hand, came to practice cinema therapy purely by accident, when they noticed that their client, a troubled 13 year old with a history of abandonment and abuse who became institutionalized after he destroyed his guardians' home with an axe, had an unusual fixation on horror movies. Turley and Derdeyn write:

Individual psychotherapy and periodic family therapy were begun. C. spent the initial individual meetings complaining about his uncle, school teachers, and other authority figures. He complained of being misunderstood and of being unable or

¹⁸⁵ Hesley et al, 61.

¹⁸⁶ Wooder, 18.

unwilling to meet the expectations that these people had of him. He mentioned several times his resentment regarding his uncle and aunt prohibiting his viewing of horror movies. He complained bitterly that they were prohibiting him from watching the films despite the fact that they had never seen one themselves and did not understand his interest in them. He expressed worry about his own preoccupation with death and killing. “It’s as if I’m addicted to horror movies.”¹⁸⁷

The therapist found that while the patient became despondent and resistant when asked to discuss his thoughts and feelings, he began to open up when the therapist invited him to discuss horror films. Turley and Derdeyn write:

In individual work, the patient’s frequent silences were often broken by his mention of horror movies. The therapist’s inquiries about C.’s thoughts and feelings about them were followed by silent resistance. This pattern, which lasted several sessions, was resolved by a transference interpretation. The therapist suggested that the questions about the movies perhaps betrayed the same ignorance that his uncle demonstrated and that perhaps the patient was experiencing the therapist as disapproving or critical. Though this interpretation was not accepted in any visible way, C. responded by continuing on with a discussion of the films, his interest in them, and his anger that “adults don’t understand.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ JM Turley and AP Derdeyn, “Use of a horror film in psychotherapy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 29.6 (Nov. 1990): 942-5.

¹⁸⁸ Turley et al., 943.

As the therapist learned more about the films from his patient, and his patient began to open up more about his experiences of the film, the patient and therapist decided to incorporate a significant amount of textual analysis of one of the patient's favorite films, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (Renny Harlin, 1988), into their therapy sessions. Turley and Derdeyn write: "The therapist and patient agreed to a contract to spend 15 minutes of subsequent sessions watching a videotape of a horror movie and 30 minutes discussing the thoughts and feelings this experience provoked."¹⁸⁹

G.G. Bolich's book, *Brick by Brick on the Road To Oz*, is similar to the "prescriptive" therapy books in that it is written as a guidebook, and in that it recommends the movie that readers should use in order to process their sexual abuse trauma. However, it is similar to the "case study" therapy books in that Bolich also presents the book as an autobiographical case study of his own cinephilic engagement with *The Wizard of Oz*, and the ways in which it has helped him to process his own sexual abuse trauma. He writes:

Today there is scarcely anyone in our culture who is not familiar with *The Wizard of Oz*. Still, in my own mind this has become *my* story, because it speaks to me in an especially personal way. Without trying to allegorize its every detail, the story of Dorothy has suggested to me some key ideas I have found useful in my own life and in the lives of those I work with, fellow survivors of sexual abuse trauma.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Bolich, 1.

Like the “case study” books, Bolich also suggests that readers can use his cinephilic engagement with *The Wizard of Oz* as an analytical model in order to process their experiences of sexual trauma through the films to which they find themselves particularly cathected. He writes:

All of us find certain stories draw us in so that we become a part of them. What has happened is that we have participated in a metaphorical experience. As survivors of sexual abuse, our own stories often seem muddled or even lost. Paradoxically, we may be a people especially drawn to the stories of others. Perhaps in their stories we seek our own. Such wonderful power needs to be comprehended if we are to derive full benefit from it.¹⁹¹

These case study books are especially useful in a consideration of the ways in which emotional trauma and cinephilia inform one another because they provide detailed documentation of the ways in which trauma survivors engage with film narratives, characters, and form in order to process their own experiences (the ways in which they do this will be examined later). They also differ strongly from the “prescriptive” therapy books by repeatedly suggesting that the subjects of the case studies *demonstrated cinephilic tendencies before they began therapy*. While Gary Solomon, John W. and Jan G. Hesley, and Birgit Wolz prescribe films that they feel will resonate with their patients’ experiences in order to help them process their traumas, the case studies presented by Wooder, Bolich, Turley and Derdeyn suggest that patients were using films as a form of self-therapy before they sat on a therapist’s couch for the first time.

¹⁹¹ Bolich, 3.

Bernie Wooder points out that Mac immediately and without hesitation responded “*Watership Down*” when asked if there were any films that particularly moved him, before delving in detail to its resonance with his life experiences. Wooder described another patient, Tasha, raised with an intensely abusive mother, who immediately answered a similar question with *The Sound of Music* (1962). Wooder writes:

Inside I groan. I can’t stand *The Sound of Music*. However, what followed was truly moving.

“Tell me, what is it you really like about the film? Is there anything that helps you?”

Tasha got comfortable.

“I never tire of seeing this film. I think it represents my ideal family childhood. The children look out for each other and when Maria (the governess) arrives she teaches them how to love and have fun.” Tasha paused.

I was very excited that Tasha was gaining so much from this film. The fact that she was so articulate and had evidently thought about it a great deal was even more impressive.¹⁹²

It also seems notable that, in the cases presented by Wooder, Turley, and Derdeyn, the therapist is initially surprised or even slightly resistant to their selections of films. Unlike Hesley and Hesley, Wolz, and Solomon, who recommend a film hoping to get a certain response, the “case

¹⁹² Wooder, 187.

study” books demonstrate the eclecticism and unpredictability that characterizes cinephilia in general and, certainly, the cinephilia of trauma survivors.

B) Form vs. narrative in post-traumatic cinephilic cathexis

“Prescriptive” therapy books and “case study” therapy books differ strongly from one another on two more important counts: their definitions of what films are appropriate to engage with in the processing of trauma, and what elements of a film become poignant to viewers in the processing of their traumas.

The prescriptive therapy books by Hesley and Hesley, Solomon, and Wolz generally assign films that narrativize the stories of characters that have experienced traumas similar to those of the patient. Hesley and Hesley write:

Therapeutic films should correspond to clients’ narratives as closely as possible in terms of chronological age, socioeconomic background, education, values, and subject matter. Close correspondence is more necessary for some than for others.

Clients who abstract easily, who are imaginative and tolerant of other opinions and lifestyles, can benefit from a wider range of films than those who identify exclusively with films and characters that reflect familiar environments.

Ordinarily, however, films should mirror the client in as many ways as possible.¹⁹³

Thus, for clients who have experienced child abuse (physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse), Hesley and Hesley refer to the following films as therapeutically appropriate: *Bastard Out of*

¹⁹³ Hesley et al., 49.

Carolina (Angelica Huston, 1996), *The Best Little Girl in the World* (Sam O'Steen, 1981), *Dolores Claiborne* (Taylor Hackford, 1995), *Matilda* (Danny Devito, 1996), *The Prince of Tides* (Barbra Streisand, 1991), *Radio Flyer* (Richard Donner, 1991), *This Boy's Life* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1993), and *A Thousand Acres* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1997).¹⁹⁴ Gary Solomon's recommendations include *Flowers in the Attic* (Jeffrey Bloom, 1987), *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1992), the made-for-Lifetime biopic of Suzanne Somers' childhood titled *Keeping Secrets* (John Korty, 1991), and *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich, 1962). Birgit Wolz recommends films including *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1988), *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985), *Extremities* (Robert M. Young, 1986), *Lady Sings the Blues* (Frank Pierson, 1972), *Nuts* (Martin Ritt, 1987), and *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1991).

Jan and John W. Hesley describe some ways in which watching a movie that demonstrates a trauma narrative very similar (on a literal, thematic, narrative level) to that of the client can be therapeutic to him or her, and lead to cognitive and bodily experiences—similar to cinephiliac experiences—that help him or her to process difficult emotions. In one potent example, she describes a 44-year-old male patient who overly intellectualizes his experiences of intense abuse at the hands of his father, without being able to connect to the emotional component of those experiences. She describes how watching *This Boy's Life*, a film whose story was identical in many ways to his own, triggered “emotions and open[ed] doors that might otherwise be closed.” She writes:

¹⁹⁴ Hesley and Hesley, 81.

The film contains many classic elements of child abuse: a single mother looking for a strong male image for her difficult son, the arrival of a too-good-to-be-true Prince Charming who changes into a tyrant after the wedding is over, a child's cries for help that go unanswered by a mother wanting to make the marriage work. The film documents Toby's strategies for survival, the escape from his abusive stepfather, and the reconciliation between mother and son. When Jim returned the following week after watching the film, he was somber. "That was the first time I've cried about anything since I was a kid," he said, "and I'm not sure that represents therapeutic progress. I swore that SOB would never get to me again. Now look what's happened."

But in the weeks to come, therapy became more intense and more productive. Viewing the film was, for Jim, a key that opened the lock on his unfortunate past. Many of the same feelings he had experienced as a child came back, and he saw that the problem had not gone away. His emotional reaction to the film, breaking through decades of denial, convinced him that he had not 'gotten over' the abuse and that his background was contributing to problems in his marriage and family. The real problems were not his current family but that he was filtering his family life through screens of his past. As he talked more in therapy about his youth and the pain he'd suffered from his father, Jim slowly began handling present difficulties more successfully, separating fact from fantasy. He began dealing better with his emotional isolation not only from his

family but also from friends. And it was important to Jim that the film had been based on real life. “If he did it, I can too,” he said.¹⁹⁵

The Hesleys’ account is persuasive. Accounts such as this encourage us to revise certain theories of cinephilia, such as those by Willemen and Keathley, which exclude representations from cinephilic perception. Jim’s story suggests that people do, certainly, also have intense cinephilic engagement with a film’s representations: its narrative, themes, and characters. However, at the same time, in solely prescribing such literal narratives to patients who are trauma survivors, “prescriptive” cinema therapists tend to leave something important out: that traumatized people do not always understand or experience trauma as a literal narrative, or as a clear and overt representation.

The American Psychiatric Association defines post-traumatic stress disorder as a response to an event or events that takes the form of “distressing recollections,” “recurrent distressing dreams,” “illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes.”¹⁹⁶ In *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections*, Robert Stolorow argues that survivors of trauma lead a separate existence from (to quote one of his patients) “normals,” and see and experience the world in a different way: “It is not just that the traumatized ones and the normals live in different worlds; it is that these discrepant worlds are felt to be *essentially and ineradicably incommensurable*” (emphasis his).¹⁹⁷ Cassese writes that “trauma shatters beliefs of trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity and, in

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁶ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Stolorow, 15.

many cases, conceptions of the future.”¹⁹⁸ Stolorow writes that developmental trauma is an experience of unbearable affect, incited by an event and/or an inter-subjective context that contributes to the maintenance of the unbearable affect. Both authors argue that the trauma survivor’s feeling that unbearable affect must be contained, hidden, and un-expressed contributes prominently to trauma’s enduring effects. Each of these writers suggest that the experience of trauma survival entails far more than the experience of a traditional “trauma narrative” (the experience of the “traumatic event” itself). The therapists writing the case study therapy books acknowledge this, and demonstrate that discovering the ways in which their clients’ traumas have effected their present states often entails first digging through symbolic ways in which their traumas manifest themselves in their present lives (from their relationships with others, to their intense cathexions to certain films). These therapists demonstrate several important issues about trauma and cinephilia that prescriptive therapists tend to overlook. The first of these is that clients often find their experiences of trauma and trauma survival powerfully represented in films that don’t literally represent their types of trauma at all.

As was aforementioned, Mac, Bernie Wooder’s patient, felt a profound connection to *Watership Down*, an animated film about a group of rabbits leaving their cozy but ultimately doomed warren and setting out to find a safe warren in which to live. In particular, he is drawn to a sequence in which two rabbits, Bigwig and Hazel, battle General Wound-Wort, a cruel, oppressive military leader who is “intent on subjugating them and eradicating all independent rights.” Mac states that watching the film induced an intense intellectual, emotional, and bodily response that re-connected him to previously suppressed emotions attached to an incident in

¹⁹⁸ Cassese, 6.

which he, at the age of 15, stood up to his physically and emotionally abusive father in order to defend his mother. Wooder writes:

Mac's voice broke. "The scene moves on and the tears are flowing down my cheeks. I recognize the significance of what I am watching and find it climactic and disturbing." Mac's face now looks flushed. "Bigwig's struggle, my struggle, all intertwined. A battle is raging in my heart, yet I understand Bigwig's motivation. It's all in defense of others physically less able than himself and lies above and beyond any idea of personal gain or safety."

My mind immediately flashed back to Mac's confrontation with his father. Mac's voice cracked now. "Such a sacrifice," he said, "such grief, such suffering. No person can ask that of another—it can only be undertaken voluntarily. Righteousness shall prevail but it takes courage to make it happen."

The hairs stood up on my arms. I was intensely moved at the emotional identification Mac had made with Bigwig facing the General, and himself at the age of 15 facing his dad to protect his mother. The clarity of that experience of sacrifice was being lived out in front of me. Mac went on, "In the blink of an eye, the understanding of what I had seen crystallized my memories and feelings. I felt deeply moved as I gained a new perspective on a major event in my life, a perspective that recognizes and assigns."

Mac paused, looking out the window. I realized time was moving on. He continued, "The scene drew importance to my actions in a time of great terror. Understanding comes in many forms...it takes a willingness and desire to look

deep within oneself to realize this. In the story Bigwig survives the battle with the general.¹⁹⁹

This example both strongly mirrors Keathley, Willemen, and Elsaesser's definitions of cinephilia, while also encouraging us to expand their definitions. Mac experiences a cinephiliac moment while watching *Watership Down* ("In the blink of an eye, the understanding of what I had seen crystallized my memories and feelings."). However, Mac's cinephiliac moment is strongly tied to the film's representations, its ideology, and his own issues of identity (components that, according to Keathley and Willemen, cinephilia excludes). Like the cinephiles described by Elsaesser, Mac re-masters the film and its makers' presumed mastery over his emotions. He articulates that he does this in order to re-master the imagery and re-appropriate the means of his father's presumed mastery over his emotions and his memories ("Bigwig's struggle, my struggle, all intertwined."). However, unlike Elsaesser's cinephiles, whose re-mastering takes place in more traditionally artistic or media-related forms of discourse, Mac's re-mastering takes place in therapy. Like Jim, Hesley's patient who had a cinephilic engagement with *This Boy's Life*, Mac re-connects to suppressed emotions associated with domestic trauma through intense engagement with a fiction film. However, unlike with Jim and most of Hesley and Hesley's examples, the animated rabbits in *Watership Down* do not correspond to Mac's identity in any traditional level, and the film's narrative does not directly correspond to his own traumatic experiences. Rather, Mac relates to the film on a powerful metaphorical, allegorical level and, indeed, the parts of the film that don't correspond literally with Mac's experience (the helplessness and vulnerability of rabbits) seem to connect with him on a different level,

¹⁹⁹ Wooder, 21.

resonating with the *emotional* truths about his experience of his identity and his story, rather than its more literal, physical characteristics.

Bolich similarly argues against the suggestion by prescriptive therapists that the most useful films for trauma survivors are those that literally represent traumas similar to their own that befall people similar to themselves. He writes:

It matters not a whit to me that the story of Dorothy told by L. Frank Baum was not written about sexual abuse. Stories tend to take on their own life and spawn meanings never imagined by the first storyteller. What matters very much to me is that in this story of a girl named Dorothy I find meanings that speak to the experience of something defining in my own life and in the lives of many I have known. Dorothy experienced elements of change helpful to my own journey. Whatever Dorothy's tornado was, mine was sexual abuse. She found herself in Oz, and that is as good a name as any for a land that most definitely is not Kansas anymore.²⁰⁰

Turley and Derdeyn's patient, C., find his affective experiences mirrored in the stylistically, narratively excessive world of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series. Turley and Derdeyn write:

C. explained that Freddy was "conceived of the sperm of a thousand psychopaths." His mother, a nun, served God by working at a prison for the criminally insane. Accidentally locked up with the inmates one night, she was

²⁰⁰ Bolich, 7.

raped by them all and subsequently conceived her son. She died in childbirth, producing the ultimate “bad seed.”

While explaining the details of the movie to the therapist, it occurred to C. for the first time that the loss of his mother was the motive behind Freddy’s otherwise unexplainable violence. When the therapist suggested that perhaps the patient knew how angry such a loss could make a person, C. spent the balance of the session angrily describing the deprivation he had suffered. Although the patient appeared physically normal, he felt his mother caused what he thought were dysmorphic body features and short stature by giving him soft drinks rather than milk. C. seemed to identify himself with Freddy’s ugliness and anger. There was also some envy of Freddy. Freddy has “ultimate power.” He cannot be controlled by human means and he knows no remorse for the destruction that results from his limitless rage. He is invulnerable. “He can’t die, he is already dead.”²⁰¹

The extremity of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4*’s horror film conventions (the birth and abandonment of “the bastard son of 1,000 maniacs,” the gruesome special effects makeup that characterize Freddy Krueger) mirror the extremity of C.’s experiences of his family, his affect, and his perceptions of himself in the wake of his various traumas—even though they also, in some important ways, diverge from his trauma narrative, and his “reality.”

While most of the prescriptive therapists suggest that films are most useful to trauma survivors in that they can show trauma survivors other people who have experienced similar

²⁰¹ Turley, et al., 943.

suffering (certainly a valid point), another of Bernie Wooder's patients, Tasha, suggests that trauma survivors may also find in films the satisfaction of having emotional needs met that have been taken or kept from them by their traumatic experiences. Wooder suggests that films can help to restore the "beliefs of trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity and, in many cases, conceptions of the future" that trauma shatters.²⁰² If, as Stolorow states, developmental trauma is an experience of unbearable affect, incited by an event and/or an inter-subjective context that contributes to the maintenance of the unbearable affect, Wooder argues that films can provide an *alternative* inter-subjective context. Wooder demonstrates this through the case of Tasha who, as was aforementioned, developed a cinephilic engagement with *The Sound of Music* in the wake of her "early years with a frightening, abusive mother."²⁰³ After Wooder asked Tasha why she felt particularly moved by *The Sound of Music*, she stated:

"...Maria. She is firm and friendly and gives love without emotional blackmail. And the children are sad about the distant relationship they have with their father, but not depressed. In fact they seem to have an inner strength and they believe that they are worth something. There does not seem to be any destructiveness in this family." Tash said this with a look of regret and hurt in her eyes.

She signed and moved about restlessly. I was sitting there in rapt attention. "Each time I watched this film, it helped me to escape into a world of happiness and love I so longed for. I knew the words to all the songs and, if I went for a long walk on my own, I would sing them to cheer myself up and give myself the energy to keep going and escape from hurting."

²⁰² Cassese, 6.

²⁰³ Wooder, 152.

What Tasha had just told me was deeply moving and impressive. She had found a healthy inner resource and she had done it all on her own, which was terrific.²⁰⁴

Both prescriptive and case study based cinema therapy books demonstrate that film can provide trauma survivors with at least two kinds of what Stolorow describes as “relational homes,” arenas in which their emotions can be held and contained. Some films do this by validating their experiences of trauma and trauma survival—by giving people, sometimes for the first time, the invaluable feeling of *being understood*. Others provide them with corrective experiences, and allow them to experience a safer, more stable experience than the one they’ve known in the wake of their traumas.²⁰⁵

If many scholars of cinephilia make a crucial error by excluding issues of identity, ideology, and representation from cinephilic perception, prescriptive cinema therapists make the mirror-image mistake: overlooking the importance of film form in therapeutic cinephilia. In the introduction to Birgit Wolz’s book, Stuart Fischhoff, Emeritus Professor of Media Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles and Director of the Media Psychology Research Institute states: “It is not the aesthetics of film that is of moment for Wolz, but how the film resonates with the troublesome narratives of our lives.”²⁰⁶ In *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories, Lost and Found*, Lenore Terr, M.D. makes the assertion that triggers that come through the five senses (in particular, vision) are as, if not more, vital in connecting

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 187.

²⁰⁵ Stolorow, p.

²⁰⁶ Wolz, ix.

trauma survivors to memories that have been wholly or partially repressed as words. Terr writes that

the most powerful impetus for the return of traumatic remembrance is not mood or state but a very simple perception, or cue. A child's freckled face. A twisted head. Looking down. Any of the five senses can do it. It appears that vision is the strongest immediate stimulus to old lost memories, but this does not mean that the other senses fail to operate as memory cues. A Madeleine for Proust. The odor of innocence for the killer in Patrick Suskind's novel *Perfume*. In Walker Percy's *The Last Gentleman*, the protagonist, a young man who has suffered from amnesia since his father committed suicide, recovers his memory upon hearing music—the same chamber-music piece by Brahms that had been playing on a phonograph when his father died.²⁰⁷

The flashes of potent visuals that Terr describes (“A child's freckled face. A twisted head.”) seem remarkably similar to the unexpected images that, according to scholars like Keathley and Willemsen, become especially poignant and even fetishized to cinephiles (like, for example, the wind in the trees behind a film's narrative, or the color of Cary Grant's socks in *North by Northwest*). It makes sense, then, that case study based cinema therapy books and articles demonstrate that aesthetics and film form (images, sounds, etc.) can also resonate with the troublesome narratives of people's lives (perhaps, in particular, the lives of trauma survivors), helping them to connect with and process their difficult memories and emotions. Many of the

²⁰⁷ Leonore Terr, *Unclaimed Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories Lost and Found* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 13.

case studies by Bolich and Wooder provide examples of traumatized people processing their experiences through an intense connection with elements of film form, in addition to its narrative, themes, and characters.

Bolich compares the boundary violating trauma of sexual abuse to Dorothy's unexpected, unwanted, and violent transition from Kansas to Oz. He writes:

The comforting gray hues of Kansas have been shattered by the dazzling colors of the rainbow. We have an unwanted, unwelcome, unwarranted new chance at life. We can either focus on the fact that this chance is unwanted, unwelcome, and unwarranted, or we can grab it like Dorothy and her friends do and make the most of it, slaying evil witches along the way.²⁰⁸

For Bolich, *The Wizard of Oz's* transition from sepia to Technicolor is strongly resonant with what various scholars of trauma have described as trauma's tendency to completely revise the survivor's perspective of the world in which they live. The transition in Oz's cinematography, for Bolich, seems to illustrate Stolorow's assertion that "It is not just that the traumatized ones and the normals live in different worlds; it is that these discrepant worlds are felt to be *essentially and ineradicably incommensurable*."

Mac, Bernie Wooder's patient with a particular fondness for *Watership Down*, found himself highly cathected to the film *Lord of the Rings* as his therapy progressed. In particular, he became very invested in moments of the film's fantastic imagery. He describes an incident in which a state of depression lifted after viewing the film. Wooder writes that Mac stated

²⁰⁸ Bolich, 48.

“One of the scenes that keeps coming back to me, in *The Lord of the Rings*, is the mailed fist of the warrior who throws the ring into the air and catches it as he considers throwing it into the volcano.” I noticed Mac doing the fist and catching the ring with his right hand unconsciously.

“Mac,” I said, “can you keep doing that with your fist, opening and closing as you catch the ring, but really become it, really exaggerate it?” Mac did. “Stay with the feeling it gives you.”

Mac looked very powerful now and said, “Fuck it, that’s what it makes me feel. I know what I believe.” A look of wonder passed across his face as I asked him to say that again. He did “Fuck it!” He said more strongly, shoulders straightening up, jaw jutting out. He went very quiet and the look of wonder stayed on his face.

After a while he said, kind of to himself, “That’s it...I realized sitting here that just before I felt better I let go of my depression. That was when I kept seeing that image.”

“And those words?” I asked.

“Fuck it, I know what I believe.”

“Is it your strength? Is that what helped you?”

“Yes,” he said, “in retrospect it did.”

Analyzing Mac’s session, Wooder writes: “In watching *The Lord of the Rings* Mac saw the dynamics of inner parts of himself as the genesis of much of the conflict he felt. *One of the*

reasons that the film helped Mac so much was that its genius for imagery appealed to his artistic ability and rich imagination.” (my emphasis)²⁰⁹

Tasha, Wooder’s client who demonstrates a strong cinephilic attachment to *The Sound of Music*, finds the medium of videotape, its re-playability, and its ability to be controlled by the spectator as therapeutic as the content of the film itself. She’s as moved by the film’s consistency, reliability, and (emotional) availability—three components that were notably absent from her traumatic childhood environment—as she is by the narrative, character, and songs that fulfill emotional needs that went unmet. She is also helped emotionally by her ability to control the film by rewinding and replaying it, correcting Tasha’s general feeling of being out of control, and unable to bring emotional health into her own life. Wooder writes:

Tasha, I wonder if we could look at what *The Sound of Music* actually gives you.”...

Tasha then turned to me and she said, “Well, I can decide when I want to see it. I can watch it when I need to.

“So it gives you control?”

“Yes.” Tasha looked quite pleased with herself.

“What else do you think it gives you?”

Tasha paused for a while and then said very clearly, “Reliability. It’s simply always there waiting to be seen. It won’t let me down.”

²⁰⁹ Wooder, 52.

This session proved most revealing...the film was a much more comprehensive resource than had been immediately apparent... “Safety, the film gives me safety. I know it’s there and it works. It helps me feel safe when I’m frightened.”

My mind was thrown back to previous sessions where she had no idea what safety was. Here, discussing the film, and two years into our relationship, she was talking about experiencing safety. What a wonderful thing to happen. Safety was gradually replacing terror.

“Tasha, you say that with such confidence. I am really getting a deep understanding of how helpful this film is to you.”

“Well, to be honest, as I am talking about it to you, so am I.”

“Would you say it also gives you confidence? And your ability to help yourself when you are feeling vulnerable?”

“Oh yes, it does.”²¹⁰

Mac’s experience of *Watership Down* and Bolich’s experience of *The Wizard of Oz* resonate with Keathley’s suggestion that cinephiliac moments are “points of entry, clues perhaps to another history flashing through the cracks of those histories we already know. However, Keathley assumes that “another history flashing through the cracks of those histories we already know” is another element of traditional, scholarly film history. The history flashing through the cracks of *Watership Down* and *The Wizard of Oz* for Mac and Bolich are their own life histories (indeed, I would argue, the existence of Wooder’s book productively encourages us to view Mac’s and Bolich’s histories as part of the histories of these films).

²¹⁰ Ibid., 188.

II. A bridge between pathological cinephilia and reparative cinephilia: Cinema therapy and the horror film

In the final section of this chapter, I want to focus more closely on “Use of a Horror Film in Psychotherapy” by Jeffrey M. Turley, M.D. and Andre P. Derdeyn, M.D., the case study based article in which a therapist worked with a teenaged client with an obsession with slasher films. While (as was aforementioned) this article shares many productive similarities with the other books discussed in this chapter, it stands out from all of them in several important ways: 1) It is the only case study, of all that I consulted, that examines how a low brow film from a disreputable genre can be therapeutic; 2) It demonstrates with great nuance the ways in which cinephilia can both help a person to heal from and process their traumatic processes, *and* function as a symptom of trauma that can keep a person from integrating their trauma and, thus, healing.

This case study is particularly provocative because, of the case studies discussed in this chapter, it is the only one that serves as a bridge between the criminal cinephilia discussed in chapter one and the therapeutic cinephilia discussed in this chapter. Unlike the other cinema therapists, who studiously stay away from low brow or disreputable genre films (the films that, in chapter one, became symptoms of pathology in those who loved them), these therapists demonstrate ways in which such films can be therapeutic. This case study serves as a “true to life” counter-example of the films and television episodes discussed in chapter one. At first, the cinephilia of Turley and Derdeyn’s client, C., seems yet another indication of his pathology, which includes destructively violent activities. However, unlike the films and television episode of chapter one, Turley and Derdeyn raise the notion that, with therapy, a person’s cinephilia can

be switched *from* pathological and even criminal *to* therapeutic. They demonstrate this possibility through analysis of their client.

C. transitions from having a passionate, cinephilic engagement with films that seems strongly intertwined with his pathology and bad behavior (his cinephilia seems to be a *symptom* of his trauma), to realizing that he has been using cinephilia as a form of traumatic repetition in order to try and get out of an emotional trauma cycle which he cannot escape. In therapy, the client learns how to use his cinephilic engagement with the same films in a different way, in order to escape his trauma cycle. Unlike the protagonists discussed in chapter one, C.'s cinephilia is not contained or destroyed, but integrated into his healing process.

Turley and Derdeyn point out that, in the early stages of his therapy, C. watched horror movies compulsively in an effort to sooth symptoms that occurred in the wake of early childhood traumas and to satisfy unfulfilled emotional needs. They write:

C. had many concerns about himself that were responsible for considerable suffering on his part and consternation on the part of his guardians. He worried about his worth to others, peers and adults alike. He worried about his bodily integrity and form. He felt himself to be unloved, unrespected, unheeded, and powerless. He worried about his sexual and aggressive impulses. These were concerns shared by the characters in the films he watched and by the audience of his peers at the shopping mall cinema where he spent so much of this time.

Although he envied the monster's power and lack of remorse, he identified with the helpless victims of terrible danger and especially with the one among them who refused to accept the position of impotence. This one teenager survived to

fight and win. He shared in her victory over and over in a vain attempt to master his own miseries.²¹¹

Like the protagonists in chapter one, his cinephilia propagated his trauma cycle: The satisfaction he got from horror films, according to Turley and Derdeyn, kept him from communicating his needs to the actual people around him. As a result, their inability to understand his experiences and meet his needs eventually led him to violent behavior (the drunken destruction of his guardians' living room with an axe). Turley and Derdeyn write:

The therapist's use of the horror film as a means of grasping and working through unconscious conflict employed a technique common to the play therapy of younger children. Observation of play alerts the therapist to the repetitive but unsuccessful patterns of behavior that the child uses in attempting to master loss, trauma, or unconscious conflict. Because these patterns are unsuccessful, they often perpetuate anxiety rather than relieve it. The task of the therapist is to gain access to this material through play and to interpret it appropriately to the child. The child is thus guided toward a process of repetition leading to mastery...If C.'s "addiction" to horror movies can be considered as an unsuccessful attempt to master anxiety, then it follows that the therapist's task is to join the "play." Of course, any therapist's willingness to accept the legitimacy of, and take interest in, the preoccupations of his or her adolescent patient is essential for a therapeutic alliance. Discussion with the therapist about the thoughts, concerns, and motives

²¹¹ Turley and Derdeyn, 944.

of the characters in horror films allowed C. access to his preconscious conflicts. Insight and the experience of being accepted by a trusted adult helped this adolescent to realize his affection for his guardians and muster the courage to express his need for their love and acceptance.²¹²

In concluding this chapter, I'd like to return to Sedgwick's concepts of "strong and weak theory" and their relation to "paranoid and reparative reading," first laid out in the introduction of this dissertation. If the case studies in chapter one (fictional representations that theorize that, underneath the relationship between trauma and cinephilia, invariably lies crime and pathology) are paranoid representations of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia that are emblematic of paranoid theories about that relationship which circulated throughout American culture, the texts in this chapter are reparative readings of the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia, that also present the relationship as fundamentally reparative.

The case study by Turley and Derdeyn serves as an effective bridge between this and the next chapter, because, unlike the cinema therapists who seem eager to distance their clients' cinephilia from notions of "dangerous" cinephilia propagated by mainstream culture, Turley and Derdeyn suggest that the relationship between trauma and cinephilia can be both fundamentally reparative and *also* deeply intertwined with elements of pathology and post-traumatic symptoms. They show that, in the wake of trauma, cinephilia can be both a barrier *and* a road to healing. They make a distinction between cinephilia as compulsion and cinephilia as integrative process, concluding that "Following a series of successful family sessions and home passes the patient was discharged to the care of his guardians. He was free of symptoms and functioning well at a

²¹² Ibid., 945.

6-month follow up. While he still watched horror movies, *he no longer felt compelled to watch them*” (emphasis mine).²¹³

It seems no mistake that, while many of the authors in this chapter seem to purposefully distance themselves from the discourse in chapter one by suggesting that their clients have nothing to do with *those* criminals, or that the films they suggest have nothing to do with *those* bad object choices, Turley and Derdeyn directly question the theories about certain “bad” films and their spectators that the mainstream discourse propagates. They conclude their article by stating that:

Although there may be a population of children at risk to become violent in response to violent media images (i.e. psychotic or physically abused children), the authors wish to suggest that the modern horror movie may satisfy for the adolescent the same function that the bedtime fairy tale does for a younger child. Seen in this way, the popularity of this art form can be understood rather than feared. A reflex condemnation by parents and mental health professionals of any entertainment so widely enjoyed by adolescents as modern horror movies is not only irrational but also disrespectful of our young people.²¹⁴

The artists whose work I explore in the next chapter, who represent the ways in which trauma and cinephilia have intertwined in their lives in their own work and their public personas, explore the complications presented by Turley and Derdeyn further, and perhaps unintentionally raise questions that encourage theorists (or, at least, this theorist) to do the same.

²¹³ Ibid., 944.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 945.

The films and informal theories described in chapter one, and the prescriptive therapy books described in this chapter, might be characterized as strong theories. The films and theories in chapter one suppose that only one fundamental action can lie beneath the relationship of trauma and cinephilia: criminality. The prescriptive therapy books believe that they have reduced the relationship between trauma and cinephilia to a systematic series of practices and films. On the other hand, the case study texts described in this chapter may be understood as weak theories: They aim to understand the relationship between trauma and cinephilia, and tease out its infinite complexities and ever-changing nature, by looking closely at specific examples of the phenomena. While the case studies in this chapter were pre-analyzed by the doctors and social workers who wrote the books and articles, the artists in the next chapter provide new angles and intricacies in their depiction of the relationship of domestic trauma and cinephilia by providing weak theories of *their own* experiences. I argue that we can discover even more heretofore unspoken elements of the relationship between trauma and cinephilia by examining the ways in which artists have explored, depicted, and understood their own trauma informed cinephilia, using their own chosen means of expression.

Discussions of the ways in which gender identity, race, sexual orientation, and class might inform the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia are, for the most part, notably absent from the texts (prescriptive and case study based) in this chapter. In fact, none of them mention race or sexual orientation at all. The filmmakers in the next chapter are specifically concerned with the ways in which their experiences of trauma and cinephilia are informed by these fundamental issues of identity, and as such become invaluable resources in our understanding of the ways in which this relationship can work.

Finally, cinema therapy texts (especially, I would argue, case study based texts) are hugely valuable because they document a very intimate, often private culture (that of the therapist's office) in which the relationship between trauma and cinephilia takes place. However, these books have remained fairly under the radar. I would argue—although it is, perhaps, impossible to quantify this—that their influence on mainstream perceptions and discourse about the relationship between trauma and cinephilia has been minimal (I had to dig deep to find several of the books, and Turley and Derdeyn's article appeared in a psychiatric journal for a highly specialized audience). I would argue that the artists described in the next chapter, because of the mainstream attention that they received in the press, the media, and other venues, have created a new, relatively mainstream public discourse about the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia that has revised, expanded, and complicated the discourse described in chapter one.

Chapter Three:

Seeing Differently: Domestic Trauma, Cinephilia, and Authorship

This chapter examines filmmakers who have incorporated the relationship between their cinephilia and their experiences of domestic trauma into their film work, and into their public personas. The work of the filmmakers in this chapter, like that of the cinema therapists and their clients in the last, is both strongly resonant with prominent academic theories of cinephilia, and insists that we expand upon them in multiple ways that I elaborate below, in order to accommodate the ways in which cinephilia can intertwine with domestic trauma.

Authorship has been strongly associated with cinephilia at least since the members of *Cahiers du Cinema*, including Andre Bazin, Francois Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, established the *auteur* theory in the 1960s.²¹⁵ The *auteur* theory, and *Cahiers* as a whole, was centered around what later came to be defined as its authors' cinephilic writing, which also, in the case of directors like Truffaut and especially Godard, later came to be enacted through filmmaking that also incorporated the makers' cinephilic sensibilities. However, as was discussed in this dissertation's introduction, it is only in the last two decades or so that people in the academic community have begun to write about the ways in which cinephilia may be informed by identity and, in particular gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class. The subjects of this chapter, Tyler Perry, Lee Daniels, Odette Springer, Johanna Demetrakas, and Jonathan Caouette publicly and artistically enact cinephilia that is self-consciously informed by their experience of belonging to these identity categories. I build on the discussions of cinephilia and identity that have come before by also discussing the ways in which psychological and emotional difference, those wrought by domestic trauma, inform the cinephilia of these artists.

²¹⁵ Keathley, 54-112.

I find that carefully examining the work of these artists is particularly useful in charting a portrait of the ways in which the relationship between cinephilia and domestic trauma functions in American culture because they each examine this relationship so intimately, so carefully, and in such highly personal ways. Because of this, I consider them ideal examples of “weak theory”. As Sedgwick has suggested, these “weak theories” of cinephilia and trauma reveal complexities that over-arching “strong theories” cannot. However, an academic analysis is an ideal forum in which these weak theories and strong theories can “inter-digitate” in order to illuminate and expand upon each other. Weak theories (like experiences of cinephilia and trauma) are, by their nature, highly individualized. The unique nature of each relationship between trauma and cinephilia that manifests itself in these films is, I would argue, fundamentally what makes them so interesting and valuable. However, at the same time, I argue that these texts share fundamental similarities that make them function together as one coherent corpus. As such, it seems productive to outline the qualities that they share, before delving into their idiosyncrasies.

It is clear, watching work made by the filmmakers discussed in this chapter, that all of them intend for us to think of them as *auteurs* in the classical sense. As will be discussed throughout the chapter, the media has also framed them in this way. Peter Wollen’s summation of the *auteur* theory still strongly resembles the ways in which these filmmakers have been framed and described: “In time, owing to the diffuseness of the original theory, two main schools of *auteur* critics grew up: those who insisted on revealing a core of meanings, of thematic motifs, and those who stressed style and *mise en scène*.”²¹⁶ Perry, Daniels, and Caouette, all of whom have made multiple films, are known for revealing a core of meanings and thematic motifs, and for utilizing recurring traits in their style and *mise en scène*. These recurring traits obviously

²¹⁶ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 78.

mark the films as their own. All of the filmmakers, including Odette Springer (who has only made one film, and thus might not be able to claim *auteur* status according to traditional definitions), also insist that we understand their works in relation to their personal personas and their life histories (and vice versa). This way of examining authorship has somewhat fallen out of favor in academic writing about film directors. Nonetheless, it remains a trend in popular thinking about film authors. The relationship between cinephilia and trauma is a major recurrent trope in all of their oeuvres.

All of the filmmakers discussed in this chapter, like all of the case studies in this project, problematize the boundaries between spectatorship and production. They reveal that, often, both experiences happen at once for both filmmakers *and* film viewers. Similarly, the filmmakers and their work (like the cinephiles and cinephilic work discussed throughout this dissertation) problematize Christian Keathley and Paul Willemen's suggestions that cinephilia must take place in a theater, rather than in response to something watched on television or home video. As will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter, television programming and the contexts of home viewing directly inform each filmmaker's cinephilia, and the way in which it engages with their experiences of trauma and their creative production.

All of the films described in this chapter purposefully problematize the line between fiction and documentary. As will be elaborated below, Janet Walker describes this blurring of generic boundaries as one of the foundational tendencies of what she usefully describes as "trauma cinema," since films that try to accurately convey subjectivity in the wake of trauma often make efforts to convey the difficulty of finding traditional "objectivity" in the understanding of traumatic experiences.

Finally, all of the films in this chapter are engaged with low culture, including film melodramas that have been re-claimed as camp, TV soap operas, low budget horror, action and erotic thriller films, and lowbrow comedies. In chapter one and chapter two I examined how these types of low culture have, as a general trend, been ignored and minimized in discussions of the ways in which cinephilia might be reparative of trauma. At the same time, I examined the ways in which mainstream culture has often viewed the interaction of domestic trauma and spectatorship of low culture as dangerous and potentially inducing of crime. Unlike the “How To” therapy books in chapter two, which suggest that certain kinds of films will usually help people with certain traumas, the authors in this chapter demonstrate time and again that there is little rhyme or reason to the object choices to which traumatized cinephiles cathect, and in which they see their experiences reparatively (and pathologically) mirrored back to them. The artists described in this chapter find that lowbrow cinema mirrors their experiences of trauma in ways that are ultimately productive and reparative, if sometimes ideologically complex and problematic.

Recent scholarship has made an effort to “reclaim” the value of trash and low cinema. The works in this chapter contradict Jeffrey Sconce’s seminal writing about fans of “trash cinema” who engage with it in a cynical, mocking way that distances them from their object of “affection.” The affection (or, in the case of Odette Springer, fraught but extremely intense cathection) that the filmmakers described in this chapter feel for low brow cinema is profoundly loving and sincere, and deeply intertwined with their most vulnerable and painful life experiences. These filmmakers make good cases for taking the pleasures to be found in lowbrow genre films seriously.

The films that these filmmakers appropriate are often not just genre films, but *hyper-stylized* genre films. Taken as a group, the works in this chapter perhaps demonstrate that hyper-stylized genre films are particularly resonant with the experience of traumatic subjectivity. This, perhaps, make sense, since traumatic subjectivity is often described as the experiencing of affects that “cannot be contained.”²¹⁷ The un-contained style of certain genre films seems to resonate with the perspectives of people whose subjective worlds are defined by un-contained affects.

Each of the works described in this chapter is characterized by a tendency to jump between seemingly disparate genres, sometimes jarringly. Tyler Perry’s comedies shift from slapstick drag comedy reminiscent of Norman Lear sitcoms, to glamorous Old Hollywood romantic comedy and melodrama, to disturbing, clearly spoken revelations of domestic trauma narratives. Lee Daniels’ *Precious* has been described as a family melodrama, an inspirational coming of age story, a horror film, and a black comedy. I argue that it can also be described as a partial documentary. Jonathan Caouette’s *Tarnation* could be described using all the same generic adjectives as *Precious*. Odette Springer describes how her life became inseparable from the erotic thrillers that she was working on, until she decided to re-write it as a story of a woman finding herself. Her documentary finally resembles films like *An Unmarried Woman* (Paul Mazursky, 1977) or *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985), in which a feminist protagonist finds her strength and rises from patriarchal oppression.

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich argues that jumping jarringly between genres is one way in which a work of art can effectively convey post-traumatic subjectivity. To demonstrate her point, she offers the example of *2 ½ Minute Ride*, a one-woman performance piece by Lisa Kron. In the piece, Kron (without warning) jarringly juxtaposes stories of visiting

²¹⁷ Stolorow, 10.

Auschwitz with her father, a Holocaust survivor, with anecdotes about crying at her brother's wedding and at a screening of Gillian Armstrong's film adaptation of *Little Women* (1994).

Cvetkovich writes:

2.5 Minute Ride insists on the queerness of emotional life, documenting unpredictable surges of feeling that fall outside the terrain of the sublime horror of Holocaust testimony or the sentimentality of U.S. popular culture's women's genres.

2.5 Minute Ride careens, often wildly, not only between widely disparate stories but between wildly disparate affects, taking the audience from humor to traumatic rupture without even pausing for a theatrical beat.²¹⁸

James Cassese writes that "Trauma shatters beliefs of trust, safety, reliability, physical integrity, and, in many cases, conceptions of the future."²¹⁹ In veering wildly between genres, I would argue that all of the filmmakers described in this chapter achieve a similar effect to that achieved by Lisa Kron in her work, taking the audience from "ordinary" or "blissful" emotions to traumatic rupture "without missing a beat," and communicating the ways in which the life of a trauma survivor is often one that seems to veer wildly between genres, perhaps offering some evidence as to why genre films, at least according to the case studies examined in this dissertation, seem to have particular appeal to them.

Because the works of these filmmakers appeared in relatively close proximity to each other and acquired a significant amount of mainstream attention, I would argue that they have, as

²¹⁸ Cvetkovich, 20.

²¹⁹ Cassese, 8.

a corpus, created a new, dominant model that has contributed to the ways in which cinephilia and domestic trauma are understood in American culture. This model both strongly relates to and complicates the purely pathological and purely reparative dominant models described in chapters one and two. To defend this point, I speak not just of the film texts themselves, but also of the mainstream discourse surrounding them in the media and the popular press. In doing this, I demonstrate the ways in which these films became conduits through which the relationship between trauma and cinephilia came to be understood in a new and more complex way in the late 1990s and 2000s.

If most of the case studies in the first and second chapter of this dissertation were notable for their clear ideological points of view, the works discussed in this chapter are important because they publicly enact cinephilia that is, in many ways, nuanced, complicated, and ambivalent. Tyler Perry, Lee Daniels, Odette Springer, Johanna Demetrakas, and Jonathan Caouette enact cinephilia in ways that they present as fundamentally reparative. However, their cinephilia is marked by what both they and their critics present as marked by traces of pathology. If the ideological stances of the case studies in chapter one and two are marked by clarity, the ideological positions of the cinephiles described in this case study are complex and, in some cases, productively contradictory and even irreconcilable. In this chapter I argue that, by examining trauma in relation to cinephilia, these filmmakers intentionally and unintentionally reveal new dimensions through which to understand the multitude of different, sometimes contradictory affects and ideological issues that can be tightly enraptured with cinephilia.

I. “All my life I had to fight”: Trauma and cinephilia in Tyler Perry’s archive of feelings

Tyler Perry is likely the first mainstream, popular filmmaker to repeatedly make connections between his own experiences of domestic trauma (particularly, in Perry’s case, physical and sexual abuse) and cinephilia. The trauma-informed cinephilia that Perry has expressed as part of his public persona and in his work resonates strongly with academic theories about cinephilia. At the same time, Perry’s cinephilia insists that we expand upon those theories, and add nuances to their understanding of cinephilia. In particular, the repeated connections that Perry makes between cinephilia and domestic trauma stretch the boundaries and possibilities of cinephilia. At the same time, they illuminate, in a very prominent forum, some of the complex ways in which people use media in order to process trauma and its after-effects.

If Sedgwick justifiably complains that “a disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind—whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, *jouissance*, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation,” Perry’s work provides an ideal case study through which to create theory that necessarily undertakes all of the above.²²⁰ Perry’s cinephilia, like all of his work, is marked by rich and sometimes troubling contradictions. By placing cinephilia in constant conversation with domestic trauma, Perry draws attention to the many complicated affects with which it can be intertwined, which certainly include the self-shattering, suspicion, abjection, horror, righteous indignation and potential lack of knowingness that often come attached with trauma and trauma survival.

²²⁰ Sedgwick, 146.

Perry's films are known for bringing multiple influences into often uneasy, unusual, and, for many, uncomfortable conjunction with each other, including film, television sitcoms, soap operas, camp, black Vaudeville and theater, popular music, art, Christian traditions and performative styles, poetry, opera, and therapeutic and self-help rhetoric. In her review of Perry's 2010 film *For Colored Girls*, Manohla Dargis writes that "There are...lines separating audiences, and whether you like Mr. Perry's work may depend on your color or sex or love of boiling melodrama, ribald comedy, abrupt tonal shifts, blunt social messages, unforced talk about God and flourishes of camp, sometimes whipped together in one scene."²²¹

Just as Perry infuses his work with multiple artistic and cultural influences, he emphatically asserts that his films and plays are tightly intertwined with his own life experiences. Samantha N. Sheppard eloquently describes the way that, through Perry's discourse about his films, he blurs the line between his fictional stories and his life story. She writes:

Perry uses his films as a discursive space to invest—not just financially but ideologically—in the narrative of himself as someone of value. One could argue that Perry uses black women's stories of abuse—in basically all his films—as a way for him to work through his own personal traumas and relay his own experiences of suffering. According to Perry, "a lot of the stories that I tell, it's just about people getting healed and moving on. That's just my own experiences that I've put into film and television and everywhere else." Making such deposits in his work, Perry's productions are "biomythographies." A genre created by Audre Lorde, biomythography is a mixture of personal biography and fiction to

²²¹ Manohla Dargis, "Movie Review: *For Colored Girls*," *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2010. http://movies.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/movies/05for.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

“create a representational space where homes, identities, and names have mythic qualities.” Perry’s films and characters, which all come from the “foundations” of his life and the lives of those around him, function to create a cinematic biomythography, where Madea, Uncle Joe, Brian, Terry, Ben, and Wesley—all characters Perry has played in his films—are different versions or “new spellings” of his name.²²²

I’d like to build on Sheppard’s insightful description of Perry’s “biomythography” by suggesting that, taken together, his work and his public persona also compose an archive of feelings.

Cvetkovich argues that sometimes fiction is a necessary way for an artist to communicate traumatic and post-traumatic feelings and experiences, which rarely exist in the memory as objective narratives. Cvetkovich also discusses several documentaries by Jean Carlomusto which use clips from mainstream American films to represent the unspeakable feelings wrought by traumas that have taken place in her own family, and in the queer community. Tyler Perry’s films are quite comparable with the work described by Cvetkovich in their blending of the fictional, the autobiographical, and media appropriation in order to convey difficult, traumatic emotions and affects. In Perry’s films and public persona, like in Cvetkovich’s archives of feelings, “The memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value.”²²³ Similarly, like

²²² Samantha N. Sheppard, “She Ain’t Heavy: She’s Madea: The Tyler Perry Discourse and the Politics of Contemporary Black Cultural Production,” in *Black Cinema Aesthetics Revisited*. Forthcoming. Many thanks to Sheppard for letting me read the manuscript of her forthcoming book chapter before publication.

²²³ Cvetkovich, 8.

the works described by Cvetkovich, Perry's archive of feelings creates public cultures: the people who gather en masse to watch, interact with, celebrate, and often find therapy in his work, partly through recognition of the films and genres that he references and re-appropriates. By considering Tyler Perry's body of work as an archive of feelings devoted to the processing of domestic trauma and its affects, we might develop greater understanding of the seeming incongruity that marks his mashups of fiction, life experiences, genres, and media references that he has invested with emotional, even sentimental, value. Thinking about Perry's body of work as an archive of feelings allows us to chart his cinephilia by considering his constructed public persona and the media that he appropriates and champions, in addition to the films and plays that he's written and directed.

In addition to drawing heavily from the trauma theory, queer and feminist theory, and body of scholarship on cinephilia that I've used throughout this project, my analysis of Tyler Perry, Lee Daniels, and their work has roots in the work of scholars who have written about black spectators' fraught relationship with mainstream media. Manthia Diawara's groundbreaking "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" problematizes seminal psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship by pointing out that the authors of these theories take for granted that the ideal, hypothetical, largely passive spectator that they imagined was white.²²⁴²²⁵ Largely drawing upon his own experiences as a spectator, Diawara argues that many black audience members resist identifying with the offensively represented black characters in mainstream films. bell hooks points out that Diawara makes generalizations about all black spectators that may or may not be accurate. In particular, hooks emphasizes that the experiences

²²⁴ Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 211.

²²⁵ For early psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship, see Metz and Mulvey.

of black female spectators are left out of Diawara's argument.²²⁶ In her seminal essay "The Oppositional Spectator," and throughout her work, hooks explores black women's relationship to media and finds that it often entails a complex combination of identification *and* resistance, absorption *and* distance, pleasure *and* criticism. The spectatorship that Tyler Perry and Lee Daniels publicly enact through their work and public personas provides an unusually rich portrait of this kind of fraught, sometimes contradictory spectatorship, arguably problematizing what kinds of spectatorship can be associated with "maleness" or "femaleness."

My methodology is highly informed by works on black spectatorship by Jacqueline Bobo, Anna Everett, Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, and Jane Gaines. These authors demonstrate that examining and historicizing the experiences of as many actual (as opposed to theoretical) spectators as possible reveals that the spectatorship of different members in one identity group will be marked by similarities, but will also differ from person to person because of various factors that should be taken into account. Everett restores the voices of black film critics from the first half of the 20th century to cultural consciousness, and finds that the history of black spectatorship is more complicated than many have suggested. For example, her book counters "the myth of a monolithic response by African Americans to *Birth of a Nation*," showing that responses to the film were varied, nuanced, and often marked by dissidence: Tensions boiled in the black community between those who protested the film, and those who did not.²²⁷ In an article in the *Chicago Defender*, Mrs. J.K. Bills, a woman whose family had dangerous encounters with the Ku Klux Klan in the South during the period represented in Griffith's film, assessed how the film's depiction of African Americans' experiences with the Ku Klux Klan

²²⁶ hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 210.

²²⁷ Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

compared with those of real African Americans. She stated that, rather than purely resenting the film, which vastly misrepresented the Klan's terrorism, she found the movie especially disturbing because its "first half contains 'historical facts which hold a person almost spellbound.'"²²⁸

Stewart and Gaines' close analyses of specific case studies illuminate nuances of individual spectators' experiences that authors who do the important work of analyzing a whole collective group could not uncover. Stewart historicizes representations of black spectators of early cinema in the historical novels *Native Son* (Richard Wright, 1940) and *The Bluest Eye* (Toni Morrison, 1970). She suggests that they present highly plausible portraits of the ways in which movie theaters served as spaces where spectators could get pleasurably lost in the fantasy of mainstream cinema, while also being oppressed by the rigid inequalities of the white patriarchy that such films perpetuated. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline Breedlove's efforts to escape from her tortured, impoverished life and imagine herself as Jean Harlow are decimated when her tooth comes out in a candy from the concession stand. At the same time, segregated movie theaters somewhat ironically give the male protagonists of *Native Son* the opportunity to resist racist social structures, by allowing them to look at and respond to a white starlet as an object of desire.²²⁹ Stewart turns to fiction to repair the absence of such experiences from the historical record, since similar ones were undoubtedly a part of "real" American history.

In Gaines' close analysis of James Baldwin's childhood cross-identification with Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, she has the somewhat counterintuitive insight that "Rather than seeing [this cross-identification] as retrograde, we need to see the ingenious eclecticism of black queer

²²⁸ Ibid., 90.

²²⁹ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 101-107.

identity formation as able to find itself through whiteness, to go deeply into whiteness and take out the best parts.”²³⁰ Gaines articulates what all of these authors have demonstrated through their work: “A black attitude or reading is by no means uniform or predictable even while the black eye may be consistently jaundiced in the most productive of ways.”²³¹

These authors have also inspired my own work by analyzing how the traumas that black people experience living in a racist, patriarchal culture (Mrs. Bills’ childhood encounters with the Ku Klux Klan; Miss Pauline’s oppressive poverty and desire to achieve the “white standard of beauty”; the absence of people of color in the films that Baldwin loved, and his father’s hatred of his “frog eyes”) can inform an individual’s media spectatorship.²³²

I take a similar “case study” approach to black spectatorship in my close examination and historicization of the spectatorship that Tyler Perry and Lee Daniels publicly enact. Their spectatorship allows me to expand upon the aforementioned body of scholarship in various ways. While Everett, Stewart, and Gaines write about black spectatorship in relation to early cinema, I use a similar approach to examine contemporary black spectatorship. While Bobo’s analysis of *The Color Purple* focuses on women’s response to Steven Spielberg’s 1985 film, Perry offers the opportunity to examine the highly unconventional spectatorship of a man who adores films about women (and is, helpfully, enamored with *The Color Purple*). I aim to increase our understanding of the ways in which cinephilia can be fraught and ambivalent by investigating, in-depth, how domestic traumas such as sexual and physical abuse may inform and complicate a person’s media spectatorship, and his cinephilia, as much as gender or race. Indeed, Perry’s and Daniels’

²³⁰ Jane M. Gaines, *Fire & Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 38.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 30.

work and public persona help us to understand how a person's subjective experiences of gender, race, and domestic trauma entangle to inform his or her media spectatorship and cinephilia.

A) The Roles of Trauma and Cinephilia In Tyler Perry's Public Persona

As he tells it, two major transitions in Tyler Perry's life and career were the result of variations on what Willemsen describes as cinephilic "moments of revelation": his decision to write plays about abuse survival after watching an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (syndicated, 1986-2011), and his decision to publicly recount his full trauma narrative after watching Lee Daniels' *Precious Based on the Novel 'Push' by Sapphire* (2009). In an interview with Terry Gross on the NPR series *Fresh Air*, Perry said:

I was about 18 or 19 years old and I was watching the *Oprah* show, and she said it was cathartic to write things down. And I, at that time didn't know what cathartic meant, I had to go find a dictionary to look things up. Once I did I started writing a lot of my own experiences down, and there wasn't a whole lot of privacy in my house, so what I did was I used different characters' names in these experiences because I didn't want people to know that I had gone through them. A friend of mine found them and said man this is a really good play. And then I thought well maybe it is a play.²³³

Perry's cinephilic moment resonates with Willemsen's theories, specifically in that it sparks within him a desire to create and to write. However, it also encourages us to build on and expand them. What I describe as Perry's cinephilic moment of revelation watching *The Oprah*

²³³ Tyler Perry, Interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, Natl. Public Radio. 15 Oct. 2012.

Winfrey Show differs from Willemen's definition in several ways. As I've mentioned, Willemen's article insists that cinephilia takes place during a theatrical screening of a fiction film. Indeed, he argues that cinephilia cannot take place in relation to most television, in particular non-dramatic series such as game shows, gardening programs, news programs and talk shows.²³⁴ Perry's work and public persona suggest, repeatedly, that a person may also have a cinephilic response to fiction and non-fiction television. A spectator's engagement with television is, after all, an engagement with moving image media that shares many formal and narrative properties with film. Furthermore, a spectator's engagement with television (or a film on video) creates a different form of intimacy than an engagement with a film in its theatrical release. Often, the television is viewed in the home, physically and emotionally situated in relation to any family or other social dynamics that exist there.²³⁵ For Perry, his therapeutic relationship with Oprah Winfrey's television persona counteracted the oppressive and abusive family dynamics in his home.

Perry's first documented cinephilic moment of revelation also counteracts Willemen's suggestion that such moments in a film designate something in excess of the films' representations, its narrative, thematic, and ideological meanings. Contradicting this insistence that cinephilia must take place in response to something in excess of a text's intended meanings and representations, Perry's intense cathexis to *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and, in particular, the moment in which Winfrey stated that it is cathartic to write about your traumas, takes place in direct relation to Winfrey's (and her show's producers) construction of narrative, thematic, and

²³⁴ Willemen, 230.

²³⁵ For an influential discussion of the ways in which television becomes intertwined with family dynamics and domestic space, see Morley. There is a growing body of work on cinephilia that takes place in relation to home video and new media. See: Bhattacharya, Dinsmore-Tully, Elsaesser, Hilderbrand, Klingler, Rosenbaum, Balcerzak and Sperb. None of these authors have discussed the possibility of cinephilia that takes place in relation to non-fiction television.

ideological meaning. Perry responded, with an unusual intensity that I define as cinephilic, to the diegetic world that Winfrey intended to create, rather than something in excess of it. However, even though Winfrey inspired Perry to write by overtly describing the cathartic possibilities of writing, Perry's moment of revelation also took place in response to something in excess of her direct advice. It was equally inspired by Winfrey's image, her way of being, her relationship with her audience, her reputation in the public sphere, and, likely, her outspokenness about her own experiences of child abuse and rape. He tells Terry Gross:

I tell you that's what's so amazing about seeing her and having her come along in my life when she did. This woman on television who looks like she could be a relative of mine, and she speaks well and she's respected and people really love her. That gave me a lot of hope in watching her.²³⁶

Throughout Perry's work, he responds to mainstream films' and television shows' representations, including characters, dialogue, costumes, and set design. Describing his cinephilia on the DVD audio commentary of the play *Madea's Class Reunion*, Perry says:

I'm a huge fan of movies, I just love movies, and everything I do there's just some moment that comes up where I remember a great scene or a great character ...I see a lot of movies but I only remember the great characters. When I go into one of those moments and I start thinking of all of those scenes, they start coming into my brain one by one.

²³⁶ Perry, Interview

Perry's second highly publicized cinephilic moment of revelation took place in 2009, during a viewing of *Precious*, a film about a girl who deals with horrific sexual and physical abuse. Perry's overwhelming physical, emotional, and mental experience of watching the film again inspired Perry to write. On his website, he recounted a detailed trauma narrative of physical and sexual abuse. In the same open letter, he also announced his decision to executive produce the film. He wrote:

If life begins at 40, then I owe the little boy that I was my life. Case in point, not long ago, I was brought a film to watch to see what I thought of it...I sat at home watching this movie not knowing what to expect. After the movie was over, I sat there for a long time just thinking about what I had just witnessed...It hit me so hard, I sat there in tears realizing that somehow, by the grace of God, I made it through. My tears were tears of joy, being thankful that I made it.²³⁷

Perry's statement that the film "hit me so hard" suggests a physical and emotional response similar to Christian Keathley's mobilization of Barthes' concepts of "the third meaning," "the punctum," and "*jouissance*" in order to explain ways in which cinephilic perception functions on physical, emotional, and intellectual levels. Barthes describes "the third meaning" as an under-current of a film that often contradicts the film's temporality, shots, and sequences. It reveals something to the spectator that is counter-logical to the film's narrative, and

²³⁷ Tyler Perry, "We're all PRECIOUS in His sight," *TylerPerry.com*, Tyler Perry Studios, Oct. 3, 2009. Reprinted at: <http://caloriecount.about.com/all-precious-his-sight-gt184-630>

yet true. In his letter, Perry writes: “I watched all the things that Precious, a 16-year-old girl in the film, went through. I watched her mother be unusually cruel to her and I realized at that moment that a large part of my childhood had just played out before my eyes.” He seems to respond to something in *Precious* that runs somewhat counter to its form and narrative, even as it intertwines with them: the film’s symbolic resonance with his own memories, experiences, and feelings. Perry, a male who was beaten by his father and sexually abused by neighbors, describes watching a girl being beaten and sexually abused by her mother and sees “a large part of my childhood...played out before my eyes.”

Barthes describes the *punctum* as a detail in a photograph that attracts the spectator to it, that reaches out beyond and perhaps contradicts the photo’s *studium*, its constructed meanings. The concept of the *punctum* resonates strongly with Perry’s described experience of watching the film. However, Perry’s cinephilia again problematizes Keathley and Willemen’s exclusion of representation from cinephilic perception. It seems clear that Perry was “poked” (or, to use his word, “hit”) largely by the film’s representations: Precious’ experiences of abuse and growth, etc. Similarly, while Perry’s physical and emotional reaction to the film, his “tears of joy,” sounds somewhat similar to *jouissance* (an individual’s fetishistic bodily experience of pleasure), the joy is inseparable from his deeply painful experiences, memories, and affects. His tears of joy remind him that he made it out of terrible circumstances. Perry’s work demonstrates that the bliss associated with *jouissance* need not be separated from pain, and that the pleasure associated with cinephilia can be rooted in affects such as abjection, horror, sadness, and loss.

Perry’s “writing” in response to *Precious* did not end with his website announcement. Shortly after, he recounted his narrative of abuse on a high profile episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. He helped conceptualize and was featured on a two-part episode of *Oprah* titled “200

Men,” one of the most highly publicized and widely seen discussions of sexual abuse against men in media history.²³⁸ Finally, Perry’s abuse confessions became part of the publicity for *Precious* (2009) and *For Colored Girls* (2010), Perry’s controversial film version of Ntozange Stewart’s choreo-poem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. The film draws upon traditional Hollywood genres and narrative tropes in recounting multiple tales of women’s trauma.

In the discourse surrounding his work, Perry has discussed his cinephilia, and how it has helped him to process traumas and find professional success. His work also relies on the cinephilia of his audience members (in particular, their engagement with mainstream American films and TV shows that represent African Americans). In Perry’s plays and films, and their advertising, Perry and his staff repeatedly count on the audience’s knowledge of and affection for popular culture. In an article about Lionsgate’s marketing of *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), Perry’s film debut, Tim Palen, LGF’s executive VP of world-wide theatrical marketing, said: “We launched the campaign early with the ‘Orchid’ poster, which was sort of *Lady Sings the Blues*. It could touch Tyler’s core audience, the older African-American women, and let them know it’s a very special movie and we take it seriously.”²³⁹ The posters for the film *Madea’s Big Happy Family* (2007) recreated iconic Hollywood movie posters and television advertisements with Madea cast as their star, including *The Godfather* (re-titled *The Godmother*), *The King’s Speech* (*The Queen’s Speech*), *True Grit* (*True Grits*), *Jersey Shore* (*Georgia Shore*), *Black Swan* (*The Real Black Swan*), and *The Brady Bunch*. Perry’s advertisers attempted to attract audiences by implying that his films engage with iconic popular culture, either seriously or parodically.

²³⁹ Archer, Michael, “Strategies on a shoestring: Tailor-made campaigns for a trio of Lionsgate Pix Hit the B.O. Bullseye,” *Variety: Independent Distribution*, Sept. 7, 2005, X-2.

These advertising techniques are at least partially inspired by ample evidence that Perry's audiences love his pop culture references, as they demonstrate on the DVD recording of his play *Madea's Class Reunion*. Whenever he re-enacts scenes from various films and television shows, his audience goes wild. He gives few clues identifying his references. The audience clearly recognizes them immediately after seeing just a few gestures or hearing a single line of dialogue.

Perry encourages his audience members to have intense physical, emotional, and intellectual—I would argue, cinephilic—experiences, similar to those that he had watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Precious*. Sheppard argues that Perry

turns his audience into a congregation, shifting the way in which the movie theater is experienced to accompany the stylistic desires of a spiritual audience that engages in 'call and response.' Given his preacher-entertainer aesthetic, Perry's films prosthetize and testify, allowing audiences to 'talk back' to the screen and their representations.²⁴⁰

In doing this, Perry illuminates the somewhat blurred line between cinephilia, therapy, and the cathartic experiences that one may have at a religious service. Perry's work suggests that a cinephilic engagement with a film may constitute a therapeutic and/or religious engagement as well. I would argue that all of these events share fundamental similarities: they take place in a room in which people face each other while an interactive exchange takes place between performers and spectators, and in which "audiences" and "creator/performers" both participate in spectatorship and production. In each forum, the performers and the spectators often have intense

²⁴⁰ Sheppard, 21.

emotional, physical, verbal, and intellectual experiences that are somewhat unique to those particular environments. These experiences encourage people to experience revelations, which help them to see something (often, their lives) differently, and in new ways. Perry himself has made these connections—between highly cathected spectatorship, therapy, and church—in interviews. He states:

My hope is that when people see the plays or the film that they will see themselves. If I can put a mirror in front of you and you can say, “Wow, I do that”—even if you don’t admit it to anyone out loud—you admit it to yourself and say, “That’s something that I need to work on.” If I can offer some sort of suggestion as to how to change it or show you an example of a better way to do it—I got an e-mail from a woman who said, “My sister was being abused by this man and you did in two hours what we couldn’t do in twelve years.” She finally left him...My hope is that it is just a mirror. I don’t want it to be preachy; I don’t want it to be church. I just want it to be a mirror that the audience can say, “Is this something I need to work on? Is this something I can change?”²⁴¹

Perry notably compares the role of his plays and films to that of a therapist (who constructively mirrors a client’s experiences back to them in a way that can help them evaluate them), while distancing the works from what he describes as the “preaching” of religious leaders. This statement somewhat contradicts the religious content of his plays and films.

²⁴¹ Edie Riggins, “Diary of an Artist: Tyler Perry Shares His Gift,” *Venice*, Feb. 2005, n. pag. Note: Accessed in the clipping file for Tyler Perry at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

I find Perry's suggestions that his films, Christianity, and the right romantic partner can easily help a person solve deep emotional traumas problematic, as I am somewhat dubious that a person can fully process such traumas without help from a professional therapist. However, I respect Perry's assertion (opportunistic though it may be), that his films are intended to help those who can't afford therapy, or might be ambivalent about it. He has stated that:

These are people who can't afford therapy for the most part, who've never had it, who don't understand why they are in the situation, and here I am with this very simple but complex mirror in front of them and they're able to say "Wow, that's me. What if I did that?"²⁴²

We need not take Perry's word that his films have had the therapeutic, cinephilic effects that he seems to intend. On the episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on which Perry confessed his trauma history, Winfrey featured an interview with a woman who profoundly loves Perry's films and plays. She states that she healed from the traumas of childhood rape, abuse, and ensuing eating disorders with help from Perry's work:

My grandmother introduced me to Tyler Perry and his plays and I have seen every single movie and I have seen every single play. He made me feel like I had a voice for the first time because certain subjects in the black community, rape,

²⁴² Perry, Interview

molestation, homosexuality, those topics are just taboo and they're just not discussed. It's my form of therapy.²⁴³

Winfrey handpicked this audience representative, undoubtedly with Perry's approval. However, I don't think that her experience is unique. I have had cinephilic, therapeutic moments of revelation watching Perry's films, even as I find them troubling, and I've spoken with others who have as well. Furthermore, the massive success of his work does, to an extent, speak.

Tyler Perry situates his public persona and his work as an archive of feelings in which his emotions and experiences are held, and in which his audience members can deposit their emotions and experiences. In the next section I discuss Perry's cinephilic appropriation of media in his film, television, and theater work. Like Perry's public persona, his work insists upon the potential ambivalence of cinephilia.

B) Tyler Perry's cinephilic production

Tyler Perry fits well into Elsaesser's new generation of cinephile producers: his films re-master, re-purpose, and re-frame familiar film clips in new, unexpected ways that are concerned with issues of identity. Perry re-contextualizes scenes from movies that represent people who fit his demographic and those of his audiences: pre-dominantly African Americans, women, and abuse survivors. However, unlike many other producers who might fall under Elsaesser's new category of cinephile, Perry's appropriations are often contradictory and disturbing, rather than progressive, in their underlying ideologies.²⁴⁴ They re-claim sometimes problematic

²⁴³ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, syndicated. KABC Los Angeles, Oct. 20, 2010. Accessed at The UCLA Library Broadcast Newsscape database, newscap.library.ucla.edu.

²⁴⁴ Such producers include Marlon Riggs, Joan Braderman, Todd Haynes, and the makers of Slash YouTube videos.

representations of identity, yet often re-contextualize them in oppressive new ways. Although references to films permeate most of Perry's work, in this section I will focus on the play *Madea's Class Reunion* (2003), the film *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), and Perry's introduction to the 2006 Black Movie Awards, which he hosted. I've chosen to focus on these texts because, in them, Perry repeatedly re-enacts sequences from *Lady Sings the Blues* (Sidney J. Furie, 1973), *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985), *What's Love Got to Do With It* (Brian Gibson, 1993), and Norman Lear's sitcom *Good Times* (CBS, 1974-1979), all of which deal centrally with domestic trauma and are frequently referenced in Perry's work. Perry has described his high level of cathection to the media that he re-enacts. For example, on the audio commentary to *Madea's Class Reunion*, he states "I love *The Color Purple*, so there are all these *Color Purple* references." His alternately loving and parodic recreations of these texts make the complexity of his cathection clear.

Madea's Class Reunion re-appropriates the format of the film *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932). Several of Perry's stock characters and a slew of new characters with the problems that typify Perry's work (infidelity, abusive relationships, prostitution, drug addiction) gather at a hotel where Madea's 50th class reunion takes place. In addition to playing Madea, Perry plays Dr. Willie Leroy Jones, a bellhop/bartender suffering from "dissociative identity disorder" (meaning, according to Perry's script, that he has "27 people living inside his head"). Because of his negligence as an employee, Dr. Jones finds himself at odds with the hotel's villainous, home-wrecking manager, Ann. When Ann finally fires Dr. Jones and refuses to give him his check (offering to mail it), he tells her that he'll ask for his check one more time before one of his personalities "beat the hell out of you." After she picks up the phone to call security, Jones grabs her arm, tells her that she better "hang up that phone or I'll bust you in the face," and

drags her to a bench. He threatens her with hulking body language while reciting a slew of movie references, revealing that iconic film characters are among his head's 27 occupants. To the audience's wild applause, he unleashes a montage of re-enactments and parodies of *What's Love Got To Do With It*, *The Color Purple*, *Good Times*, *Forrest Gump* (1994, Robert Zemeckis), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), and *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980). I pay particular attention to Perry's use of the first three texts, since they deal most directly with domestic trauma and are most recurrent throughout Perry's work.

After Dr. Jones drags Ann to the bench, he re-enacts Sofia's monologue from *The Color Purple*, originally delivered by Oprah Winfrey: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my brother, I had to fight my uncle...I loves Harpo God knows I do, Miss Celie." Tellingly omitting Sofia's proclamation that she'd kill her husband before letting him hit her, Perry follows the monologue with an incongruous montage of lines from *Forrest Gump*, a parody of a poem by Maya Angelou, and a re-enactment of a notorious sequence from the *Good Times* episode "The Evans Get Involved", in which Penny's mother burns her with an iron. Mr. Jones takes on the role of Penny's mother, Ann the role of Penny, and a wine bottle the role of the iron. When Mr. Jones "burns" Ann after asking where she's been, she cries "I was with J.J.!", and the audience roars with laughter. Perry immediately transitions to a re-enactment of the sequence in which Shug and Celie kiss in *The Color Purple*, although the sensual kisses become ominous as Mr. Jones kisses Ann's fearful looking face. After kissing her, he says "Shug like a bee and me just like honey," sings a line from "Miss Celie's Blues," and then tells Ann to run, before jumping up, grabbing her arm, and re-enacting the scene in *What's Love Got to Do With It* in which Ike Turner forces an exhausted and sick Tina to go out on stage. Mr. Jones inhabits the role of Ike while Ann, looking abject, appears in the role of Tina. Perry, in an effective Lawrence Fishburne

impersonation, yells: “Anna Mae where the hell you going? You gonna leave me like all the other suckers did? You trying to run out on me? This is Ike and Tina, you understand that, this is Ike and Tina! You better get out on that stage!” Ann performs Tina’s dance fearfully while the audience laughs. Mr. Jones finally takes the cash register and leaves. Ann, her toughness obliterated, looks on.

Perry creates a similar dynamic in the 2006 film *Madea’s Family Reunion*, in which the local court forces Madea to adopt Nikki (Keke Palmer), a troubled teenager. When Nikki arrives home from school late, Madea ominously wields a hot iron while the aforementioned sequence from *Good Times* plays on a TV screen behind them. As the sequence ends, Madea hits Nikki with a belt. When Nikki tells Madea that the kids on the school bus make fun of her, Madea gets on the bus to set them straight. A bully talks back to Madea and, again, Perry re-enacts Sofia’s monologue, this time including the line “I’ll kill him dead before I let him hit me!,” before grabbing the boy and shaking him violently.

When Tyler Perry re-enacts the scenes from these films, he appears to experience *jouissance*, a blissfully, “fetishistic, bodily experience of pleasure.” I believe that it is at least partly the *jouissance* that Perry conveys—and the loving detail with which he imitates and oddly re-edits film scenes—that inspires such giddy pleasure in the audience. At the same time, the interplay that takes place between the audience and Perry suggests that he relies on their cinephilia of black popular culture as well, and on what Jacqueline Bobo describes as the black audience’s “cultural competency.” Bobo writes:

A cultural competency is the repertoire of discursive strategies, the range of knowledge, that a viewer brings to the act of watching a film and creating

meaning from a work... The meanings of a text will be constructed differently depending on the various backgrounds of the viewers. The viewers' position in the social structure determines, in part, what sets of discourses or interpretive strategies they will bring to their encounter with the text. A specific cultural competency will set some of the boundaries of meaning production.²⁴⁵

In Tyler Perry's cinephilic production, the aforementioned church-like call and response interaction becomes a dialogue between Perry's cultural competency and that of his audience.

In her seminal work on *The Color Purple*, Bobo writes that black female audiences can use their cultural competency of black film and literary history in order to respond to what she describes as an ideologically problematic film. They can reject the film, or, to use Elsaesser's language, they can "re-mix, re-master, and re-appropriate it." Bobo writes that the black spectator who loves *The Color Purple* "constructs something useful from the work by negotiating her/his response, and/or gives a subversive reading of the work." Bobo suggests that the "construction of something useful" from *The Color Purple* entails the construction of something *positive* from *The Color Purple*. Perry's cinephilic engagement with the film undoubtedly gives a subversive reading of the work. However, I would argue that his resulting re-construction of the film's parts is even more ideologically problematic than the original film.

Describing Perry's re-enactment of *The Color Purple* in the film version of *Madea's Family Reunion*, Sheppard argues that it

²⁴⁵ Jacqueline Bobo, "Reading Through the Text: The Black Woman as Audience," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge), 102.

functions as a way to pay respects to the profound influence of Alice Walker's womanist text. However, similar to Jacqueline Bobo's critique of Steven Spielberg's adaptation, as Madea, Perry's comedic invocation of the text "[displaces] black women as the center of the story and [reinserts] traditional demeaning images of them." Borrowing Walker's work as cultural cache, Perry's negotiation of reference and reverence produces the feminist and patriarchal tension in his films' representations.²⁴⁶

I both strongly agree with Sheppard's reading, and propose another, somewhat contradictory interpretation. When taken in the context created by Perry's public persona, his recurring re-enactment of Sofia's monologue (in male *and* female drag) suggests his profound identification with this moment and with Oprah Winfrey, which seems to lead to his pleasure in re-enacting it. By extracting Sofia's "all my life I had to fight" speech, which resembles his descriptions of his own life, Perry suggests a way in which he might have re-appropriated the sequence in processing his own traumas.²⁴⁷ Perry extracts one of Sofia's most powerful moments of defiant strength from the film, a moment in which she states that she acknowledges the existence of an abusive patriarchy and refuses to become its victim. In doing this, he (and, for that matter, Madea) separates this powerful moment from *The Color Purple's* narrative, in which Sofia is ultimately beaten, humiliated, and imprisoned for decades because of this power. One can imagine that resistant black female audiences might have responded to the scene in similar ways, by taking inspiration from Sofia's power while putting aside its ultimate containment at the hands of white men.

²⁴⁶ Sheppard, 23.

²⁴⁷ For an example of such a description, see Perry, "We're all".

At the same time, a “positive reading” of Perry’s re-mastering of the film is problematized by the fact that Mr. Jones, Madea, and, on another level, Perry, channel Sofia’s feminist power in order to inflict emotional and physical violence on children and an upwardly mobile working woman. Similarly, in *Class Reunion*, Perry’s re-mastering of Celie and Shug’s kissing scene changes it from a touching, sensual exchange that corrects abuse in the original film to a moment of perpetration. Perry exacerbates this transition by juxtaposing the sequence with violent scenes from *Good Times* and *What’s Love Got To Do With It*, in which Perry changes in an instant from survivors Celie and Sofia to perpetrators, Penny’s mother and Ike Turner.

In *The New Yorker*, Hinton Als points out that “Perry’s (and Madea’s) negative take on ambitious or successful black women comes up again and again, leading one to ask whether it isn’t ultimately a bit of self-flagellation—penance for his own enormous ambitions and success, which he sometimes tries to mask with Christian fervor.”²⁴⁸ In *Class Reunion*, the somewhat contradictory possibility of Perry’s anti-feminism as self-flagellation is crystallized as Perry “schizophrenically” takes on the roles of men and women, victims and perpetrators, in his condemnation of an ambitious black woman in a role of authority. I find it impossible to reconcile these comical sequences with Perry’s sincere outspokenness against abuse in interviews. Perhaps he does as well. Describing the aforementioned montage of film references on his audio commentary for *Madea’s Class Reunion*, Perry states:

A lot of the stuff, the comedic moments, for me they happen in the moment and, sometimes they just pop into my head and I’ll just say it... Yeah, when I go into

²⁴⁸ Hinton Als, “Mama’s Gun: The World of Tyler Perry,” *The New Yorker*, Apr. 10, 2010, 72.

one of those moments and I start thinking about all of those scenes they come in my brain one by one. It was pretty strange for me to recall [the scene from *Good Times*] at that moment.

These sequences exemplify the contradictory, un-reconcilable, possibly semi-conscious post-traumatic affects that intertwine throughout Perry's cinephilia, and his archive of feelings.

Perry's tendency to take on multiple contradictory roles in his enactment of cinephilic *jouissance* becomes even more pronounced in his introduction to the 2006 *Black Movie Awards*, titled "Great Moments in Black Cinema." In this sequence, Perry painstakingly recreates the *mise en scène*, dialogue, and performances of *What's Love Got to Do With It*, *Waiting to Exhale*, *Lady Sings the Blues*, and *The Color Purple*. Perry in male drag plays all of the films' leading man roles, while Perry as Madea plays the leading women. He plays Ike *and* Tina Turner, Sofia *and* Celie, Louis Kay *and* Billie Holiday, and Gloria Matthews (the character originally played by Loretta Devine in *Waiting to Exhale*) *and* Marvin King (Gregory Hines). In Perry's cinephilic re-enactments, the paradoxical combination of diva worship and identification, parody, feminism, anti-feminism, empowerment, victimhood, and perpetration that seems to manifest itself in all of his work becomes literalized to a bizarre extent. Perry pays adoring tribute to filmic female survivors of abuse, embodies them, and makes fun of them. He situates himself as the abuser of women, the rescuer of women, and victimized women themselves. He plays both feminist and oppressive patriarch. In these moments, the films that have influenced Tyler Perry, his own films and plays, and his discourse about his personal life—all of which have, I would argue, helped him to process his personal traumas—become superimposed on one another. Their highly contradictory affects and ideologies become inseparable.

Perry's canon of "Great Moments in Black Cinema" is composed almost entirely of films about black female abuse survivors. His cinephilic recreations raise questions about Perry's (and, indeed, our broader culture's) relationship to media representations of abuse. Why, for example, were similarly seminal films about black male abuse survivors like *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) and *Antwone Fisher* (Denzel Washington, 2002) excluded from the list of "great moments"? The most obvious answer seems to be that those movies (particularly the latter) leave no room for the beloved *Madea*. However, it also draws attention to a more troubling issue that runs throughout Perry's work. In spite of Perry's outspokenness about abuse against males, and his admitted admiration for *Antwone Fisher*, he only conveys (and connects) his trauma and his cinephilia in his work by representing the abuse of women.²⁴⁹²⁵⁰ This, perhaps, draws attention to his knowledge about the kinds of on-screen abuse that consumers in the industrial marketplace, and American culture as a whole, can tolerate. It also suggests, to me, the difficulties that a person can have connecting with his identity as a male abuse survivor in a culture that, for decades, has only allowed the visibility of abuse and victimization of women.

There are reasons—social, cultural, and industrial—why the vast majority of movies and popular culture about abuse survivors focus on women, one of the most prominent being the centuries long invisibility of abuse against boys and men. A vicious circle creates this invisibility. Scholars contend that male survivors have remained invisible partly because cultural

²⁴⁹Perry discusses *Antwone Fisher* in the featurette "Oprah and Tyler: A Project of Passion" on the *Precious* Blu Ray.

²⁵⁰ For a discussion of this issue in relation to *Precious* and *For Colored Girls*, see Jennifer Williams, "For Colored Boys Who Have Survived Sexual Abuse, Is *For Colored Girls* Enough?" *Ms. Magazine Blog*, *Ms. Magazine Online*, Nov. 15, 2010.

<http://msmagazine.com/blog/2010/11/15/for-colored-boys-who-have-survived-sexual-abuse/>

norms define victimhood as a more acceptable role for women, a notion that runs rampant throughout mainstream film and media.²⁵¹ Perry's cinephilia points to the problem that, until very recently, abused boys seeking to understand their emotional experiences by looking to mainstream media would likely only find them in depictions of abused women. This cultural tendency has both promoted and glamorized the abuse of women, and maintained the invisibility, stigmatization, and collective lack of comprehension of abused men and boys.

Tyler Perry has taken great, profound steps—likely more than any other celebrity—to make abuse against men and boys visible and comprehensible through his public persona. Yet, in the worlds of his films and plays, abuse against boys and men remains all but non-existent.²⁵² Meanwhile, the abuse that Perry heaps upon the female protagonist in his most recent film seems more hateful and less empathetic than ever before. *Tyler Perry's Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor* (2013), which draws upon the narratives and style of Douglas Sirk melodramas and the Diana Ross star vehicle *Mahogany* (Berry Gordy, 1975), generated controversy for presenting physically debilitating domestic abuse and HIV as a woman's deserved punishments for committing adultery and valuing her career over that of her husband. This development makes me fear that Perry's work is losing its productive contradictions, and

²⁵¹ See Cassese, 6-8; Richard B. Gartner, Ph.D., *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life After Boyhood Abuse* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2005), 21-41.

²⁵² In my research, I have found some small but notable exceptions to this rule. In Perry's first play, *I Know I've Been Changed* (1999), a man sexually molests his son, a secondary character. This play has not been published or released on video and is, so far as I can tell, currently inaccessible. The summary of the play on Perry's website does not mention the character. The film *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* (2009) includes a passing mention that Byron, a side character with minimal dialogue, was put in the microwave by his drug addicted mother when he was a baby. Madea frequently slaps around or threatens boys, but Perry presents these instances comically, and does not frame them as abuse. On the infrequent occasions that abuse against men is present, Perry relegates it to the sidelines.

moving towards consistently perpetuating the cultural problems created by and reflected in the incongruous gender disparity in popular representations of abuse.

I wonder how our cultural terrain would change if Perry moved in the other direction. Could Perry make the first mainstream feature film to illuminate and analyze these cultural problems, instead of perpetuating them? What would such a film look like? Might it recount the story of an abused boy who can only understand his experiences of abuse by watching the women around him (including those in movies and on television)? How would Perry situate its women characters in relation to its men and boys? How would critics and Perry's core audiences receive a fictional film that challenges notions of "acceptable" abuse survival as much as Perry does in his public persona? Would fictional representation prove more threatening to audiences than public confession? If so, why? Finally, how would Perry's admirably public journey towards processing his traumatic experiences be affected if he integrated them more directly in his fictional worlds? I hope that, in the future, Perry may use his talents, influence, and hard-won wisdom to work towards answering some of these questions.

B) The fabulist: Lee Daniels

Lee Daniels' film *Precious Based on the Novel by Sapphire* is a fundamental element of Tyler Perry's archive of feelings. It is, in fact, the only deposit in his archive that directly represents a character who makes connections between cinephilia, domestic trauma, and traumatic affects. However, in order to discuss *Precious*' role as a central contributor to mainstream discourse and understanding about the connections that some trauma survivors make between their traumatic experiences and their own cinephilia, it must be discussed as its own archive, one that is strongly tied to its director-producer, Lee Daniels.

Lee Daniels has been very open about his experiences of childhood domestic trauma while publicizing his work. Daniels was regularly beaten by his father, a policeman, partially because he demonstrated signs that he was gay. A *Los Angeles Times* feature on Daniels published several weeks after *Precious*' initial limited release stated:

Daniels...says he was a victim of abuse, that he was beaten by his father, a policeman. 'He wanted Lenny to be tough,' Daniels's Aunt Dot, who is his father's sister, told me. "Leonardo is Lee's given name, and we all call him Lenny. I think Lenny was gay from the time he was a baby, and his father saw him walking and acting real feminine, and he wanted Lenny to be tough. He tried to get him into boxing. He was verbally cruel. He cracked the whip."

According to Daniels, it didn't stop there. "He regularly beat me," Daniels said. "One time, I put on my mom's red patent-leather high heels, and he beat me. I knew he loved me, but he thought I wouldn't survive as a black gay guy."²⁵³

In 1975, when Daniels was 15 years old, armed men killed his father while trying to rob the patrons of a bar where he had gone for a drink after work. They shot him upon seeing his badge.

Like Perry's films, each of Daniels' films enacts his cinephilia both by referencing movies and television shows directly, and by emulating hyper-stylized Hollywood generic tropes. *The Paperboy* (2012), which takes place in 1969, cleverly references (and also takes apart) the representational politics of *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967), the rough graininess and startling sexual subversion of 1970s exploitation films from American

²⁵³John Horn, "Putting a film from 'Push'," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 29, 2009, XI.

International Pictures and Crown International, and the self-conscious formal gimmicks of “counter-culture” Hollywood films of the period like *Midnight Cowboy* and *Easy Rider* (both 1969). A review states:

The film was adapted by Daniels and Pete Dexter from Dexter’s novel, and seemed aimed at anyone who, when young and impressionable, was treated to and weirdly turned on by a truant matinee of *In the Heat of the Night*. Or at least it’s hard to imagine any better primer for enjoying such minor flourishes as David Oyelowo’s deliberately brittle Poitier impression in the role of McConaughey’s reporting partner, and family maid Macy Gray’s coy narration...Otherwise, when not contriving to get Efron out of his clothes, *The Paperboy* gropes for familiar movie language of its period setting: Soul music swells up excitedly over a jumble of jerky zooms, befuddling cuts and spatial vagueness.²⁵⁴

Daniels frequently discusses his cinephilia, the directors and films that inspire him, and the ways in which they have helped him to process his traumas through his work. Daniels’ directorial debut, *Shadowboxer* (2003), jarringly mixes erotic action thriller tropes with sequences that seem to have come directly from Sirkian melodrama in its recounting of the story of a hit man who, as a child, watched his father get killed by his stepmother, a hit woman. The stepson and mother are also lovers. Daniels makes the film’s purposeful melding of genres made strikingly clear when a violent montage of the couple killing several people is cross-cut with a sequence in which a future victim watches Mark Robson’s *Valley of the Dolls* (1967). In a *New York Magazine* profile, Lynn Hirschberg writes:

²⁵⁴ Jonathan Kiefer, “Review: *The Paperboy*,” *L.A. Weekly*, Oct. 5, 2012, n.p. Accessed in the clippings file for *The Paperboy* at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

Daniels, who grew up in a rough southwest Philadelphia neighborhood, wanted to make a movie that melded his history with the lush, operatic intensity of Pedro Almodovar or Wong Kar-wai...

“*Shadowboxer* was based on my life,” Daniels told me, as a man began playing showtunes on the piano. “I knew killers. My uncle, who took care of me, murdered people, and yet he took care of me too. People who have gone to jail for murder are also human. Black people are not all saints.”²⁵⁵

Daniels’ ongoing project is to take events and affects from his gritty life experiences and turn them into highly stylized films. In doing this, he and his work constantly point to the ways in which highly stylized genre film can represent traumatic subjectivity. Stories about Daniels emphasize that he is a fabulist, that he tends to describe his life with cinematic flourishes, and that his cinematic understanding of his life impacts the nature of his work. Hirschberg writes:

By the time Daniels moved to Los Angeles in 1980, he had changed his name to Lee. “I should have been a casualty, honey,” he told me one afternoon...”How did I get out of where I was raised? When my father died, I started shoplifting and my brother became a drug dealer. The ghetto is a place of war. And where we have come with Obama being president is the complete opposite of where I’m from. One of my brothers—there are five of us, and I’m the oldest—has spent most of his adult life, off and on, in jail. And now he has a job. I had the gift for talk, but I

²⁵⁵ Lynn Hirschberg, “The Audacity of *Precious*,” *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 25, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/25/magazine/25precious-t.html?pagewanted=all>

could have been him. The story could have gone that way.” Daniels paused. “I came to L.A. with \$7 to my name. I knew instinctively that the hustle was on.”

As always, Daniels is weaving a cinematic tale of his youth. According to Aunt Dot, he didn’t live in the ghetto, and his brother spent only about five years in jail. But things weren’t easy, and he definitely wanted out.²⁵⁶

The inconsistencies between the details of Daniels’ life recounted by him and by his aunt call to mind recent psychological theory that argues that the facts and events of a life marked by traumatic experiences and traumatic inter-subjective contexts often exist on an uneasy, inconsistent continuum between “objective reality” and “fantasy.” Janet Walker writes:

In spite of the difficulties of holding in one’s mind fine distinctions and seemingly contradictory premises, that is precisely what we must do to understand traumatic memory: abuse *and* confabulation happen; forgetting *and* making up are characteristics of trauma; ritual abuse, alien abduction and recovered memory all have elements of fantasy, but these elements are not evenly distributed, nor are they autonomous of exogeneous reality. Traumatic memories blur into one another on the continuum, and/or they have to be relocated, and/or they contain features that pertain to disparate places on the continuum, and/or we just can’t tell where some of them belong.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

²⁵⁷ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 16.

In Daniels' films, he melds his traumatic experiences with his cinematic fantasies in the creation of fictional narratives.

Hirschberg writes:

Shadowboxer...was an attempt to fuse Daniels's past with his present—the film tried to combine the machismo of his upbringing with a gay sensibility. “It was an anarchic shoot,” [star Helen] Mirren recalled enthusiastically. “Lee was learning on the set. He loved the designer Vivienne Westwood, and he told me, “You’re going to wear Vivienne Westwood!” I said “Why would a contract killer living in Philly wear Vivienne Westwood?” But the why was irrelevant.”²⁵⁸

Daniels connects the realities of his childhood with the cinematic even more directly in *Precious*. Although *Precious* was adapted from a novel by Sapphire about a girl growing up in Harlem, Lee Daniels' partially recreated his own experiences through the film's production design. A profile about Daniels in *The Los Angeles Times* states:

To begin to understand director Lee Daniels, you can start by looking closely at the living room of the broken-down Harlem apartment created for Claireece “Precious” Jones, the obese, illiterate, abused teenager at the center of his emotionally raw new drama, “Precious.” There you’ll see remnants of the West Philly apartment in the tough neighborhood where Daniels grew up. The fabric on the walls is the same, the worn couch a replica, a framed photo of his late father

²⁵⁸ Hirschberg, 37.

hangs on the wall; and the memories, the ones that refuse to leave him alone, linger in the stairways, color the scenes.²⁵⁹

Walker writes that trauma cinema purposefully blurs the line between documentary and fiction film, troubling both forms by emphasizing that certain elements of fiction films are documentary, while certain elements of non-fiction films borrow the narrative and formal conventions associated with fiction film. She writes that:

I define trauma films and videos as those that deal with traumatic events in a nonrealist mode characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the films' narrative and stylistic regimes. Trauma films depart from "Hollywood classical realism," a highly evolved editorial, compositional, and narratological *illusionist* system (in spite of its name) that facilitates the identification of spectators with characters and purports to show the world as it is. Trauma films, in contradistinction to this classical regime, "disremember" by drawing on innovative strategies for representing reality obliquely, by looking to mental processes for inspiration, and by incorporating self-reflexive devices to call attention to the friability of the scaffolding for audiovisual historiography. I propose, therefore, that we read the memory continuum in relation to what we might conceive of as a cinema continuum that reflects, in its entries, the provocative instabilities of trauma cinema. The two continua should be, not mapped in one-to-one correspondence, but read back and forth so that theories of

²⁵⁹ Betsy Sharkey, "Toronto International Film Festival: Out Of Despair, Hope," *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 2009, D6.

memory and theories of film language may signal one another across a topography of truth and representation... Imagine trauma cinema ranged across a continuum, with the most veridical forms of documentary to the right and fiction films in which there are invented characters and stories to the left.²⁶⁰

Precious is a somewhat unusual contemporary example of trauma cinema, as Walker has described it, because it is unusually far to the left of her continuum. It tells a story about somebody totally different from Lee Daniels, using physical and emotional details from his own life. However, I still find it productive to think of the film as a semi-documentary, semi-autobiographical work of trauma cinema.

Walker provides another useful paradigm that helps us to understand the ways in which domestic trauma can emphasize the documentary elements in fiction, and the fictional elements in documentary. Describing the ways in which “traces of the real” manifest themselves in fiction films, Walker quotes Vivian Sobchack’s discussion of the sequence in which a real rabbit is killed in the poaching scene of Jean Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game* (1939). Walker describes this as “a momentary instance when our attention is drawn to fiction film’s thoroughgoing correspondence with the real world.” Walker points out that “Characters are embodied by real people (actors) after all, and fiction films are usually set within a recognizable reality of workplace and family patterns, even when they are not explicitly historical.” In making *Precious*’ apartment a replica of the apartment in which his own childhood traumas took place, Daniels has turned his work into an unusually literal archive of feelings: A unit of storage that contains physical artifacts from his own life (like a framed photo of his abusive father). The film is set in

²⁶⁰ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 23.

a recognizable reality of family patterns which becomes, on one level, explicitly historical because of the artifacts of Lee Daniels' childhood that it contains. However, its *fictional* adaptation of a book by another author that profoundly resonated with his experiences (he has said that he slept with it under his pillow for weeks after reading it), its typical incongruous mix of genres (reviewers have cited its pronounced elements of melodrama, comedy, horror film, and camp) and somewhat shocking, highly stylized cinematic flourishes point to Daniels' tendency to use cinematic fantasy in order to process his own childhood experiences.²⁶¹ Daniels says that, after he finished reading *Precious*, "...it made me feel the same way I'd felt when I was 11. The only way I know how to release tension is either through my artwork or through cinema. I had to do this film. I had to make a movie out of this story because I thought it would heal me."²⁶²

Precious also blurs documentary and fiction through its star Mo'Nique, who won an Academy Award for her performance in the film. In interviews with the press that accompanied the release of *Precious*, Mo'Nique, who plays *Precious*' abusive mother, frequently references her own experiences of childhood physical and sexual abuse by her brother. She discusses how she drew on and recreated those experiences in order to contribute to her performance's sense of realism. She has stated: "We wanted people to see the illness...Lee said, be a monster. And my brother was that monster to me. When Lee said, 'Action,' that's who I became."²⁶³ Mo'Nique's extratextual discourse about *Precious* draws attention to the ways in which a performance, like a traumatic experience or a formal device in a film, can interrupt the traditional line between fact and fiction. Mo'Nique's performance is its own archive of feelings, which contains tangible "traces of the real" even as it primarily serves as an element in a fictional story.

²⁶¹ Daniels describes his intense emotional response to reading *Precious* in Hirschberg, 31.

²⁶² Adrienne Samuels Gibbs, "Tell Me...Lee Daniels," *Ebony*, Dec. 2009-Jan. 2010, 42.

²⁶³ Horn, XI.

Like Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey, Lee Daniels and Mo’Nique emphasize that the importance of *Precious* is to bring un-represented stories of trauma to the light, through practices ranging from a fictional narrative to the re-embodiment of their own traumatic experiences. In doing this, they create an archive of feelings in which their feelings are deposited, and in which audiences can deposit and process their own experiences. The makers of *Precious* repeatedly described their delight that audience members experienced cinephilic moments of revelation watching the film, much like Perry’s. In several interviews, Mo’Nique recounted the following story:

I did an interview last week, we were talking about [my] molestation and I heard [the interviewer] get sad, and I said, ‘Brother, this ain’t a sad time. We should be excited because the story’s getting out there. And someone’s going to say, ‘I am Mary Jones,’ like an Asian brother said to me, or someone’s going to say, ‘I am Precious and please get me out of this situation.’ I’m excited about the response it has gotten from people crying, ‘Oh my God, it changed my life.’

‘People keep talking about the Oscar race, but we’ve already won. Because when that Asian brother said, ‘I am Mary Jones,’ and we hugged and he boo-hoed, and I said, ‘Congratulations for your honesty, go get you some help,’ we have already won.’²⁶⁴

Precious’ diegesis directly represents a connection between domestic trauma and cinephilic fantasy. *Precious* offers several pronounced, poignant, and disturbing examples

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

demonstrating that the immense pleasures of cinephilic fantasy can be inextricably intertwined with the most negative affects. In the film, Precious repeatedly dissociates into blissful cinephilic fantasies at the moments when her abuse reaches its most unbearable severity. During one abuse sequence, she fantasizes that she is the star at a premiere of a film whose poster replicates the poster of *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), with Precious in Jennifer Beales' pose. In another sequence she fantasizes that she and her mother are starring in *Two Women* (Vittorio de Sica, 1960), Vittorio de Sica's film about a woman who tries, and fails, to protect her daughter from being raped. She re-writes the film's English subtitles in her fantasy to align with her and her mother's verbal patterns.

These fantasy sequences received a great deal of attention in the press. Daniels and screenwriter Geoffrey Fletcher have emphasized in interviews and on *Precious*' Blu Ray audio commentary that these scenes were both meant to emulate the psychological processes that attend trauma, and to relieve the audience from the horrors more literally and graphically described in Sapphire's novel. In an interview,

Fletcher says he decided to create a number of fantasy sequences for *Precious*, now central to the film. "Characters who experience great trauma will sometimes create an escape," says Fletcher, who studied psychology as an undergraduate. At the same time, he saw the colorful fantasy scenes—Precious sees herself as a fashion model in one scene, as a pop singer in another—serving an equally important role. "I thought it would make the story cinematic," he says.

As he was adding, he was also taking away. Though the book's incest scenes remain, they are less graphic than in the movie, and Fletcher and Daniels

redacted the novel's sexual abuse committed by Precious' mother, played by Mo'Nique.²⁶⁵

Daniels has also said that he emphasized the fantasy sequences over the literal depictions of abuse in order to make them more palatable, and less traumatic, for audiences. On the Blu Ray commentary, Daniels discusses this decision over the *Two Women* sequence, which takes place shortly after Mo'Nique begins to force Precious, who states that she's not hungry, to eat a huge plate of unappetizing food. Daniels says that "her eating was really horrific for me, more than her being beaten, and I felt that we needed to escape, or she needed to escape."²⁶⁶ An interview with *Precious*'s editor, Joe Klotz, states:

Klotz was also determined to keep the audience off-balance through the story.

That meant jump cuts and dissolves and unexpectedly moving from the horrors of Precious' external life to the rich fantasies of her inner life. Klotz never wanted to [sic] audience to quite know what to expect in the process.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Daniels also relies on his cinephilia to relieve tensions related to his own traumas. Sharkey writes: "On this sunny September day in New York, just back from a vacation in Italy and with Toronto only a week away, Daniels is, as he describes it, content to stay in his bubble, the one that only grants entry to good things. He would rather not pick through the more difficult moments of his past, not sure how much he wants to reveal, deflecting what he can with funny lines lifted from *Muriel's Wedding*, which, one could argue, is a much, much lighter Aussie white-girl version of *Precious*," D6.

“It’s a way to build tension and then give the audience a kind of comic release,” Klotz says. “Because to stay with her real life the whole time would be too much.”²⁶⁷

The film encourages the audience to disassociate, transporting themselves to pleasurable cinematic experiences (the fantasy sequences) in order to escape unspeakable/un-showable terrible experiences (the brutal sexual and physical abuse enacted on Precious, with which the audience is—through the film’s narrative and form—encouraged to identify). In doing this, Daniels encourages audiences to *experience* the ways in which cinephilia and trauma can meld with one another using the formal, theoretically informed innovations described by Walker in *Trauma Cinema*. He “deal[s] with traumatic events in a non-realist mode characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the films’ narrative and stylistic regimes.”²⁶⁸

However, Walker also describes the mainstream American film industry’s long history of obliquely representing domestic trauma, which arguably began with the self-censorship imposed and encouraged by the Production Code Administration. Describing the classical Hollywood film *King’s Row* (Sam Wood, 1942), Walker points out that the film’s makers, possibly anticipating censorship from the Production Code Association and/or responding to social norms of speakability and unspeakability, excluded any kind of literal representations of incest that were present in the novel upon which the film was based. However, Walker argues that while the makers of this film attempted to “repress” incest in the story that the film told, traces of incest

²⁶⁷ Karen Idelson, “Tech Roundup: Editors: Unexpected cuts keep the audience off-balance,” *Variety*, Feb. 18, 2010, X2.

²⁶⁸ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 19.

nonetheless remained in its imagery and symbolism, reviews, and the audience's knowledge of the text upon which the film was based. As a result, Walker argues that:

the concept of repression alone is not adequate to account for the textual multiplicity that seems to result when the incest theme is introduced into film production. What we often see is “a disturbance or alteration in the normally integrative [textual] functions.” In this last phrase I quote, adding a word and shortening the sentence, not from narrative film theory but from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*'s entry for “dissociative disorders.” Sexual trauma in Hollywood psychological film operates, I submit, as textual trauma, overtaxing the filmic mechanisms for response and producing a dissociated text.²⁶⁹

Precious was an independently made, low budget film originally intended for a niche audience. However, it eventually acquired quintessentially mainstream executive producers, a wide release from a prominent studio, and won recognition from The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Perhaps, then, it makes sense that it seems to exist within two traditions of “trauma cinema”: Like the smaller documentaries that Walker describes, it innovatively disturbs mainstream narrative functions in an effort to convey the ways in which trauma disturbs one's ability to “make sense of things” in a traditional or normative way (in life *and* in films), partially through intertwining trauma with cinephilic fantasy. At the same time, the film's traumatic disruptions are also aligned with the mainstream American film industry's tradition of protecting audiences from direct representations of traumas that members of the industry fear will be too

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

much for them. In an interview published before the film's release, Daniels admits that he hopes the fantasy sequences will make the film's difficult material more palpable for a mainstream audience. Sharkey writes "But at the moment, Toronto [Film Festival] awaits. [Daniels] hopes the fantasy sequences will balance the more disquieting moments in "Precious," that the optimism of the ending will translate."²⁷⁰ It seems telling that, 69 years after *King's Row's* release, filmmakers still feel the need to self-censor direct depictions of domestic trauma. However, I would argue that Daniels puts his self-censorship to brilliant use. His incorporation of documentary like realism and fantasy ultimately conveys truths about the subjective experience of trauma that a more direct depiction of traumatic events could not have. I feel that *Precious* is more aligned with alternative trauma cinema, which often focuses on representing trauma as a way of being as much as a series of events, than as a mainstream "dissociated text." I feel that it can be most accurately described as a partially "dissociated text" which, unlike *King's Row*, comments knowingly on its own dissociation in order to convey to audiences its protagonist's traumatic subjectivity.

C) Cinephilia as unwanted compulsion: Odette Springer and *Some Nudity Required*

Can cinephilia be part of a compulsion? Can cinephilia contain aspects that a person would rather not possess as part of their character and experiences? Odette Springer and Johanna Demetrakas' documentary *Some Nudity Required* (1998) raises these questions, further expanding the ways in which cinephilia may be defined and understood, particularly in relation to domestic trauma. Odette Springer composed music for the action films, horror movies, and erotic thrillers released by Roger Corman's New Concorde Pictures in the late 1980s and 1990s.

²⁷⁰ Sharkey, D6.

In 1991 she became Vice President of Worldwide Music for the company.²⁷¹ Springer found herself alternately offended and fascinated by the films she made and the industry in which she worked. She stated: “I was sick and stuff started coming up in my body. It got so I couldn’t stand the sexual violence, but kept being drawn back in spite of the revulsion. I didn’t know why. It was a push-pull thing. I was pissed off at these women for perpetuating this kind of thing and yet I saw there was a lot of pain in these women. I had compassion and anger at the same time”.²⁷²

Around 1994, she decided to deal with her conflicting feelings about the industry, and its gender politics, by making a documentary about women in B movies titled *R-Rated: Sex and Violence in Hollywood*. As she conducted research and, most significantly, watched many erotic thrillers for research, she found herself becoming obsessed with them and watching them compulsively. In an interview, she states “Originally I was going to make a straight documentary...but as I was watching these clips, I found myself getting turned on, and it horrified me.” The clips, she says, awakened long-suppressed memories of being sexually molested as a child—the pleasure of being touched coupled with the fear of being controlled by adults.”²⁷³ In its final form, *Some Nudity Required* became an autobiographical film about the ways in which Springer uncovered and began to process her own childhood traumas through her intense, often disturbing and uncomfortable, engagement with films, the film industry, and its participants.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines cinephilia as “the fondness of film.” Therefore, it seems counterintuitive that cinephilia could take place in relation to movies that a person hates

²⁷¹ Press kit, *Some Nudity Required*, accessed at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA

²⁷² Clark, John, “Some Nudity” Provided a Catharsis,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1998, n.p. (Accessed in clipping file at Margaret Herrick).

²⁷³ Clark, n.p.

and is “repulsed” by, and that she only watched because she found a way to pay the bills by working on them. However, Springer’s intense engagement with these films is strongly reminiscent of how scholars and other filmmakers have defined cinephilia and cinephilic production.

In Janet Walker’s analysis of *Some Nudity Required*, she brilliantly analyzes how the film (like other trauma documentaries) work towards representing the “traumatic mindscape.” She writes:

(Auto)biographical traumatic documentaries may be recognized by their use of three strategies or three categories of footage: (1) home movies, (2) direct address to the camera or to an unseen interviewer, and (3) enacted and reenacted sequences. These, I will argue, are woven together in the films such that their formal design echoes that of the traumatized mindscape, with its characteristic recurrent memories, dissociative tendencies, and involuntary reenactments.²⁷⁴

I would add to Walker’s argument by suggesting that *Some Nudity Required* demonstrates, in uniquely intimate ways, how cinephilia can become incorporated and intertwined with the traumatic mindscape *and* bodyscape.

In the final third of the film, Springer’s fascination with the films that she watches and researches begins to clue her in to emotions that she cannot reconcile. While watching a film in which two actresses enact a BDSM striptease, she expresses horror (in voiceover) at her arousal by the scene. Springer’s description of becoming suddenly “turned on” sounds like a colloquial

²⁷⁴ Walker, 87.

description of a feeling strongly similar to the sensation of *jouissance*. However, her *jouissance* is combined with a feeling of being repelled and horrified by the same images.

Walker aptly points out that oblique traces of Springer's memory of abuse reveal themselves throughout the film/her described process of making the film, including her narrated experience of being turned on watching erotic thrillers, and her incorporation of slightly ominous clips of home movies in which Springer, as a young child, dances around naked. However, her memories of abuse finally become fully legible while she watches and re-watches a sequence of actress Maria Ford playing a woman who is accidentally choked to death as part of a sexual experiment. Over a close up of Springer re-watching the scene at a console, her voiceover states "That's when I finally remembered." Walker writes:

There follows the film's revelation: that Springer was sexually molested in childhood by her aunt and uncle. The home movies from the beginning return in shortened form—the hands spinning the salmon-pink garbed girl and the little naked body—this time interspersed with close-ups of Springer remembering and overdubbed with Springer's account of their past actions.²⁷⁵

The film's "revelation," in Walker's words, represents Springer's "moment of revelation," one strongly reminiscent of the cinephilic moments of revelation described by Willemsen and Keathley. Springer "sees things differently" in films and encounters "moments of revelation" about herself that spark in her the desire to write about her relation to them and their production (literally, through the creation of *Some Nudity's* screenplay, and more expansively

²⁷⁵ Walker, 94.

through her co-direction of the film). Unlike the cinephilia described by Willemen and Keathley, Springer's moment of revelation is directly tied to her ability to consume media on VHS tape. In her recreation, we see her accessing the meaning of her moment of revelation by rewinding the scene with Maria Ford and watching it over and over again. One wonders if Springer could have reached the same revelation watching the film once in a theater with an audience, or even editing it in a space other than the safety and privacy of her home. Unlike Tyler Perry and Lee Daniels' moments of production inspiring revelation, Springer's "moment of revelation" does not come in response to films that she loves, but films that she is both repelled by and to which she is strongly attracted and attached.

Walker argues that, through Springer's use of home movies, direct address to the camera, and enacted/reenacted sequences she creates a formal design that contains echoes of recurrent memories, dissociative tendencies, and involuntary reenactments. I would like to add to her argument by arguing that Springer's film is also concerned with representing and grappling with an element of the traumatic mindscape/bodyscape that seems strongly reminiscent of Imprinted Arousal Pattern. King writes that:

The phenomenon of an IAP, common among sexual abuse survivors, induces the individual to continue to be eroticized by stimulation and circumstances that overtly or covertly resemble the abuse circumstances. This is a type of learned behavior that is imprinted as a traumatic effect of the abuse. It is repeated in an often excruciatingly dystonic cycle which is ultimately in the service of the person

attempting to recover from the trauma... Useful understandings of otherwise puzzling behaviors of the victim of sexual trauma can be found in these ideas.²⁷⁶

Springer's narration describes much of her work in the B-movie industry as "puzzling behavior" that "overtly and covertly resembles the abuse circumstances." In the film, her voiceover states: "So when I found myself in Hollywood, a place where I could compose and sing, I went for it. It felt familiar, like when I was a little girl. So this was my new family." Later, she states: "Even though part of me wanted desperately to get out of this world of exploitation, something even stronger kept pulling me back."

She finally becomes conscious of what might be her imprinted arousal pattern during her final cinephilic moment of revelation. Her memories of abuse include memories of feelings comparable to those that she experiences watching the films. She states:

That's when I finally remembered. Aunt Lena and Uncle Johnny liked to play this game. I lie down on the floor and Johnny watches as she hovers over me. When I hear the clanking of her gold charm bracelets, I know her hand is reaching for me. She always laughs when she touches me, slowly sliding her fingers inside until she makes me laugh back at her. The little electric rushes feel good but I'm really nauseous at the same time... Degradation, pleasure, fear, that's the basic formula for an erotic thriller. When I was violated, it felt good, and bad, kind of like getting your wires crossed. It was time to get out, I quit my job.

²⁷⁶ Neal King, "Childhood Sexual Trauma in Gay Men: Social Context and the Imprinted Arousal Pattern," in *Integrating the Shattered Self*, ed. James Cassese (Binghamton: Haworth Press, 2000), 24.

Some Nudity Required is unique among the works in this chapter in that it intimately engages with the ways in which cinephilia can manifest itself as a symptom of repressed trauma. The films and television shows described in chapter one (*Fade to Black*, *Scream*, etc.), and Turley and Derdeyn's case study in chapter two, represent cinephilia as similarly symptomatic of trauma, to an extent. Springer's cinephilia shares some surprising qualities with the pathologized cinephilia in those films: Like the protagonists of those texts, she finds herself re-enacting films in order to understand her emotional experiences. She writes:

I knew it was all trash, but I didn't care anymore. My personal life started to sound like an erotic thriller. I dated a man who thought he was the reincarnation of the Marquis de Sade. He held a cheap whip over me and made me speak French, even though he didn't understand the words. Another man wanted me to cook dinner for him wearing just my new bustier and stiletto heels. Then there was the married man old enough to be my father. He said he wanted to take care of me, but what he really wanted was to control me. Nobody gets to do that to me anymore.

Similarly, like the protagonists of those texts, her cinephilia inspires her to take action and produce. However, unlike the protagonists of the films in chapter one, Springer's production is not criminal. It's reparative. If the protagonists of the films in chapter one unconsciously reenact their traumas through their cinephilia in destructive ways that keep them from escaping the trauma cycle, Springer finally uses her cinephilia to raise her own consciousness about her experiences of trauma. In representing the making of her documentary (partially, as Walker has

pointed out, through re-enactment), Springer identifies more ways in which cinephilia can be both symptomatic *and* reparative. It can both keep a person from accessing her trauma, and help her to access and deal with it.

In a lecture at UCLA about actor/director Ida Lupino, Amelie Hastie says that research about a film or star can constitute cinephilia. She states: “It’s the body of [Lupino’s] work and the process of investigation that her work invites that leads to this feminist’s love of Lupino. To her cinephilia.”²⁷⁷ Similarly, I would define Springer’s production of the documentary *Some Nudity Required*, in which she engages antagonistically with certain male directors but also forms strong, intimate bonds with other directors and stars, as cinephilic. She demonstrates a complicated love for the process of researching erotic thrillers, even though her most conscious response to the films themselves is hatred. If the films that problematically engage Springer become stepping stones to discovering her traumas, her research into their contexts and their makers helps her to understand and process them.

Much of the film focuses on Maria Ford, a B movie star who expresses dissatisfaction at the film industry’s requirement that she objectify herself in order to act. Springer forms a relationship with the star, and they find themselves opening up to each other. Over a shot of Ford buying lingerie, Springer’s voiceover states:

Maria pretends to be someone else when she’s acting. I’ve pretended to be someone else most of my life. In my family, women were taught that sex is dirty, and only men enjoyed it. So you can imagine how daring it felt when I bought my first bustier at Fredericks of Hollywood right there with Maria. Later I confessed

²⁷⁷ Amelie Hastie, “Ida Lupino and Historical Legibility,” lecture given at UCLA on February 24, 2009.

to her that I was 28 before I had my first orgasm. Maybe if I'd worn this stuff, it would've happened a lot sooner.

Throughout this dissertation, I have reiterated the ways in which scholars like Keathley and Willemen have argued that cinephiles respond to something figurative that peaks out from under a film's representations: for example, an actor's gesture that seems to betray the actor, rather than the character. I have argued that cinephiles also respond to films' representations. Springer expands upon all of our arguments by demonstrating that particularly meaningful cinephilia can take place as a result of the interplay between representation and figuration. The juxtaposition between the roles Maria Ford plays (sex kitten, femme fatale), and her self-described identity (former honor student, feminist, aspiring serious actress) presents Springer with stronger identification, stronger cinephilic moments of revelation, than either Ford's public persona or her films could do alone. It seems meaningful that, according to Springer, she had her most profound cinephilic moment of revelation—the revelation of her childhood sexual abuse—while watching Ford being victimized on film.

The press kit of *Some Nudity Required* states that “Unexpectedly along the way, Springer uncovered disturbing personal memories of her own, that turned her from observer into participant of *Some Nudity Required*—She found herself becoming part of the story.” In becoming part of the story, and placing Roger Corman's films, particularly his erotic thrillers, in the context of the industry that creates them *and* her own experiences as a producer-spectator, Springer “re-mixes, re-masters, and re-purposes” them in order to raise to the surface and make conscious the traumatic affects that they perhaps unintentionally and problematically convey (most prominently, the ways in which sex and violence often become disturbingly intertwined in the mind and body of a survivor of sexual trauma). In doing this, she uses cinephilic production

to process her own trauma, partly by bringing to light several ways in which intimate, individual domestic trauma is closely connected to social attitudes that are conveyed by well-funded popular media. Springer follows her ambivalent cinephilia until it helps her become conscious of the roots of her emotional distress, leading her to get another job and create a movie that creates a new, different dynamic for women engaging with erotic thrillers and/or their trauma histories.

D) “A life organized around film”: Jonathan Caouette and *Tarnation* (2004):

If cinephilia is, in part, “a life organized around film,” Jonathan Caouette fits the definition perhaps more than any other subject in this project. Caouette received a great deal of public notice when his film *Tarnation* hit the film festival circuit in 2003. The film, made for \$218 on Apple’s iMovie software (before accounting for movie clip and music rights, 35mm prints, advertising, etc.) received distribution from Wellspring Media and received substantial coverage in the newspapers of cities in which it played (prominently, New York and Los Angeles), and in national publications like *Rolling Stone* and *Entertainment Weekly*. After its theatrical release, its accessibility increased when it became available for viewing on DVD and Netflix’s instant streaming service.

Although I argue that the work of all of the filmmakers in this chapter could be described as constituting “archives of feelings,” *Tarnation* is composed almost entirely of archival sources: 19 years worth of short films and home movies made on Super 8mm, VHS, and DV, still photographs, answering machine messages, audio cassette diaries, and clips from feature films, TV shows, and music that Caouette loves and/or finds resonant with his life experiences. Indeed, the film was characterized as “an archive” by its press kit, which stated that “slipping back into the archives of [Caouette’s] youth, we watch Caouette grow up on camera, seeking escape from family trauma through musical theater, grade-B horror flicks, and the forging of his identity

through popular culture.”²⁷⁸ A review of the film described it as “a scrapbook of stolen moments and gloriously random pop culture references.”²⁷⁹

Anna Poletti effectively examines the ways in which *Tarnation*, as a text, enacts cinephilia informed by trauma. In her article, “Reading for Excess: Relational Autobiography, Affect and Popular Culture in *Tarnation*,” Poletti argues that, in *Tarnation*, clips from films and popular culture and Caouette’s re-enactments of popular culture texts stand in for traumatic affects for which a traditional narrative cannot account. She also discusses the ways in which Caouette juxtaposes home movie footage (including re-enactments of popular culture) and visual and aural pop cultural texts in order to blur the lines between media texts and “the real,” demonstrating the extent to which, for Caouette, the lines between them are blurred in his experience of and efforts to make meaning of his life. She writes:

Caouette makes use of his childhood performance for the camera as an object that can be cited (alongside many others in the film), but more than this, the inclusion of the performance footage works to destabilize the indexical power of home-made moving image by bringing it into relationship with mass media and popular culture and the models of selfhood which populate it. Through collage, there is a deliberate attempt to dissolve the boundaries between the documents of popular culture and the moving images of the family archive.

This intertextual relationship between the archival and the popular provokes a re-consideration of interpretive paradigms that seek to maintain (and through such maintenance, police) the distinctions between the autobiographical

²⁷⁸ Press kit for *Tarnation* accessed at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

²⁷⁹ Wendy Ida, “Knock-Down Memories,” *The Times (London)*, May 20, 2004, 7.

and the popular, the documentary and the fictional. However, such a provocation should not be seen as inevitably leading to a relativist *mélange* commonly associated with postmodern culture; it instead demands dynamic and sensitive reading strategies which can respond to Caouette's claim for recognition of the powerful resource popular culture presents for self-representation. Caouette is insisting on the capacity to make truth claims about lived experience, yet he does not want to rely solely on the truth-telling power of indexical home-made footage, or other documents of the private sphere, to do so. The use of popular culture and the camera as technology of self are central to the autobiographical project of *Tarnation*, where 'evidence' of experience and affective intensities are drawn from sources far beyond the domestic and the personal.²⁸⁰

In this section, on Caouette and *Tarnation*, I build on Poletti's argument by looking at the copious amounts of press material surrounding the film's release to document and examine the ways in which popular culture is not just a powerful resource for self-presentation for Caouette, but is, indeed, a fundamental part of his self, and his everyday experience of the world. Indeed, Caouette does not simply use pop culture to represent un-describable affects in his film, he seems to rely on it to *experience* them in his life. Indeed, I would argue that part of *Tarnation's* fascination lies beyond the fact that he uses popular culture as a way of relying on something *other than* indexical home-made footage or other documents of the private sphere in his self-representation. The discourse surrounding *Tarnation* suggests that, for Caouette, popular culture texts are, in their way, indexical home-made footage for him: footage that he has made indexical

²⁸⁰Anna Poletti, "Reading for Excess: Relational Autobiography, Affect and Popular Culture in *Tarnation*," *Life Writing* 9, no. 2 (April 30, 2012): 168.

and home-made by investing his feelings and affects in it, and weaving them into the texture of his life. For Caouette, popular culture texts *are*—when intertwined with Caouette’s feelings and experiences--documents of the private sphere, which *Tarnation* makes public.

Examining the paratexts surrounding *Tarnation* allows us to see that the melding of popular culture and “indexical” footage of “true experiences” in the film *Tarnation* constitutes Caouette’s effort to accurately represent the melding of popular culture and reality that makes up his day-to-day perception of his experiences. It also reveals the ways in which *Tarnation* became a conduit through which the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia came to be discussed in mainstream culture (in particular, the mainstream press). I will argue that the discourse surrounding *Tarnation* is both reminiscent and corrective of the mainstream understandings of “pathological cinephilia” discussed in Chapter 1, and most represented by fictional feature films. *Tarnation* and the texts surrounding it provided a new, relatively mainstream understanding of the ways in which cinephilia (and, in particular, cinephilia of low brow, violent films) could interact with trauma, one that is largely reparative and certainly not criminal.

I then return to the text of *Tarnation*. In particular, I examine the pop cultural texts that Caouette chooses to represent his experiences. Ranging from works by high brow *auteurs* like *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* (Robert Altman, 1982) to “trash” cinema like *The Devil’s Rain* (Robert Fuest, 1975) and *Friday the 13th Part II* (Steve Miner, 1981), *Tarnation*’s pop culture appropriations demonstrate the ways in which the value and definitions of high and low art can become conflated when viewed through the lens of cinephilia. Caouette suggests that, for him, this conflation partly takes place because “trash” cinema communicates and resonates with traumatic affects in unique ways. Caouette’s cinephilia

problematizes seminal definitions of trash cinephilia, like that of Jeffrey Sconce, which assume that an adoration of trash contains a distant or mocking component. *Tarnation* demonstrates that an adoration of trash cinema can be thoughtful, intelligent and, at the same time, profoundly intimate and sincere.

Finally, I examine the controversies of whether or not *Tarnation* was exploitative and misogynistic in its depiction of Caouette's mother Renee, and how critics arguing this understood the film's "misogyny" and "exploitative" tendencies in relation to the films he references. I question what *Tarnation*'s potentially misogynistic and exploitative qualities can reveal to us about Caouette's cinephilia and his cinephilic object choices, and how they relate to his experiences of domestic trauma.

In the considerable amount of press documentation surrounding *Tarnation*, Caouette's extraordinarily poignant and vivid descriptions of his lifelong cinephilia create a portrait of cinephilia informed by trauma that is separate from, although strongly related to, the feature film. The press documentation surrounding the film presents a portrait of a man who, for better and worse, truly lives "a life organized around film," his film memories overlapping with his actual experiences every day.

The press kit of *Tarnation* reveals that the incorporation of cinematic language and conventions became a part of Caouette's cinephilia when he was very young.

"I don't remember ever NOT wanting to be a filmmaker!," says Caouette in an interview.

Even when I was four or five, I used to escape to the backyard to get away from all the grown-ups. I would tell them, 'I am doing this movie,' or, 'I am going to do a movie,' and then prance around the backyard while reciting a completely

improvised script in my mind. As I got a bit older and began learning my neighborhood, I turned my entire suburban neighborhood into a giant sound stage and I would ‘do this movie.’ I would do horror films, rock operas, and serious dramatizations. I talked and sang to myself. Sometimes I even went to the extent of pretending to be one of the characters in my films and incorporating people from around the neighborhood who had no idea that they were inadvertently part of one of those movies happening in my mind.

He states that, before VCRs, he would go to see a movie with his grandfather, record the audio on a tape recorder, then go home and draw out films like *The Wiz*, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Exorcist* and its sequel, and *Phantasm* frame by frame using magic markers on loose leaf or typing paper. At one point, he ran a film program out of his grandparents’ home, screening 16mm films in their attic.

Profiles of Caouette written during *Tarnation*’s release demonstrate how his extremely intimate engagements with film continue in his adulthood. Ida writes: “A self-taught cineaste, Caouette describes his life with film references—of the standing ovation the film received the previous evening, he says: ‘I felt like Diana Ross in the last scene of *Mahogany* or *Lady Sings the Blues*.’”²⁸¹ In *The Los Angeles Times*, Choire Sicha points out that “Jonathan Caouette’s Astoria apartment is the home of a boy who grew up believing in movies, and film posters of a specific sort are everywhere: *Midnight Cowboy*, *Eraserhead*, *Christiane F.*, *Santa Sangre*.”

²⁸¹ Ida, 7.

Attending the after party of The New York Film Festival, where *Tarnation* screened, at Tavern on the Green, Caouette exclaimed “It’s very *Stepford Wives!*”²⁸²

In an interview with Caouette published in *The Nation*, Stuart Klawans writes: “In interviews and within the film itself, Caouette has said that he suffers from depersonalization disorder, which leaves him experiencing his own life as if he were watching a movie. You could describe the associative, variegated, expressionistic flow of *Tarnation* as a re-creation of this mental state...” On his audio commentary for *Tarnation*, Caouette confirms this interpretation. Describing home video footage from his film, he states: “This is one of several Hi8 video clips that I ran through Apple’s iMovie to emulate old Super 8 footage. I turned the brightness and contrast way up to give it the appearance of flickering saturation that’s a kind of set up for what it was like to watch my family through my eyes.”

In these statements, Caouette suggests that his “life of film” is directly informed by his experience of troubled family dynamics and domestic trauma (in *Tarnation*, Caouette suggests that he developed depersonalization disorder when, at the age of 11, a drug dealer gave him two joints dipped in formaldehyde, shortly after he watched his mother being raped). Perhaps one reason that he sees his family as though watching a Super 8 film is because, as the movie (and Poletti) suggest, Caouette saw affects and experiences that reminded him directly of his own in movies like *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, *Rosemary’s Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1967), *Friday the 13th Part II*, *Guyana: Cult of the Damned* (René Cardona Jr., 1979), and *Let’s Scare Jessica to Death* (John D. Hancock, 1971), and TV series like *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (syndicated, 1976-78) and *The Bionic Woman* (ABC & NBC, 1976-1978), all of which deal directly with domestic trauma.

²⁸² Choire Sicha, “The Chronic Memoirist,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 10, 2004, E1.

As with all of the filmmakers and cinephiles discussed in this chapter, Caouette's cinephilia, and its relationship to his domestic traumas, is directly informed by the fact that much of it took place not in movie theaters, but in his home, either in his attic repertory theater, the rooms where he recreated drawings of movies from audio tape, or, perhaps most influentially on *Tarnation*, the room in which he watched movies on TV and video tape. Cassese writes that "a sexual trauma separates the victim's physical being from his psyche. It becomes the survivor's legacy to integrate the shards of his shattered self into a cohesive whole."²⁸³ It could be argued that the entirety of *Tarnation* is Caouette's effort to physically integrate the "shards of his shattered self" into a cohesive whole, using photographs, sound clips, and film footage (his own, and that of others) to represent the shards. This is rarely more apparent than in a sequence that is meant to represent Caouette's "teenage years," which begins with a shot of young Caouette's face super-imposed over a television set with static on it, over which are super-imposed various moments from the sequence in *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) in which Rosemary "dreams" that she is raped by Satan (and actually is raped by Satan). There is a cut to video footage of young Caouette on a couch flipping through channels with a remote control, followed by more clips from the *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) sequence inter-cut with clips of Caouette that have been seen in the film before (many of the more dramatic, performative type). This is followed by brief snippets from a series of films, including *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* and *Friday the 13th Part II*. These clips eventually become a four-way split screen, and images from horror films are juxtaposed with images from Caouette's life (including footage of him being interviewed after a fire evicted him from his home), and footage of Caouette lip-synching to the song "Frank Mills" from the original motion picture soundtrack of the musical *Hair* (a song about love and

²⁸³ Cassese, 6.

innocence lost). The sequence makes it seem possible to make the argument that Caouette's entire docu-memoir has the style of "flipping channels." Images and sounds quickly shift from one to the other, as they do in Caouette's montage of films. Film clips seem to interweave themselves freely with Caouette's traumatic memories. The fact that he saw many of these films on television seems to influence the way he processes them, works them into his memories, and uses them to live, recount and understand his life (perhaps movies were particularly meaningful to him, because they were often experienced in such a fragmented way). By making his film, he makes an effort to put the fragments together.

Given the seamless integration of popular culture and "reality" in his life, it seems fitting when Caouette states, on the audio commentary of *Tarnation*, that he originally was unsure about whether or not he wanted to make and/or present *Tarnation* as a fiction film. He states that he originally wanted to tell the story as a narrative using actors. However, looking back, he realizes that the only people who could play these roles were the people themselves. At the end of the audio commentary, which plays as Caouette tucks in his sleeping mother, touches the indentation under her nose, and rests his head next to her, he states: "I want to half act and half be real in this scene." Originally, Caouette intended to include an ending in which Adolph [Jonathan's grandfather] shoots him and he ends up in heaven, seeing his partner David again. At one point, he confesses, he was hoping that people would think that his film was fictional and that its subjects were "just really good actors." In the making and distribution of his film, Caouette's constant integration of fiction and reality seemed to take on new meaning. His struggle over whether to present his life (and his traumas) as fictional or real speaks to the ways in which he has potentially used fiction as a protective shield through which to deal with and understand his life's difficulties.

Jonathan Caouette's enactment of cinephilia in *Tarnation* is notable for its conflation of "high" and "low" culture films, whose signifiers of "quality" are rendered indistinguishable when juxtaposed and inter-cut with each other through Caouette's sensibility and in relation to his life experiences. Mainstream films by canonical *auteurs* like Robert Altman's *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* are no less valuable in conveying Caouette's affects and experiences than critically lambasted exploitation films like *Guyana: Cult of the Damned* and *The Devil's Rain*, and popular '70s TV shows like *The Bionic Woman* and *Zoom!*.

A snippet from the opening of *Friday the 13th Part II*, in which the murder Jason Voorhees' mother is superimposed on the final girl's face effectively communicates multiple nuances of Jonathan's emotional experience. It calls to mind his descriptions of feeling that his mother's experiences and feelings are inextricable from his own. In particular, it calls to mind the line spoken during his final tearful testimony to the camera, that "She's in my head, she's behind my eyes, she's downstairs." It also communicates his admitted tendency to see his mother infused with images in popular culture, such as that of Lindsay Wagner's character, Jaime Sommers, on *The Bionic Woman* (on the film's audio commentary, Caouette states that a sequence in which she is trapped in a mental institution and having a breakdown on *The Bionic Woman* reminds him of Renee). Jason Voorhees and his mother are a couple of outsiders who feel devastatingly, passionately devoted to one another. This type of mother-son relationship leads to murder in the *Friday the 13th* series, and cohabitation and documentary filmmaking in *Tarnation*. Finally, Caouette's use of the scene from *Friday the 13th Part II* finds an experimental quality in the moment that makes it fit appropriately side by side with Paul Morrissey's *Trash* and the work of the Kuchar Brothers, Kenneth Anger, and Jack Smith, all of whose work seems to

have influenced Caouette (as various critics have noted).²⁸⁴ Caouette foregrounds the “cinephiliac moments” that he experiences watching all of the films he samples: moments of unique power and artistry. In his conflation of “high art” and “trash,” Caouette illuminates the profound, serious meanings that can be found by spectators and, perhaps particularly, trauma survivors, in “trash” films. Caouette’s engagement with “trash” is loving, serious, and sincere: in another word, cinephilic. Caouette’s film insists on trash films’ artistic integrity, their ability to communicate difficult emotions, and on their rich possibilities as cinephilic objects.

Caouette seems particularly drawn to horror movies’ abilities to convey rage, intense sadness, and anger. His “life organized around film” includes dressing up like film and TV characters and having outbursts at his family that lead them to commit him to mental institutions. Caouette juxtaposes the on-screen texts describing his destructive outbursts with footage of him looking and acting like Regan in *The Exorcist* (a professed favorite film), strongly bringing to mind the pathologized cinephiles of popular texts discussed in chapter one, all of which were released during the decades in which Caouette grew up. I find it tempting to wonder if one of the reasons that Caouette was so drawn to “disreputable” horror films, underground films, and B-movies is because those films, like him, were bodies stigmatized by the culture surrounding them. However, like that of Odette Springer, Caouette’s cinephilia is ultimately reparative (at least for him), leading to the cathartic creation of his film, significant success, and (it seems) an integrated relationship with his mother.

Several critics and commentators found that Caouette’s reparative process was not devoid of pathology. In particular, they questioned the ethics of the film, claiming that Caouette

²⁸⁴ See A.O. Scott, “Tracing a 20-Year Odyssey Across Hope and Despair,” *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 2004, n.p.; Matt Severson, “Live Through This: *Tarnation* Reviewed,” *Outword Magazine*, Nov. 25-Dec. 23, 2004, n.p. Accessed in the clipping file at The Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

exploited his mentally ill mother and the rest of his family. Several critics also suggested that his cinephilia was part of his ethically questionable filmmaking. In *Time Out: London*, Dave Calhoun writes:

The film's later scenes are clearly bred of an increasing urgency to complete the film and are dominated by the disturbing effects of Renee's more recent lithium overdose. Much of this is uncomfortable, not least when Caouette's grandfather begs him to switch off the camera. But, to my mind, Caouette is innocent of voyeurism or exploitation: this is a highly personal project born of a childish desire to understand the world through cinema. Unhealthy, perhaps, but never invalid and always intoxicating.²⁸⁵

The Sunday Times (London)'s critic, Cosmo Landesman, writes:

It is never honest about its attitude to the mother. Jonathan the loving son is sincerely distressed by her condition; but Jonathan the gay would-be filmmaker is enthralled by her. With her pigtailed and childish ditties, her battered beauty and vulnerability, she's Blanche DuBois and Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* In fact, she's the trashy, tragic woman Jonathan has always wanted to be.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Dave Calhoun, "Review: *Tarnation*," *Time Out: London*, April 20, 2005, n.p. Accessed at Margaret Herrick Library in clipping file for *Tarnation*.

²⁸⁶ Cosmo Landesman, "All About Me: Review of *Tarnation*," *The Sunday Times* (London), April 24, 2006, n.p. Accessed at Margaret Herrick Library in clipping file for *Tarnation*.

At the same time, several critics voice the opposing view: *The Village Voice*'s Rob Nelson wrote that "There's nothing the least bit distanced about the son's poignant attempts to connect with Mom, whose unconditional love is reciprocated through one of the most generously affectionate characterizations of a mother in all of movies."²⁸⁷ Phillip French of *The Observer* (London) writes: "There are times when sustaining a shot (of, for instance, Renee babbling incoherently) seems cruel. Yet the movie expresses the love Jonathan feels for his mother and grandparents."²⁸⁸ Matt Severson of *Outword* describes the film as "at once a stream-of-consciousness purging of rage, sorrow, and despair about a tortured childhood and also a multimedia love letter to his psychically ravaged mother."²⁸⁹

Caouette has defended the film, stating that his mother loves it, that he *did not* film her after her lithium overdose, that the controversial long shot of her dancing with a pumpkin was an example of them "having fun," and that he doesn't feel that a film about a family can be considered exploitative if it is made by a loving member of that family. His stance counteracts arguments made by Michelle Citron, John Stuart Katz, and Judith Milstein Katz, prominent scholars of autobiographical documentary (and, in Citron's case, an autobiographical documentary filmmaker herself. Reading the different views in relation to each other demonstrates that, when it comes to the ethics of autobiographical documentary, there are always at least two sides which are difficult to reconcile. They argue in several anthology chapters that, indeed, an autobiographical filmmaker can be *more* likely to exploit his or her family, because of various reasons including his or her family's unusual intimacy and emotional entanglement with

²⁸⁷ Rob Nelson, "Supersize Me," *Village Voice*, Feb. 4, 2004, 64.

²⁸⁸ Philip French, "Review: *Tarnation*," *The Observer* (London), April 24, 2005, 7.

²⁸⁹ Severson, n.p.

the filmmaker and their desire to help him or her succeed.²⁹⁰ Emphasizing the increasing gray area that forms when filmmakers make documentaries with their own families, Katz and Katz point to a scene in Bill Reid's *Coming Home* in which his father states that "I don't need you to come home and psychoanalyze me" and eventually leaves the room, much like the occasionally protesting subjects in *Tarnation*.²⁹¹

I am not interested in taking a side of this debate, as I don't know that one side can be defended definitively. The film makes both readings insistently possible, which makes sense coming in response to a movie that is partially about trauma's disruption of clear-cut narrative, and its necessary creation of ambivalence to one's surroundings. The movie (in particular, the cited scene in which Caouette's grandfather asks him to turn off the camera when confronted about whether or not he abused his daughter) demonstrates, and, I feel, comments honestly on the fact that the processing of domestic trauma, especially in any kind of a public forum, cannot, by its nature, exist without creating hurt and relational conflicts. *Tarnation* reveals that reparation cannot exist without pain, the trauma survivor's own and that of those around him.

Of particular relevance to this chapter are the ways in which the ethical questions surrounding the film contain within them ethical questions about Caouette's cinephilia. Calhoun's comment that "this is a highly personal project born of a childish desire to understand the world through cinema" converses interestingly with Landesman's comment that Caouette is

²⁹⁰ Michelle Citron, "Fleeing from Autobiographical Documentary: Autobiographical Film/Video and the "Ethics of Responsibility" in *Feminism and Documentary*, ed. Diane Waldman and Janet Walker (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 271-209; John Stuart Katz and Judith Milstein Katz, "Ethics and the Perception of Ethics in Autobiographical Documentary," in *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television*, eds. Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 119-136.

²⁹¹ Katz and Katz, 126.

enthralled by his mother because she's like Blanche DeBois and Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, "the trashy, tragic woman Jonathan has always wanted to be."

It seems very clear that Caouette is drawn to tragic women in sometimes "trashy" films and television programs because he sees himself, his mother, and their experiences in them. As Poletti and Caouette point out, a much commented on sequence in which 11-year-old Caouette dresses up and gives a monologue as a battered single mother is based on an Alfre Woodard monologue in the PBS version of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, the aforementioned episode of *The Bionic Woman* in which Jaime Sommers is locked up in a mental institution, and his mother's own experiences as a battered single mother.

I cannot blame Caouette for his relationship with female characters on screen. Just as male constructions of femaleness helped him to understand himself and his mother, his deep understanding of his mother also led to his understanding of and cathexis to them. His cinephilia is clearly part of what seems to have become a loving and realistically healthy relationship with his mother, which is explored even more deeply in his semi-sequel to *Tarnation*, *Walk Away Renee* (2011). *Tarnation* and *Walk Away Renee*, while male constructions of a female protagonist, ultimately strike me as Caouette's efforts to help audiences understand his mother as he does. I find this to be a noble and useful, if ideologically complicated, goal.

Almost all of the films quoted in *Tarnation* depict suffering, often traumatized women. Like the work of Tyler Perry and Lee Daniels, *Tarnation*'s focus on suffering women raises questions. Is there an element of misogyny in Caouette's cinephilia, or does his cinephilia (in conjunction with his depiction of his relationship with his mother) demonstrate that shared trauma creates productive cross-identification with people across genders? I am inclined to argue the latter. However, the work of Perry, Daniels, and Caouette begs another question that

problematizes that singular argument: What does it mean that the cross-gender identification that takes place for all of these filmmakers through their cinephilia is cross-gender identification with both the performances of actual women *and* female characters who are uniformly written, directed, and otherwise constructed primarily by men? Through the work of Perry, Daniels, and Caouette, cross-gender media identification is powerfully enacted in a public forum. Yet, what finally results from it are more representations of women constructed by men. It seems telling that Odette Springer's cinephilia is rooted in a far less adoring, more painful spectator interaction with women suffering in genre films.

I find myself looking for an answer to this question, but one doesn't come. The answer, or argument, that seems most persuasive to me is that Jonathan Caouette's public cinephilia, and the public cinephilia of all of the cinephiles examined in this chapter, reveal definitively that cinephilia, like trauma, is too individualized, too wrapped up with complicated emotions and deeply rooted issues of identity, to ever be ideologically neat (or, as so many have suggested, apolitical). The works discussed in this chapter demonstrate that more diverse voices are endlessly needed.

Conclusion:

While I was in the final phases of writing this dissertation, a controversy broke out in academia regarding triggers in the classroom. As the controversy blazed, I geared up to teach what seemed to me to be the most triggering course imaginable: “American Genre Films and Domestic Trauma,” which examined how melodrama, horror, and comedy films depicted subjects including physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and rape throughout American film history. Teaching this course taught me about my dissertation’s important relationship to the trigger warning controversy on college campuses. However, before I explain how, it seems useful to outline the controversy in some more detail.

The university system’s efforts to move towards incorporating trigger warnings in the classroom was emblemized by an extensive trigger warning policy in Oberlin College’s Sexual Offense Resource Guide, published early in the 2013 academic school year. The policy defined a trigger as material that “recalls a traumatic event to an individual,” and advised faculty members to “[u]nderstand triggers, avoid unnecessary triggers, and provide trigger warnings.”²⁹² It argued that experiencing a trigger will “almost always disrupt a student’s learning and may make some students feel unsafe in your classroom.”²⁹³ The policy said that if a triggering work was “too important to avoid,” professors should inform students about the material’s triggering possibilities and explain to students why the work was academically useful. It argued that professors “strongly consider developing a policy to make triggering material optional or offering students an alternative assignment using different materials.”²⁹⁴ Student organizations at

²⁹² Colleen Flaherty, “Oberlin backs down on ‘trigger warnings’ for professors who teach sensitive material,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 14, 2014. Accessed December 26, 2014 at <https://www.insidehighered.com>.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

other universities, including UC Santa Barbara and Scripps College, advocated the implementation of a similar system.²⁹⁵

Professors responded with protest. Faculty at Oberlin insisted that the classroom section of the resource guide be revised, with consultation of professors (who the authors of the report did not consult initially). On May 29, a group that called themselves “7 Humanities Professors” submitted an open letter to the widely read academic blog *Inside Higher Education* that the editors of the blog titled “Essay by faculty members about why they will not use trigger warnings.” The letter stated that

We are concerned about the movement on college campuses to mandate or encourage ‘trigger warnings’-notifications that class material may cause severe negative reactions-on class syllabuses. We are currently watching our colleagues receive phone calls from deans and other administrators investigating student complaints that they have included ‘triggering’ material in their courses, with or without warnings. We feel that this movement is already having a chilling effect on our teaching and pedagogy.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Bailey Loverin, “Trigger Warnings at UCSB,” *The Daily Nexus*, December 30, 2014. Accessed December 30, 2014 at <http://dailynexus.com/2014-03-11/trigger-warnings-at-ucsb/>; Jennie Jarvie, “Trigger Happy: The ‘trigger warning’ has spread from blogs to college classes. Can it be stopped?,” *The New Republic*, March 3, 2013. Accessed December 26, 2014 at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116842/trigger-warnings-have-spread-blogs-college-classes-thats-bad>.

²⁹⁶ Elizabeth Freeman et al, “Essay by faculty members about why they will not use trigger warnings,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 29, 2014. Accessed December 26, 2014 at www.insidehighered.com.

The writers of the letter, who included prominent Cinema and Media Studies scholar (and pioneering researcher of queer cinephilia) Patricia White, stated 10 reasons why they would not use trigger warnings on their syllabus. The reasons included that faculty could not predict what kinds of materials would trigger which students, that most faculty “are not trained to handle traumatic reactions,” and that they feared that campus administration would try to substitute ad hoc trigger warnings for much needed mental health resources on campus. Finally, they feared that students and administrators could use trigger warnings to target non-tenured faculty and queer faculty, faculty of color, and faculty teaching in gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, and the visual performing arts, “as the material these faculty members teach is by its nature unsettling and often feels immediate.”²⁹⁷

As I read endless heated dialogue about this topic on the internet and discussed it with my colleagues, I prepared the first lesson of my course, which introduced the course’s main concepts through the film *Mysterious Skin* (2004). Gregg Araki’s NC-17 rated, powerfully graphic film chronicles the lives of two male sexual abuse survivors who cyclically, painfully re-live their traumas in different ways. One recreates the experience again and again by working as a male prostitute specializing in older men, and the other represses his memories of abuse, converting (or, as Susannah Radstone may say, “mediating”) them into memories that he was abducted and abused by aliens. His post-traumatic, semi-fantastical memories are inspired by a show about alien abduction that he saw on television and science fiction movies.

When I met my students for the first time, before our screening of *Mysterious Skin*, I warned them that the film, and all of the films that we’d be watching throughout the quarter, explicitly represented domestic traumas in ways that could be triggering. I told them that if they

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

needed to leave a screening or two because of triggers, I would accept it. I only asked that they think about what it was about the film that triggered them and, if they felt comfortable, think about sharing it in our seminar or in a writing assignment. I told them that there were many mental health resources at UCLA that I encouraged them to use if the class brought up difficult emotions for them.

The next morning, in our first seminar, I was shocked by the students' responses to the film. Several students said that the movie so disturbed and fascinated them that they felt they needed to watch it again as soon as they got home from the screening. Several more students said that they felt so haunted by the film that they called up friends and made *them* immediately watch the movie, so that they could have a conversation about it with somebody. I asked one student what it was like talking about the movie with her friend, and she replied: "It made me feel better about what I'd seen. It helped me deal with it." Throughout the quarter, the students dug into the material with a level of passion and enthusiasm that I hadn't seen before in my teaching. They seemed thrilled to delve into issues that were so vitally important and controversial, and yet still under-discussed and even forbidden. Although I am not a trained therapist, and did not try to serve similar functions to a therapist in class, I do believe that watching, discussing, contextualizing, researching, and writing about many genre films, each of which dealt with trauma explicitly but in different ways, made the students in the class "feel better" about dealing with the reality of trauma in the culture in which they lived.

Throughout the quarter, a student who seemed painfully shy and uncomfortable at the beginning of the class gradually opened up and became one of the class' most active participants. I was very moved when, in her presentation of her final project, she eloquently explained how her own experience of domestic trauma informed the ideas behind her work to the entire class.

She later wrote me a letter telling me that, while the materials in class had occasionally been difficult, and even triggering, for her to watch, she felt that the class—in conjunction with mental health services on campus—had helped her deal with her difficult traumatic experience, and its resulting emotional impact. I feel that my course created further evidence of the argument that I've aimed to make throughout this dissertation: That media that triggers a person who has encountered domestic trauma can carry within it the most reparative possibilities, especially when it is encountered in a safe context that is devoted to reflecting upon, interpreting, and critically analyzing the emotions that the material provokes, including a therapist's office, an arena of creative production, or an academic environment. I would argue that it's ideal, even necessary—if not always practically possible—for the latter arenas to take place in conjunction with a professional therapeutic environment, at least for a time.

This dissertation has grappled with American culture's constant battle between publicly showing people media that resonates with traumatic experiences to facilitate interpretation and/or reparation, and repressing such media in order to “protect people” from the affects that it may inspire. I worry that the current trend towards encouraging people to avoid “triggers,” which is taking place inside and outside of the academy, may be another well-meaning, but ultimately counter-productive, form of cultural repression and dissociation that keeps people superficially safe from dealing with the emotions attached to traumatic experiences (their own, and those of others). As I've hopefully demonstrated throughout this project, such repression and dissociation can ultimately contribute to the dangerous invisibility that always threatens to engulf trauma, and especially the more “private” domestic trauma, keeping survivors in its thrall. I hope that this dissertation has persuasively suggested that media encounters with triggering material can be productive and even necessary, and that we (academics and non-academics alike) must

ultimately pay attention to formulating safe, productive contexts in which these encounters can take place, rather than keep the encounters from taking place at all.

I hope that this dissertation constitutes the beginning of what will be a long process of gathering case studies about the relationship between trauma and cinephilia/media spectatorship that will help us to continue to tease out how this relationship works and what it means, for individuals, and for collective cultures. I hope that it constitutes one of the early contributions to a body of scholarship to which other people will add, rather than the final word. As I've researched and written this work, I've identified further areas of research that I plan to explore in this ongoing project.

My dissertation began with a discussion of the ways in which the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia has been pathologized in mainstream popular culture. I begin my look towards the future of this subject with a discussion of a notable new way in which this topic has manifested itself in popular culture recently. In the last few years, Disney (the most mainstream and "family friendly" of studios) has made an effort to re-brand itself as a company whose media productions serve therapeutic functions, including the treatment of trauma. For example, the 2013 film *Saving Mr. Banks* (John Lee Hancock) makes the compelling (albeit historically questionable) argument that P.L. Travers, author of *Mary Poppins* (1934), processed her traumatic relationship with her abusive, alcoholic father by assisting with the production of her book's 1964 film adaptation.

My research on Disney has inspired me to think more broadly about the ways in which people use film spectatorship as a therapeutic tool. Ron Suskind's widely read *New York Times* article "Reaching My Son Through Autism," and his recent book *Life, Animated* (published by Disney in 2014) chronicle the life of his son, Owen, who rapidly, unexpectedly developed autism

at the age of three. This sudden-onset autism depleted his ability to communicate. Suskind movingly chronicles how Owen learned to process and express his emotions by obsessively watching, re-enacting, and drawing images from Disney films. Subsequently, Owen's family learned to communicate with him by "playing" co-stars of the characters with whom he so strongly identified. In my future research, I plan to examine this case, which suggests provocative connections between cinephilia that manifests itself in the wake of post-traumatic stress and autism. These challenging conditions are highly different from one another, and yet are similar in their unusually complex inter-weaving of the psychological, the emotional, and the physical. Furthermore, the case presents an unusual example of a family using the cinephilia of their son (who experiences a difficult neurological condition, if not a trauma) to grapple with their own traumatic experiences of losing the ability to communicate with him.

This dissertation has focused on relationships between domestic trauma and cinephilia that take place within American culture. In the future, I hope to examine several recently released films that deal with the ways in which the relationship between domestic trauma and cinephilia can be explicitly informed by national identity, and transnational issues. In the documentary *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012), several hit men in Indonesia reveal the ways in which their crimes, and later post-traumatic stress disorder, were influenced by their profoundly disturbing investments in American genre films. *Tony Manero* (Pablo Larrain, 2008), a Chilean fiction film and overt political commentary, chronicles the experiences of a man living during Pinochet's traumatic dictatorship, whose obsession with *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977) inspires him to kill several strangers. *Tony Manero* creates a fascinating conversation with Alberto Fuguet's semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical novel *The Movies of My Life* (2009). The book's narrator, a Chilean-American man, builds each chapter around a

movie that influenced him during his childhood. The book's main character, like its author, spends his early childhood and adolescence in Encino, CA in the 1960s and 1970s, before he and his family return to Chile to live with his wealthy grandparents during Pinochet's regime. The Hollywood movies that he loves take on new meaning when viewed in Chile, where he feels like a foreigner and is deeply affected by both the tumultuous socio-political environment and a painful domestic environment. The book uncannily resonates with *Tony Manero* when its narrator describes the night that he missed the theatrical opening of *Saturday Night Fever*, because he had to go to the airport to send his father off to visit America. His father never returns, abandoning him and his family and leading to a particularly devastating period in their lives. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Jacqueline Najuma Stewart suggests that novels like *The Bluest Eye* and *Native Son* can offer clues to otherwise undocumented histories of African American spectatorship.²⁹⁸ *Tony Manero* and *The Movies of My Life* serve as similar portals, allowing us to begin to put together pieces of evidence to explore what it meant to be a cinephile and trauma survivor (and, in the case of *Tony Manero*, a trauma perpetrator) in Chile in the 1970s. *Saturday Night Fever* actually opened in Chile in 1978. These fictional and semi-fictional works beg the question, what did it mean to real people who lived there?

A trauma survivor's cinephilia is often inspired by his or her desire to know that he or she is not alone in experiences that sometimes feel strange and isolating. One might argue that such a craving is also a fundamental part of the identities of most cinema and media scholars. Like trauma survivors and cinephiles, cinema and media studies scholars are people who "see differently," and crave to share their unique experiences with others. Indeed, I would argue that most cinema and media studies scholarship could also be described as cinephilic production, akin

²⁹⁸ Stuart, 93-114.

to the cinephilic productions examined throughout this project. In my future work, I hope to delve deeper into the notion of cinema and media studies scholarship as cinephilic production, and to foreground and illuminate the role that autobiography might play in such work. Scholars like Kathleen A. McHugh, Vivian Sobchack, Michelle Citron, and Ann Cvetkovich have begun this work.²⁹⁹ I would like to build on the work of these scholars by exploring the ways in which autobiography can meld effectively with theories and histories of trauma and cinephilia. In Kier-La Janisse's recently published book *House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films*, Janisse combines engagement with scholarship on horror films and gender, critical analysis of film texts, and autobiography. She uses her book's unique, autobiographical narrative format in order to demonstrate the ways in which she understood her own traumatic experiences through her cinephilic engagement with representations of "psychotic women" in horror and exploitation films. At the same time, this format illuminates the ways in which her own traumatic experiences informed her understanding of horror and exploitation films' form, content, and ideology. One of Janisse's fundamental, highly persuasive, arguments is that autobiographical film criticism reveals functions of women's spectatorship for which more traditional theory cannot account.³⁰⁰

In future work, I hope to place Janisse's work in conversation with my own history of cinephilia (which, in some ways, uncannily resonates with hers), in order to advocate for more scholarship that blurs the line between traditional academic theory and history, and the kinds of

²⁹⁹ See McHugh, "Women in Traffic: LA Autobiography"; Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* and "The Leech Woman's Revenge"; Keathley, *Cinephilia and History or The Wind in the Trees*, 153-179; Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*; Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 1-15.

³⁰⁰ Kier-La Janisse, *House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films* (England: FAB Press, 2012).

creative, autobiographical productions that I have highlighted in this project.³⁰¹ However, I firmly believe that before one can successfully write in-depth autobiographical scholarship, one must first be able to identify how his or her own experiences relate to the experiences of others, to the culture in which he or she has had these experiences, and to the broader histories of which he or she is a part. As many social groups (including trauma survivors) have established, there is tremendous social, political, and emotional power in establishing that one is not alone in seemingly isolated and emotionally oppressive experiences. At the same time, I could not have written this scholarship without knowledge gleaned from my own experiences of domestic trauma and cinephilia. I believe that those experiences, and the autobiographical experiences of other scholars, could become part of uniquely illuminating work.

For now, I hope that I have established that to see in the wake of trauma is to see differently, and that to see media differently and put its pieces together constructively in order to build one's own life is a profound, creative act. It can also be a brave, necessary, political act of survival. This dissertation has aimed to break down academic boundaries, such as those that separate fandom from cinephilia, cinephilia from pain, high from low culture spectatorship, fantasy from truth, spectatorship from production, and trauma from pleasure. At the same time, it has aimed to break down the barriers of time and place that have separated its central cinephiles, and point to the existence of a community of people who share alternately highly individualized and strikingly similar experiences of trauma informed cinephilia. This community transcends the subjects of my project, and it is perhaps additional members who I would like to reach most. I hope that this project, like the movies that have let people know that they are not alone in their

³⁰¹The increasing prominence of video essays is already beginning to blur these boundaries, usually without an element of autobiography. However, I would argue that documentaries like *Some Nudity Required* and *Tarnation* suggests a multitude of ways in which the video essay can accommodate both film theory and autobiography.

experiences, will continue to diminish trauma's isolating, silencing tendencies by demonstrating that people who have dealt with trauma using cinephilia are part of a community with a long history of defiant self-empowerment, only now becoming visible as one.

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