

# Drawing on/from a mirror

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## A self-reflexive study of the representation and perception of violence in contemporary film



This thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Visual Art in the Faculty of Arts, at Stellenbosch University

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date: March 2011

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

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The cinematic communication process starts with the creative enunciation by the filmmaker and ends with the viewer's subjective perception of the film. This thesis represents a theoretical and experiential investigation of this process and entails critical and self-reflexive discussions of stylistic approaches to filmic representation. The focus of this representation falls on on-screen violence. This study is a practice-led process, and therefore the fields of research are applied to my own work, namely the filmmaking process of a feature film entitled *Preek*.

The research was prompted by my need to take an academic stance on the filmmaking process, instead of a mere practical one, and to form an intellectual awareness of the filmmaker and viewer dynamic. As a practicing filmmaker interested in the mimetic quality of film representations, it was necessary for me to form a conscious apprehension of how a film may be understood as a reflection on reality on the one hand, and an expression formulated through the filmmakers creative decisions on the other.

The representation of violence in film was investigated by the way of critical readings of selected films, framed by both contemporary and classical film theory. Through contemporary film theory, I investigated the viewer's perception and identification with the film's diegesis, and particularly with its characters. The 'classic' film theories of the realists and formalists allowed me to discern two stylistic approaches to the representation of violence in film, and to explore the emotional affect and cathartic release these approaches may elicit from viewers. These discussions were then applied to my own film *Preek*, in order to critically understand the relationship between filmmaker and viewer.

The research and the application thereof, indicated that the stylistic approach to the representation of violence and its intensity in a film, unveils the filmmaker's motivation for communicating through the film medium. The arguments showed that I represented the violence in *Preek* in such a way that it may result in a traumatic affect on the viewer rather than an appreciation of its aesthetic value, and that this affect is the result of an engagement with the film's diegesis, due to the viewer's own identificatory participation. The research concluded that the viewer's subjective identification with the film forms a triangular relationship and communication between filmmaker, film and viewer.

## Opsomming

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Die kinematiese kommunikasieproses begin met die kreatiewe uitdrukking van die filmmaker, en eindig met die kyker se subjektiewe waarneming van die film. Hierdie tesis verteenwoordig 'n teoretiese en ervaringsgerigte ondersoek van die kinematiese kommunikasieproses, en behels kritiese en self-reflektiewe argumente van stilistiese benaderings tot filmiese uitbeelding. Die fokus van hierdie uitbeelding is op geweld gerig. Die navorsing is 'n prakties-georiënteerde studie en daarom word die navorsing op my eie werk toegepas, naamlik die filmmaak-proses van die vollengte film, *Preek*.

Die navorsing was aangespoor deur my behoefte daaraan om die filmmaak-proses vanuit 'n akademiese oogpunt te benader, in plaas daarvan om 'n suiwer praktiese posisie teenoor die filmmaak-proses in te neem. Vervolgens is die navorsing aangespoor deur my behoefte daaraan om intellektuele bewustheid oor die dinamika tussen die filmmaker en kyker te skep. As 'n praktiserende filmmaker wat geïnteresseerd is in die mimetiese eienskap van film-uitbeeldings, was dit vir my belangrik om 'n duidelike begrip te ontwikkel van die manier waarop film verstaan kan word, eerstens as 'n weerspieëling van realiteit, en tweedens as 'n uitdrukking wat deur die kreatiewe besluite van die filmmaker gevorm is.

Die verteenwoordiging van geweld in films is ondersoek deur middel van die kritiese beskouing van uitgesoekte films wat deur beide kontemporêre en klassieke film-teorie gevorm is. Ek het deur kontemporêre film teorie die kyker se waarneming en vereenselwiging met die film se *diegesis* en veral die film se karakters, ondersoek. Die klassieke film teorieë van die realiste en formaliste het my in staat gestel om tussen twee stilistiese benaderings tot die uitbeelding van geweld in film te onderskei, en om die emosionele *affect* en katartiese vrystelling wat hierdie benaderings by die kyker kan ontlok, te verken. Hierdie besprekings is gevolglik toegepas op my film, *Preek*, ten einde 'n kritiese begrip van die verhouding tussen filmmaker en kyker te vorm.

Die navorsing en die toepassing daarvan het getoon dat die stilistiese benadering tot die uitbeelding van geweld, asook die intensiteit daarvan in film, die filmmaker se motivering tot kommunikasie deur die film-medium ontbloot. Die argumente het getoon dat ek die geweld in *Preek* op so 'n manier uitgebeeld het dat dit 'n traumatise *affect* op die kyker kan hê, in plaas van 'n waardering vir estetiese. Die argumente het verder aangedui dat hierdie *affect* die resultaat is van 'n betrokkenheid by die film se *diegesis*, en dat dit te danke is aan die kyker se deelname aan vereenselwiging. Die navorsing het die slotsom gekom dat die kyker se subjektiewe identifikasie met die film 'n driedelige verhouding tussen filmmaker, film en die kyker vorm.

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## Introduction

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This thesis acts as a companion piece to my film *Preek*, which constitutes the practical component of my Masters degree, but in its own right it serves as a theoretical and experiential study of ways in which film may be understood as a system of communication between filmmaker and audience.<sup>1</sup> The thesis will take the form of a critically self-reflexive discussion of the representation and perception of violence in contemporary film. It is a practice-led process, as the aim of the thesis is to apply the fields of research to my own work, namely the writing, production and direction of a feature film entitled *Preek*.

My argument takes the position that the representation of violence in a specific film indicates the core of that film's nature and form, and particularly the relationship between the filmmaker, the film and the audience.

I intend to do this by investigating the representation of violence in film, by the way of critical readings of selected films, framed by both contemporary as well as classical film theory. I have selected several examples through which to elucidate and expand my argument, including *A Prophet* (Audiard, 2009), *Oldboy* (Park, 2003), *Kill Bill Vol.1* (Tarantino, 2004) and *Hidden* (Haneke, 2005) and will apply these ideas to my own film *Preek*, in order to critically reflect on my own filmmaking process, and by extension, my own experience and understanding of the relationship between filmmaker and viewer.

### ***Preek* as the Starting Point**

*Preek* narrates the story about the search for and the interrogation of the self by a young Afrikaans theology student, Lourens, who is obsessed with the idea of recognition and bases his thoughts on Biblical figures. Lourens has never known his biological father and has always longed for a relationship with his stepfather, Bertus, from whom he desperately seeks acknowledgement. When Bertus is nearing his death, he admits that he had once had another family and son of his own (Egbert) whom he last saw at the age of two. With strong resoluteness, Lourens imposes the task upon himself to track Egbert down so that father and son may be reunited. At the same time we follow the story of Egbert who has entered the dark, underground world of drug trafficking and who has recently lost his close friend through a deal gone wrong. One day, during his self-appointed assignment, Lourens is dragged along to a revenge scene where he witnesses Egbert commit murder. After an intense emotional struggle, Lourens concludes that a

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<sup>1</sup> In my thesis I will refer predominantly to fictional film and therefore all reflection on film, motion picture or cinema should be understood in reference to it, unless stated otherwise.

*decision over life and death has been placed on his shoulders, the result being that of total destruction. His salvation only finally comes after he understands true sacrifice.*

As a project, *Preek* represents my interest in communicating a narrative through the film medium. The ideas discussed in this thesis grew out of, and were extended by the film-making process itself, from the scriptwriting process to pre-production, production and post-production (editing and sound design), so it therefore needs to be discussed how the film developed. At the starting point of the process, the most important aspect for me was the story. I wanted to make a narrative film in a very conventional way. Yvette Biro writes: "Film is always a story. It is a representation of a significant action, no matter how extraordinary or irregular that action may be." (1982: 9). This is a narrative principle which shows the most elementary conception of a film – the simplicity of a story – which in turn requires certain choices with respect to the formal devices most appropriate to 'carry' the story.

Following this, I was free from experimenting and arguing with the medium's limits, which can be supported by Siegfried Kracauer who states that "...each medium has a specific nature which invites certain kinds of communications while obstructing others" (1960:3). As a student in fine arts I was always under the impression that these restrictions are to be challenged, and I still believe it to be a positive action to do so in certain cases, yet working within the limitations (or rather certain limitations) of film was something that greatly appealed to me. Within these limits, one can explore very freely. Working within a tradition of storytelling through narrative structure, portrayed by moving images and sound, I am able to communicate to an audience so that they may "...construct the diegetic space and time of the narrative" (Hedges, 1980: 288).<sup>2</sup> This relationship is still as challenging and rewarding for both filmmaker and audience as ever. Riccioto Canudo already wrote in 1911 that

By presenting a succession of gestures, of represented attitudes, just as real life does in transporting the picture from space, where it existed immobile and enduring, into time, where it appears and is

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<sup>2</sup> The diegetic time refers to the "amount of time that the narrative embraces" and the diegetic space is the "mental image of the space within which the narrative takes place, as constituted by the viewer's imagination" <sup>2</sup>(Hedges, 1980: 288). The diegetic narrative is the mediated story constituted by the viewer through his understanding brought about by the diegetic space and time. The diegesis of the film can thus be seen as the realm or 'world' in which the narrative of the film takes place. Further more, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis states that Diegesis refers to the "posited events and characters of a narrative, i.e. the signified of narrative content, the characters and actions taken as it were 'in themselves' without reference to their discursive mediation" (1992: 38).

immediately transformed, the cinematograph can allow us a glimpse of what it could become if a real, valid, directing idea could co-ordinate the pictures it produces along the ideal and profoundly significant line of a central aesthetic principle (2004: 33).

Canudo explains here that the ‘magic’ of the moving image lies in the way that it moves within the time and space to which it is bound. This is something that I did not wish to escape or ignore. Yet, how is space and time bound to the moving image? Inez Hedges writes:

Time and space are of course interdependent; in film the sense of passing time is carried by the image track – time is perceived in terms of space. Space, on the other hand, is temporalized, since it is the duration of projection that allows the screen image to be perceived in terms of space (1980: 28).

This also means that the diegetic narrative in the film may only exist when there is a mediated space portrayed through a continuum of moving images, be it a long take like in Jean Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game* (1939) (Tredell, 2002: 71), or Sergei Eisenstein’s meticulously edited ‘montages of attraction’ in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) (Tredell, 2002: 44). This is not to say that there may not be challenges to this framework and that some filmmakers do not move beyond this paradigm of space and time, yet I was certain that I wanted to work within these limitations film offers, with a strong emphasis on narrative flow.

In my undergraduate work and my previous short film done as a Masters student, *The Deep Sea World of a Day in the Life* (2004), I focussed my energy on producing oneiric and to a certain degree ‘magical realist’ short films.<sup>3</sup> My interest in using phantasmagorical<sup>4</sup> film sequences to explore the fantastical in the fluxing of memories and dreams, however began to waver shortly after the completion of *The Deep Sea World of a Day in the Life* and my interest in film’s ability to represent something ‘real’ began to move to the foreground. Yet, I hardly understood at that stage what it meant to have a ‘realist’ view of film. As far

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<sup>3</sup> According to M.H Abrahams’ *A glossary of Literary Terms* “the term magical realism, originally applied in the 1920’s to a school of painters, is used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Gunter Grass in Germany and John Fowles in England. These writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.” (Abrahams, 1999) Some magical realist literature and films still greatly appeal to me in that they, as Amaryll Chanady explains, are characterised by “two conflicting perspectives: An “enlightened” and rational view of reality and the acceptance of the supernatural as part of the everyday world” (Chanady, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Phantasmagoria – “A shifting and changing scene consisting of many elements, *esp.* one that is startling or extraordinary, or resembling or reminiscent of a dream, hallucination, etc.” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2009).

back as 1946, Maya Deren wrote that “My main criticism of the concept behind the usual abstract film is that it denies the special capacity of film to manipulate real elements as realities, and substitutes, exclusively, the elements of artifice” (2004: 65). My aim with the production of *Preek* was thus to produce a film in which I try to convey something ‘real’, with no magical realist elements and especially no form of abstraction, through a diegetic narrative, by implementing the cinematic apparatus. This prompts a consideration therefore, of how and to what extent ‘the real’ can be depicted and perceived in film. Because the thesis is a self-reflexive investigation, in order to understand my relation to the filmmaking process, my research question is also thus: To what extent do I understand and work with film as a reflection on reality on one hand, or to what extent do I engage with film as an experience beyond the real (in excess), as a result of formalist choices driven by subjective, aesthetic and imaginative ideas on the other?

My longstanding interest in the representation of violence in film was a significant motivation behind this project. I decided to investigate it by presenting a violent event through the actions of a character, which may result in a cathartic release for the character concerned and for the viewer who views. Here, catharsis refers to the “ideas of clarification, and purification as well as purgation”. Through this concept of catharsis it may be argued that the viewing of a violent representation may render “the mind more healthy...by providing a safe outlet for ‘unsafe’ emotions” (McCauley, 1998: 147).

The English words ‘violence’ and ‘violent’ come from two Latin words, *violentus*, an adjective meaning forcible, vehement, violent, impetuous, boisterous; and *violare*, a verb meaning to treat with violence, to injure, to dishonour, to outrage, to violate. *Violentus* concerns itself with the agent acting and is primarily descriptive; *violare* looks to the effect of an action on another. (Wade, 1971: 370). The significance of both these terms was necessary to explore in the film. The violent action in *Preek* had to carry a certain weight, which will make the emotional affect (the *violare*) stronger.

In *The Dictionary of Critical Theory*, David Macey states that psychoanalysis defines affect as “a quantity of psychic energy or a sum of excitation accompanying events that takes place in the life of the psyche” (2001: 5). Macey further states that affect is a “trace or residue that is aroused or reactivated through the repetition of that event or by some equivalent to it” (2001: 5). Cathartic purgation and affect are concepts that will be referred to throughout the thesis in relation to the representation of violence in films.

The film I planned to write and produce had to move away from violence as mere spectacle, and for this I looked at films like Michael Haneke’s *Hidden* (2005) and Jacques Audiard’s *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005), where the violence is exceedingly traumatic, and depicted in such a way, I maintain, as to produce powerful emotional affect. I was also interested in the violent act that a murderer takes upon

himself and his or her emotional response to it, which was what I was most influenced by in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The murder that Raskolnikov commits in the book resulted in significant emotional affect for me, which I wanted to mirror in a way through the murder in *Preek*. The ideological ideas of my main character also have a lot in common with Raskolnikov's ideals, which leads him to believe in his act of murder.

It is interesting here to consider affect in relation to an intellectual interpretation of a film or an emotional response to it. Viewers watching film as entertainment are likely to be occupied with the second, rather than the first, situation. This speaks in some way to the difference between spectacle and an intellectual reflection. I am convinced that some films focus heavily on the visual and aesthetic spectacle whereas others consider more carefully the traumatic implications of the violence committed. Affect is involved in an embodied looking/experiencing – this is a principle aspect of the concept, which influenced me greatly.

My critical and experiential investigation into the different approaches to violence also made me more aware of the fact that representation and perception in film depends both on *what* is shown and *how* it is shown. In semiotic terms, this refers to the denotative and connotative aspects of a signifier.

## **Motivation**

The thesis was motivated by my need to go beyond an understanding of the technical process of filmmaking and to become aware of a filmmaker and viewer dynamic. An exposition of the technical aspects of filmmaking may certainly help a filmmaker to develop a stylistic approach to practicing his or her craft, but it contributes only a small portion to the understanding of how and what a film communicates. A technical understanding of film gives a filmmaker tools, but how and when to use them can only be understood through knowledge of film as a complex signifying system containing meanings, paradoxes and portrayals, which convey something about ourselves and the world we live in. As Leo Braudy writes, “It [the knowledge of technical details] begins to contaminate and confuse when it begins to disintegrate the understanding of film, emphasizing the steps in the filmmaking process rather than the final film and its effect on its audience.” (1976: 34).

A further motivation for this practice-led research project is personal. Before embarking on this research, I had hardly ever thought about my motivation for making films. Why do I need to view and make films?

Filmmakers have different reasons for taking part in this “plastic art in motion”<sup>5</sup>. For example, Francois Truffaut writes that Bazin’s “...generosity made him lean more toward Renoir, who loved people, than toward Hitchcock, who loved only film” (1975: xvi).

These kinds of differences can be applied to many contemporary filmmakers as well – for instance Michael Haneke and Quentin Tarantino, who are two contemporary filmmakers whose work I will discuss. Where Haneke is interested in film as a psychological tool, Tarantino is interested in film as part of popular culture and his films draw greatly from specific genres and styles. It is thus imperative that the study of this thesis leads to a subjective and personal understanding of film and film representation, but nonetheless, with a critical and acute rendering of the theories being discussed.

## Literature Review

Within the thesis I refer to theories of film representation and perception, which have been thoroughly discussed by a variety of classical and contemporary film theories (Singer, 1998: 1). As my focus falls on the representation of violence in film, however, the concept of violence is discussed in the first chapter, with specific mention to the socio-anthropological studies done by David Riches in *The Anthropology of Violence* (1986). Through his discussions, the dynamics of a violent act is established, which is utilized in order to investigate violence in film. The book *Violence: Theory and Ethnography* (2002) by Pamela J. Steward and Andrew Strathern also offers good insight into Riches’ arguments. Further in the first chapter Graeme Newman’s *Understanding Violence* (1979), David Trend’s *The Myth of Media Violence* (2007) and Jeffrey H. Goldstein’s *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment* (1998) is used to investigate different ways of understanding violence and its application and implication in film. These three books are used for the reason that they give an excellent overview of violence and its use in the media.

How things are represented and what are represented in film, are issues as old as the medium itself with multiple arguments and no clear conclusions. However, it is productive to review the two overarching approaches to film theory. First, there was what is referred to today as the classic film theories of which there are two main tendencies, namely the formalist tendency and the realist tendency. Theorists such as

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<sup>5</sup> Riccioto Canudo (1911: 33) suggested that “...the successful cinematograph film can fix and reproduce them (pictures) *ad infinitum*. In fixing them, it performs an action previously reserved to painting, or to that weak, merely mechanical copy of painting which is photography...we are able, therefore, to think of a plastic art in motion, the sixth art.”

Sergei Eisenstein (1898 – 1948), Rudolph Arnheim (1904 - 2007) and Béla Balázs (1884 - 1949), are acknowledged as formalists (Singer, 1998: 1). They arose during the silent film era, but persisted to write and produce work after the advent of sound in cinema<sup>6</sup>. André Bazin (1918 – 1958)<sup>7</sup> and Siegfried Kracauer (1889 – 1966) are considered realists whose arguments are opposed to the earlier formalists. Although the time-span of these two tendencies stretches from 1922, with the writings of Eisenstein, to 1960, when Kracauer's *Theory of Film* was published, the oppositional differences between the two tendencies' approach to film has led to "acrimonious debates" (Singer, 1998: 1) around stylistic approaches to film representation and how it should be perceived. Because the realists' approach is focussed more on the real and as I investigated it first during my filmmaking process, my discussions surrounding the classic film theories will start with them.

The classic film theories can be distinguished from the "so-called contemporary movement", which arose in the 1960's, and has involved many different fields of study such as Barthesian textual analysis, Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism and feminist theory (Casebier, 1991:3). This contemporary 'movement' "veered toward the possibility that one or another of the current developments in study might be more productive" for understanding the perception of film representations (Singer, 1998: 2). Yet, these theories are vast in the fields of study they incorporate, which is why one may agree with Noël Carrol (born 1947) who argues that the immensity of contemporary film theory may result in "extravagant ambiguity and vacuous abstraction" (1988a: 8). I therefore focus my discussions and investigations on specific theories: The psychoanalytic approach to representation and perception of the film image, particularly that espoused by Christian Metz (1931 - 1993) in especially his article *The Imaginary Signifier* (1975); and Noël Carrol's critical discussions of film theory (*Mystifying Movies: Fads & Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988) and *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (1988)).

The psychoanalytically-informed theories of Metz is partially based on Lacan's 'mirror stage' theory, in which Lacan argues that an infant between the ages of six to eighteen months will gradually develop from a state where he acknowledges his own image in the mirror as another child to the point where he recognises the mirror image as himself (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1988: 53). The analogy between film and

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<sup>6</sup> Eisenstein's writings on film span from 1922 until 1934 (Simpson, Utterson and Shepherdson, 2004: 99); Béla Balázs' from 1924 with *The Visible men* to 1952 with *The Theory of film*; and Arnheim's *Film* appeared in 1933. (Tredell, 2002: 23, 28)

<sup>7</sup> Bazin's great work *What is Cinema?*, was published in two volumes in 1958 and 1959 after his death (Tredell, 2002: 61), but the English translation was first published in 1967.

the mirror stage was first discovered by Jean-Louis Baudry (born 1930), who writes about this analogy between this mirror identification and the viewer's identification with the moving image on the screen in *Ideological Effects and the Basic Cinematic Apparatus*, (1985: 539). Because Metz's research on the subject is more extensive, and because the critical research of this theory was primarily based on his discussions, my writing on this topic will also focus more on his arguments rather than Baudry's.

Semiotic theory is a useful model to investigate how meaning is created through the film medium and how different meanings may be made from different representations of violence. I will therefore briefly discuss some of the overviews offered by James Monaco in *How to Read a Film* (1977) and Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis in *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* (1992). But as I have mentioned, different 'styles' of film-making are employed by filmmakers to various ends, not least of which is the nature of the emotional response these may elicit from a viewer. I thus turn my focus now to the two classical film theories, which I argue can be seen as the primary styles of filmic representation. Generally understood as oppositional styles, the two classical tendencies, namely realism and formalism, are mainly concerned with the essence of the nature of film and how it works as a representational medium.

For the discussions on realist film representations I mainly attend to the writings of André Bazin (1918 – 1958). Bazin argues that “photographic images are ontologically fundamental in film”<sup>8</sup>, but he also recognizes “the moral and social impact that can result from photography's ability to display what is factual in our existence” (Singer, 1998: 7). As he writes in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1960), “[Through film] we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-*presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space” (Bazin, 1996: 8).

In contrast, the formalists, for whom I focus my attention on the writings of Arnheim, Balázs and Eisenstein, argue that the most important element in film is the transforming of the real instead of merely reproducing or recording it. Arnheim writes about the ability of the filmmaker and states, “He shows the world not only as it appears objectively, but also subjectively. He creates new realities, in which things are duplicated, turns their movements and actions backwards, distorts them, retards and accelerates them” (1933: 135).

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<sup>8</sup> “Ontology is the enquiry into the *nature* of being and existence” (Casebier, 1991: 1).

## Objectives

Both of these tendencies have an ontological outlook on film, which is important for this study, and both have valuable arguments. My aim, through my own film project, is to find a critical space between these two opposing stylistic approaches, in order to create a position for my own practice as filmmaker. I do not however, intend to find a clear-cut answer to the age-old (and in my opinion futile) question, *What is Cinema?*, but I do intend to conclude this study with a focussed, personal and informed understanding of film through practice, which is ultimately subjective. By using examples from selected texts, film sequences and images, I will attempt to reflect on, not only the process of film-making, but also my own desire to make pictures in motion (and sound) rather than immobile and muted artefacts.

In order to address some issues of filmic representation I will focus my discussion, through the application of selected theoretical positions to representation of violence in film. Michel Mourlet writes that “cinema is the art most attuned to violence” (Mourlet, 1998), and I aim to argue that the representation of violence in a film contains the core of that specific film’s form of representation and may show more than anything else what the filmmaker’s relationship is to the film and the viewer. I will extend this point of view by discussing the stylistic approaches of the formalist and realist tendency as well as the perception and engagement thereof, through violent representations which are attuned to a specific approach.

The representation of violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004) will be used as an example of a formalist approach. I argue that it clearly shows what kind of film Quentin Tarantino desired to make and tries to convey to the audience. The aesthetic quality of the violence and the glorification of it are made clear through the way he formally represented it. His strong formal approach may have resulted in a transformation of “an object of moral outrage into one of aesthetic beauty” (Morales, 2003).

The same thinking may be applied to a film like *Hidden* (Michael Haneke, 2005), which will be used as an example of a realist approach. In Haneke’s film, the violence is represented in a much less stylised way. I will specifically refer to a single shot in which a character commits suicide in front of another by cutting his throat. The shot is continuous, during which the witness walks in and out of frame becoming increasingly nauseous. This indicates that Haneke has different motivations to Tarantino, and therefore desires to communicate in a different manner with the audience.

My argument can be framed as such: through the representation of violence in a film, the filmmaker reveals or communicates his relationship with the film and the audience. Through an in depth study of the realist and formalist film tendencies and by applying them to the representation of violence in film, I aim to find a productive and critical way to articulate my position as contemporary filmmaker.

## Structure

My thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter is concerned with violence and the nature and form it takes in different films. Because the notion or concept of violence is multi-faceted and conjures up a variety of arguments and positions in a broad range of fields like law, psychology, sociology and anthropology, it is important to be specific about the kinds of violence depicted in the films I discuss. The second part of the chapter begins with an overview of the motives for watching representations of violence in film, after which I offer a detailed discussion about representation and perception in film that will specifically be focussed on violence, and its related effects.

The second chapter of the thesis is an in depth discussion of the two classical film theories, namely the Realist tendency and the Formalist tendency. In this chapter, I also use the representation of violence in film as the focus area of discussion. Firstly, by applying Bazin's arguments, I discuss the realist argument for a stylistic approach that seeks to capture reality. I also discuss the aspects of the realist approach with which I agree, as well as those I oppose by focussing on the representation of violence in Michael Haneke's *Hidden*, as an example of the realist style. I follow a similar critical and structural approach in my discussion of the formalist tendency. I investigate the formalist argument that cinematic tools may be implemented to alter reality for the sake of aesthetic creativity, and point to this as a stylistic approach to portray meaning expressively, in order for the viewer to identify with the character. For this section I will use the film *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (Tarantino, 2004) as an example of cinema which may be accepted productively interpreted from a formalist point of view.

The third chapter starts with a clear discussion of my subjective position in relation to violence in both society as well as its representations in film, through which I indicate why I have chosen to represent violence and therefore what approach to the film communication I have taken. Through detailed synopses of the film and discussion of its narrative structure, I explain how the violence functions within the narrative. I also discuss how the narrative structure potentially affects the viewer's response to the murder sequence at the end of the film.

I apply the arguments about the stylistic approaches of the formalists and realists on the murder sequence at the end of *Preek*. Through this application, I investigate the relationship between (a) how I approached the representation, (b) what the image ultimately shows, (c) and what kind of affective responses it may evoke in the viewer. I make consistent reference to the triangular relationship between filmmaker, film and viewer, and discuss the building blocks of this relationship. From these investigations I come to a conclusion of how I see my position as filmmaker in relation to communication.

The thesis will thus present a theoretically informed study in film language, in which I attempt to explore the relationship between the filmmaker and the viewer while focussing on the representation of violence and its effect on the spectator, concluding with a personal, practice-led perspective of communicating through film, more specifically representations of violence in film and my position as filmmaker in relation to the image on the screen and the viewer in front of it.

## **Chapter One: Violent Acts: Understanding Violence and its Representation in Film**

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The aim of this chapter is to give a clear understanding of violence and its representation in film, and how a filmmaker's representation of violence clearly depicts his relationship with the film and his audience. Here I will also describe a specific type of violence, which I will focus on and describe how the understanding and representation of this violence in film, is subjective.

I first need to consider certain aspects human violence, which is a topic fraught with debate. Firstly, I will consider some of the reasons why violence figures so strongly in human experience, from my personal perspective, and give examples of how this violence may be understood. These questions need to be answered in order to offer some clear definitions of different types of violence, which in turn, will enable me to define the type of violence on which I will focus more closely in my discussions, which can be described as predicated on an ethical question of 'right vs. wrong', in terms of the decision to commit the act, and the consequences of the act. This is a definition of violence within legal discourse, broadly speaking.

After I have mapped out this type of violence, I will further discuss how it functions and operates. What does this kind of violence 'need' in order to occur? These are questions I aim to answer in this section, and in doing so, arrive at the proposition that this kind of violence is subjective and that its 'needs' and effects (and affects) differ greatly from one act of violence to another. What I arrive at from this then, is the question, which will take me further: If violence – the act, the effect and the affective reception - is subjective, to what extent will its representation and perception in film be as well?

The second part of this chapter will consist of a discussion of the representation of violence in film, where socio-cultural and psychological ways of understanding and narrating film will form the focus of my discussion. The first question I aim to answer here is: Why do we watch violent images? In engaging with this question, I will also explore why and how filmmakers represent violent imagery. Within this study, I will discuss psychoanalytical investigations of cinematic representation and how it pertains to filmic representations of violence. There will also be a brief discussion on how meaning can be made from these representations through a semiotic investigation of selected examples. This provides a context with which to engage and examine different ways in which violence is represented and perceived, in which case I will draw on my previous discussions of 'types' or 'functions' of violence. Finally this will indicate that there are mainly two stylistic approaches to the representation of violence in film.

## **1.1 Towards an understanding of violence**

The first part of this chapter serves as an introduction to violence which I will focus on in my thesis and my film and it therefore discusses violence as something visual. Through this section I strongly argue about the subjective responses to violence and how violence may be justified by some and condemned by others. For this argument I refer to David Riches' statement that there consists a triangle in the act of violence which comprises of the performer, the victim and the witness each of whom have different views of the act (1986: 11). This section also discusses the different functions and effects of violence and how these functions and effects differ as the context of the people involved differs. The same is also argued of the conditions for violent acts to be committed. There are different points of view for the conditions for violence to be acted out, yet the context, again plays an important role and this will also be discussed in some detail. The section serves as a basis for discussing the representation of violence in film and I therefore clearly outline the specific kind of violence I will refer to in my discussions of violence in film.

### **Violent pasts and presents**

From the outset, it is difficult to imagine a state of being where violence is completely absent. The word *violence* is written daily in newspapers, and seen and heard all around us. The idea of violence, I would suggest, is even more present during its absence, for even the very notion of peace is dependent on the existence of violence. Our history is grounded in it, and as such it has shaped so much of our identities. If I were to narrate my family history in South Africa, the most important beacons of the narrative would be states of warfare, from the Angolan War, the Second and First World Wars, all the way back to the Anglo Boer War and on.<sup>9</sup>

Historian Richard Slotkin argues that:

...violence has always informed American national identity, beginning with assaults by American settlers against the people they found on the new land, to the revolt of the new colonists against their European sponsors, to the American capture and importation of African people as slaves, to the annexation of Mexican territories to the American civil war (Trend, 2007: 35).

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<sup>9</sup> There is no written history of the Marnewick family, but discussions during family gatherings have indicated that some female members of the family were sent to concentration camps during the Anglo Boer War, and my grandfather has related his experience of troubling times during the second world war. My uncle has also served as a tracker in the Angolan War, of which there are things he refuses to speak about.

The same may also be applied to South African identities where it may be argued that black South African national identity is still mainly informed by the history of violence during the struggle against Apartheid, and it may be similarly argued that an Afrikaner National identity position remains grounded in the history of the Anglo Boer War. This suggests that we often use violent narratives to define our positions in a space.

In these cases, violence has pervaded literature, history studied at school and other ways of narrating such as music. Let's consider two songs which recently caused uproar in South Africa, ostensibly because they are seen to 'represent' oppositional national groups. In 2007 the song *De La Rey* became very popular among a large group of white Afrikaners. In it, the musician Bok van Blerk asks the eponymous Boer general to 'lead' them (the Afrikaner nation) once again. The controversy around this song was vested in what some believed was a call to arms.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, *Umshini Wami*, the song which became the 'theme song' for current South African President Jacob Zuma's election campaign (and continued to surface during pep rallies after his election) caused an uproar among (mainly) white South Africans, both English and Afrikaans-speaking, as it seemed to embody a threat of violent protest. The title may be translated as "Bring me my Machine Gun", and this refrain is repeated again and again in the song (Mail & Guardian, 2007).<sup>11</sup>

The controversy surrounding these songs – cultural artefacts which somehow seem to embody, even invoke direct action – suggests how much we rely on violence to define who we are. The issue of violence then is something that divides and shapes boundaries, which implies that violence has a strong association

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<sup>10</sup> The Guardian News & Media reported that some saw the popularity of the song as the "beginnings of a reassertion of Afrikaner identity from the ashes of apartheid", while others viewed it as "an attempt to rebrand Afrikaners from oppressors to victims by casting back to their suffering at the hands of the British as an analogy for the perceived injustices of life under black rule". The article also stated that South Africa's arts and culture minister at the time, Pallo Jordan, warned that the song "risks being hijacked by extreme rightwingers as a 'call to arms'" (McGreal, 2007: 23)

<sup>11</sup> In a Mail and Guardian article published on December 23, 2007, it was stated that Andrew Mlangeni, a former ANC combatant said "The song has military character used during the struggle against apartheid and it's no longer relevant today". Yet ANC Cabinet member Pallo Jordan claimed that "In any revolution one of the mobilising tools is culture and music .... Why should we abandon it?" (Mail & Guardian, 2007). Another song that has also caused greater ruction within South Africa, is the song "dubula ibhunu" (kill the boer), sung by the ANC Youth League president Julius Malema. In a more recent internet article it was stated that this song caused particular uproar at a meeting at the University of Johannesburg "as some people viewed it as advocating the killing of farmers" (news24.com, 2010).

with hegemony. In many instances, violence has been (and continues to be) justified in the name of justice and liberty and sanctioned by the state, sometimes as a defence measure (as with the United States' *war against terror*), and sometimes for its efficiency (as with Stalin's massacres during his reign) (Trend, 2007: 36). In these cases, violence may be seen as either destroying order or creating it. This is in opposition to what Richard Brown writes in his review of *Violence in American History*. Brown makes a distinction between "negative" and "positive" violence and stated that negative violence consists of violence that is not "in a direct way connected with any socially or historically constructive development", whereas positive violence consists of "police violence, revolutionary violence, the civil war, the Indian wars, vigilante violence and agrarian and labour violence (Newman, 1979: 60). Brown's assumptions pose certain problems as he accepts that violence is constructive when an 'ideal' party enforces it. This becomes problematic when one considers the view that order is subjective, as Pamela J. Steward and Andrew Strathern assert: "what constitutes order and how it is to be attained or maintained vary according to peoples' positions in society and according to their own personal perceptions" (2002: 2). They go on to suggest that "Violence pinpoints the differences between people's perceptions of what is proper and appropriate in different contexts of conflict" (2002: 3). People may also "agree on what constitutes violence, but differ on the issues of the appropriation and justification of it" (2002: 3).<sup>12</sup> This not only holds true for a collective (as with state-sanctioned violence), but also when it comes to individual actions, which is my primary focus here.

### **An anatomy of a violent act**

David Riches argues that "the performance of violence is inherently liable to be contested on the question of legitimacy" (Riches, 1986: 11). Riches is interested in creating what Steward and Strathern call a "transactional model of violence", in which subjectivity is a fundamental component (2002: 3). In this model he distinguishes between the viewpoints of the performer, victim and witness as subjective opinions of the violence, thereby forming the "triangle of violence" (Riches, 1986:11). If an act is committed, the performer may see the act as justified and therefore legitimate, however the victim may see the act as an unjustified violation against him. On the other hand, the viewpoint of the witness is much more complex, because although the witness does not participate in the physical act itself, s/he participates in the event by virtue of having watched it take place. An eyewitness' perspective of the act will be influenced by their physical position in relation to perpetrator or victim, or even their moral position, in terms of how they

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<sup>12</sup> This is a key idea as I will use this model to discuss the subjective nature of the representations and responses to violence in film later in the chapter.

make sense of the event. Both speak to a point of view with respect to the actual events, and their impact (emotional or otherwise) on those involved.<sup>13</sup>

What is important to note about this model at this point of the discussion is that it “satisfactorily takes into account the subjectivity of violence as a category of *action*” (Steward and Strathern, 2002: 3 - 4). However we assume violent acts’ legitimacy, one thing holds true as Jeffrey Goldstein explains: “violence constitutes an act, whether it be a physical force or emotional blow, intended to harm or destruct” (1998: 2). For this to occur there needs to be someone who commits the act and (at least) someone (or something) who is affected negatively by it. In the case of suicide, which itself is a violent act classified as a homicide (i.e. an unnatural death), the performer and victim are at the outset one and the same, yet as Steward and Strathern write, “...the cost is paid all at once and the ensuing consequences can be unfavourable only to the living.” (2002: 152). This shows that the position of the victim is not necessarily that clear (because s/he is simultaneously the perpetrator) and if there is a witness, then they may be affected in such a negative way that s/he becomes a victim. The suicide scene in *Hidden*, which I will later discuss in more detail, is in fact such a case.

From this point on I will focus extensively on the individual as a performer of the action; in other words, the agent of violence. Because I am dealing with a visual medium, my discussion is principally concerned with representations of acts of violence which lead to physical injury or other such damage. These forms of violence (that result in physical traces) are the ones best suited to filmic representation, especially the aesthetic representation thereof.<sup>14</sup>

How do we start to understand these actions? One thing is clear, as Riches points out: Violence is effective and anyone can do it. He further argues that for this reason, an individual or other parties who cannot

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<sup>13</sup> This model is of great importance for this thesis, as it is applicable to violence on screen where the viewer becomes the witness, but I will discuss this later in detail.

<sup>14</sup> It is also evident that these types violence are most commonly connected to criminal violence connected to the law. In a paper on the violent nature of crime in South Africa prepared by The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in June 2007, it was stated that criminal violence can be seen as “...applications, or threats, of physical force against a person, which can give rise to criminal or civil liability, whether severe or not and whether with or without a weapon. When more severe, such violence may be associated with intimate violations of the person and the potential to cause serious physical pain, injury or death” (The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2007). I do not imply that the enforcement of law plays a particularly important role in the representation of filmic violence, but it is evident that violent crimes may result in intensely visual injuries and/or emotional destruction.

achieve their ends by other means may resort to violence, because violence gains attention (1986:11). This constitutes violence as a rational action directed towards a specific goal, which he refers to as the *instrumental function* of violence. He goes so far as to suggest that “if an act of violence has no instrumental aim, it would not be performed” (1986: 25). As such, Riches implies that there needs to be a certain degree of “tactical pre-emption” before an act of violence is committed. The perpetrator/performer may legitimise the violence, whereas the victim sees it as a vile offence against him or her. An example here may be a murder that took place in 2008 at Nick Diederichs Technical High School in Krugersdorp, South Africa, in which a Grade Twelve learner attacked two school workers and murdered a fellow learner with a sword.<sup>15</sup> For a killing like this to be calculated, it needs to be legitimised by the performer and seen as an action towards a certain end, which in turn qualifies it as a rational or instrumental action.<sup>16</sup>

There is also another very strong element complicit in violent action: emotion. Apart from an instrumental function of violence, Riches does refer to an *expressive function*, which relates to the expression of emotion and passion, yet according to him this is a secondary function, which still depends on an instrumental function for the act to be committed (1986: 25). I do agree with Riches that in many cases, even though emotion plays an important role in the act of violence, a decision to act violently still has to be made in some form, and decisions rarely have no ground or rationale however subjectively motivated they may be. Newman states that “external stimuli (and internal stimuli for that matter) are cognitively processed by the individual,” which implies that “he must first interpret the situation around him as *threatening* or as some other condition, before his emotions are aroused, and he must also interpret his

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<sup>15</sup> The Mail and Guardian reported on August 18, 2008, that a troubled and bullied Grade Twelve boy, “wearing a black balaclava over a face smeared with black paint, entered the school premises with the sword and stabbed and killed a boy just before school assembly” (Mail & Guardian, 2008). He then went further and stabbed a gardener in the back and another gardener in the face, after which he threw the sword on the ground and his younger brother grabbed the weapon and ran away.

<sup>16</sup> Newman describes the behaviour of airmen during World War II as instrumental violence in the sense that “they had not the slightest anger toward their civilian victims”, so that the act “was carried out coldly and deliberately as a matter of policy,” which indicates that it was only carried out for a specific goal (Newman, 1979: 232). This argument may also be applied to more recent events such as the calculated attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, in which high-jacked passenger aircrafts, under the control of Al-Qaeda operatives, flew into the ‘twin towers’ of Manhattan’s World Trade Centre, destroying the buildings and leaving thousands of civilians dead. While Steward & Strathern and Newman agree that some instances of violence may be understood as a strategic rational act, they argue that it is not true for all cases (Steward & Strathern, 2002: 8).

internal state (emotions) before he express aggressive behaviour on the basis of his emotions.” (1979: 228).

What Newman puts forward concurs with Riches’ instrumental function of violence. Yet I would like to point out that, in many cases, violence is prompted by emotion or passion (the classic *crime passionnel*) rather than a specific goal. Here is a recent example. On February 1, 2010, The Cape Argus reported that a 47-year-old man from Mitchells Plain had been arrested for shooting and killing a 28-year-old man after eight men, armed with spades and weapons attacked his home during a family gathering over the weekend. They stated that the man “is accused of killing one of the men after they assaulted his teenage son. Police are investigating charges of murder against the 47-year-old man and charges of assault with the intent to do grievous bodily harm against the other two men” (Jooste & Barnes, 2010: 1). The issue here is not whether the killing of the 28-year-old man is justified by the law or not, but that the man’s emotions and fears played the dominant role in his actions and subjectively justified his actions. Even though the reaction to retaliate was a means to protect his family, his violent actions can only be a result of his strong emotions of anger and fear.

Graeme Newman defines this type of violence as a “Vehemence of personal feeling or action”, that is, “the heated vehement expression of personal feeling conveyed to victims and onlookers through action that inflicts injury or damage.” (1979: 2). This is an important definition as it suggests that emotional triggers have an enormous influence on violent actions.<sup>17</sup> “Angry or scared feelings do cause people to act out in violence...” as David Trend writes, “...sometimes people commit violence simply because they have become aroused or excited – as sometimes happens with police chasing suspects or with crowds at sporting events”(2007: 34). In cases like these, the aggressors did not plan or make a particularly rational decision to act out in violence, but were carried away by what Trend calls the “excitation transfer of the moment” (2007: 34). These emotional acts of violence shock us more than most rational acts, not because they are degenerate, but because they represent civilised human beings “out of control”.

Many violent acts are committed with both an instrumental function and its emotional counterpart (an expressive function), and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which is the primary function. Both functions however, are fundamentally important when it comes to the discussion of the representation of violence in film. Both these functions, each in its own way, are devices that may be used to heighten the narrative and ultimately the violence of a film.

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<sup>17</sup> It is also important as expressive violence seems to be a key characteristic of violent actions in films and will be discussed later in relation to cinema.

## Conditions of violent acts: Nature and Culture models

Because I am dealing with the individual as performer of the violent act (and as filmic representation, not actual), the question remains: what are the determining conditions for a performer to act in a violent way where so many other people do not? Whether one looks at the act as an instrumental or expressive function (or both), certain conditions need to be present for the performer to act, which in turn should be seen in context of the situation and the parties involved. This is important here, as it influences the way in which the violence is both represented and interpreted in certain films. I now turn to two distinct fields of discussion on violent behaviour<sup>18</sup>, namely violence as part of nature, and violence as a psychological action or consequence of illness.

The argument of violence as part of nature was the dominant perception of violence in Europe through the nineteenth century, which many believe originated with Thomas Malthus' published theory of "natural selection" in 1798, which had a significant influence on Charles Darwin.<sup>19</sup> Darwin's theory of evolution not only laid the groundwork for scientific research in genetics, but also promoted the study of human behaviour and social organisation. Trend refers to Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, the two most prominent voices of psychoanalysis, and argues that they both maintained, in their separate ways, that "the craving of violence was an inherent part of human nature." (Trend, 2007: 32). Trend further states that Jung was of the opinion that there are destructive "shadow" archetypes in the human mind, which come to the foreground in certain situations, such as when we are faced with violent representations, and arouse a moral confrontation; and Freud believed that the idea of violence was an important factor in human development and that there is always a certain violent "drive" inherent in the human mind, although most people could control it (Trend, 2007: 32).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David Trend actually refers to three discussions, the third of which is a discussion on collective violence. As I specifically deal with the violent acts of individuals, this discussion is not applicable to my thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Malthus explained that human population growth may cause a global epidemic of poverty and famine (Trend, 2007: 31). In *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin suggests that nature has its own way of dealing with the issue of overpopulation, writing that "under certain circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved and unfavourable ones to be destroyed" (Darwin, 1996). His argument contends that stronger animals would prevail over weaker ones and that violent behaviour among animals was a natural part of self-preservation.

<sup>20</sup> This violent 'drive' is also sometimes referred to as instinct, which according to Newman, may be defined as "a set of behavioral patterns which are innate, transmitted from one generation to the next, and usually elicited by some triggering mechanism in the environment or maturation factor..." (Newman, 1979: 211)

Through the twentieth century, the theories of Freud and Jung continued to affect the ideas of how to control or sublimate people's violent drives. By the 1960's, a scientific theory declared that people were born with a "threshold for violence" which is measurable with certain tests (Mark & Ervin, 1970: 6). Some psychoanalysts adopted the hypotheses of ethologists<sup>21</sup> and concluded that "both man [*sic*] and animal possess the two instincts of *love* and of aggression, but that whereas in the lower species these instinct are expressed as innate behaviour patterns that are largely unchangeable, they are highly modifiable by man" (Newman, 1979: 212).<sup>22</sup> This also refers to the fact that human beings do not 'need' to act violently to survive, but choose to do so. Why? Some ethologists suggest that it is a human's way of adapting to an ever-changing environment and that acting out of aggression is an 'instinct' for survival. This statement supports Riches' proposition that the primary function of violence is instrumental. A film that uses this notion to a large extent is Fernando Mareles' film *Blindness* (2007). In the film, the people of a certain city are struck by an unidentifiable epidemic which causes blindness. As the number of cases increase, the 'patients' are taken to an abandoned facility where they are left alone and forced to adapt to their new conditions, including sharing food, which leads to aggressive behaviour.

The theory of violence as a natural tendency with instrumental function provokes some very strong oppositional opinions, in that it assumes violence is controlled rather than taught. Let's consider the expressive function of violence within the hypothesis of violence as a natural act. There is something natural (understandable) about the expression of aggression in certain circumstances. One cannot deny that in an emotionally loaded situation, as when one is in a life-threatening position, one will lash out in violence in order to survive. Aggression is a definite psychological process of the brain, an argument which Trend attributes to the psychologist William James. When this emotion is upon us, our bodies change: "Butterflies in the stomach, rapid pulse, sweating etc." (Newman, 1979: 216). With this overpowering change, we feel the need to act out in aggression.

Yet not all theories on violence are positive about this hypothesis of human violence as a natural tendency or drive. Many psychologists and anthropologists like Ashley Montague and Hannah Arendt argue that

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<sup>21</sup> Ethology is the science of animal behaviour. The study of human behaviour and social organization from a biological perspective (New Oxford American Dictionary, Second edition, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> While acts of physical violence tend to be within the domain of masculine behaviour, and much of the literature adopts male gender pronouns, physical violence is not absent from female behaviour. Violent behaviour by men is perceived to be more 'normative'. Women who act violently are pathologised in particular ways, most specifically as they are seen to be acting in contravention of their 'natural' maternal instincts. The demonizing of Myra Hindley or Dina Rodriguez are cases in point.

people 'learn' to become violent through upbringing and social experiences.<sup>23</sup> There is also a strong agreement within the mental health profession that violent behaviour may be a result of cognitive and emotional processes. Within the cognitive model, violent behaviour is seen as something we may be 'educated' in from an early age. David Trend argues that if a child is constantly exposed to violent behaviour at home or in his immediate surroundings, he or she may find this to be normal behaviour in certain situations or contexts and act accordingly (2007: 34).

As in the theory of violence as part of human nature, violence in this context may also be either primarily instrumental or expressive. For instance, if a child is hit repeatedly out of anger, he may associate violent acts with aggressive emotion and will have a strong connection to the expressive qualities of violent acts. If a child learns, for instance, that violence may be used as a means to an end (instrumentally) and without any emotional or aggressive tendencies like using force to acquire food, the child may continue to use violence as an instrument of gain. Of course there are exceptions.

It is particularly difficult to distinguish the primary function of the violent act where frustration plays a role in the act of violence.<sup>24</sup> For example, if someone who has, in cognitive terms, learned to be violent, and becomes frustrated because someone has intervened in his goals for success, he may act out in violence in order to resume the position of success. In this case it is difficult to apply a primary function. So is the case with revenge as well.

The important point here is that violence should be sanctioned for the child to accept it as a norm, which disregards the notion that violent acts are something inherently part of us which needs to be controlled. The factors that contribute to attitudes and beliefs that sanction violence are, according to Trend, "Family, peers, social institutions and culture..." (Trend, 2007: 34).<sup>25</sup> I would also add personal history.

Apart from emotion as an expression of a cognitive process, emotional aggression also has to do with other psychological factors, such as memory and trauma. Repressed feelings about a traumatic experience can "slip out and result in violent behaviour from an event too painful to consciously think about." (Trend,

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<sup>23</sup> According to Trend, Montague states that "theories of evolution and natural selection had been used to provide excuses for human violence. People needed to take responsibility for violence." (Trend, 2007: 32). Trend also states that Hannah Arendt on the other hand argues that some social inequities, like poverty, provoke violence (Trend, 2007: 33).

<sup>24</sup> Graeme Newman wrote: "...frustration occurs when something or someone intervenes just as one has begun to reach for what one wants." (1979: 229).

<sup>25</sup> He also states that children learn violence from role models they wish to emulate (Trend, 2007: 34).

2002:34). This is the case where war veterans act out violently when recollections of trauma are triggered. Mental illness and personality disorders are other factors which may cause people to act out without the conscious ability to discern right from wrong. This is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to note that certain violent behavioural traits can be connected to certain neural system dynamics and chemical imbalances in the brain (1979:217).<sup>26</sup>

But it is not always the case. Graeme Newman states that people who have certain illnesses or personality traits connected to what Franz Alexander in 1930 called “the pure criminal” – “one who completely lacked guilt” (Newman, 1979: 237) – or what Professor Harrison Gough calls “psychopathic personality”,<sup>27</sup> do not necessarily act out in violent ways (Newman, 1979: 237 – 238).<sup>28</sup>

Through investigating these two opposing opinions on why certain people act out in violence, I have come to the conclusion that one cannot apply one argument to all actions of violence, but that the context of the act should be taken into account. In some cases one may act instinctively in a situation and lash out, yet one’s action cannot be removed from one’s own context in relation to upbringing, social and cultural indicators and other factors we use to sanction our actions. This refers back to Riches argument that violence pinpoints people’s different perceptions of what is justifiable in different situations and contexts (1986:11). Whether the act has a primarily instrumental or expressive function is also affected by the

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<sup>26</sup> As in a case described by Newman where a twenty two year old girl suffering from a brain disease assaulted people on twelve different occasions (1979:217).

<sup>27</sup> “The psychopath is described by professor Harrison Gough as ‘characterized by an over-evaluation of the immediate goals as opposed to remote or deferred ones; unconcern over the rights and privileges of others when recognizing that they could interfere with personal satisfaction in any way; impulsive behavior, or apparent incongruity between the strength and the stimulus and the magnitude of the behavioral response; inability to form deep or persistent attachments to other persons or to identify in interpersonal relationships; poor judgment and planning in attaining defined goals; apparent lack of anxiety and distress over social maladjustments and unwillingness or inability to consider maladjustment as such; a tendency to project blame onto others and to take no responsibility for failures; meaningless prevarication, often about trivial matters in situations where detection is inevitable; almost complete lack of dependability and of willingness to assume responsibility; and finally, emotional poverty’” (Newman, 1979: 238). This description thus shows that the psychopath will strongly believe that the violence that he commits (if he or she indeed commits violence) is legitimate through the lack of empathy for the victim’s position.

<sup>28</sup> Newman indicates that offenders with these traits could have histories which are either traumatic or filled with sanctioned violence, but the causes vary from offender to offender making it difficult to pinpoint (Newman, 1979: 244).

context and could be argued from different perspectives as I have stated with the example of frustration and aggressive action. The legitimacy of this act also depends highly on the context of the situation, although we should acknowledge that the legitimacy is highly subjective in that the performer, victim and witness all have different judgements about its justification.

## **Conclusion**

In this section I showed that violence indicates different ideas of what is ‘proper’ action to take in conflicting situations. Therefore, violence may be applauded in some contexts and condemned in others. This shows the subjective quality of violence and its effects. The chapter also indicated that Riches’ triangle, including the performer, victim and witness, supports this subjective characteristic of violence, where each party has a different viewpoint of the act itself.

When violence is considered from one or more of the perspectives discussed above, one accepts violence from a certain point of view. This may seem obvious, but it is an important point to make as a filmmaker, because if one takes a certain position in relation to a violent act, it will influence the motivation for representing it and the way it is represented. It therefore shows that violent acts within films play a particular role within the narrative structure. The context of the violence and the parties involved (Riches’ triangle) give the act meaning – and even multiple meaning if one considers the subjective perception of the act by those involved. In the next section, I will discuss how different stylistic representations of violence also contribute significantly to how the act is understood.

## 1.2 Screen Violence

Just as there are numerous types of violence committed in real life, there are numerous types of representation of it on screen, and just as there are different conditions for the violence to be acted out, there are different reasons why people expose themselves to its representations. Filmmakers represent violence in their films with certain intent because they want their violence to ‘do something’ to their viewers and have a certain meaning in the context of the film and the viewing. This is important as I will discuss my own motive for representing violence later on. It is important for me to first outline some of the motives for our voluntary exposure to violent imagery and why some people enjoy these representations, which will lead me to further discuss how violence ‘works’ to establish a viewer author dynamic.

In the previous section, I noted that violence is an intricate part of us and our histories, and that we can see it in the way we narrate ourselves and how we represent these narratives. Therefore violent representations are ingrained in our cultures and beliefs; they are part of both our lived experience and our imaginary. As David Trend writes: “For centuries violence has been an important element of storytelling and violent themes appear in the classical mythology of many nations, masterpieces of literature and art, folklore and fairytales, opera and theatre.” (2007: 3). Some of the most violent texts may be found in religious texts like the Bible<sup>29</sup>, which shows that moral and ethical issues have been taught for millennia, through the application of violence as conditioning method. This ubiquitous nature of violent representation has only grown with new media forms (like video games) of depicting and because film (and television) has become such an international format for communication, it has moved to the foreground. This has provoked some debates around the effects of the representation of violence on viewers (especially children), with specific emphasis on the question whether the viewing of violent imagery may cause violent behaviour.<sup>30</sup> Though there is little doubt that the repeated viewing of violent material has an effect on viewers (as one may argue from a cognitive perspective, which I discussed earlier), specifically how

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<sup>29</sup> One of the most violent texts I have read is a story in the Bible. A man, who was traveling with his wife and mother in law, spent a night in a strange town. During the night, men from the town hammered on his door and shouted that they wanted to have sexual relations with him, or they would kill him. The man, who feared for his life, offered them his wife instead, who was then raped to death by the men from the town. The morning after, her body was dismembered and the parts sent all over the country. (Bible. Judges 19: 1 – 30).

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Goldstein writes that “if there is one issue confronting filmmakers and entertainment producers right now, it is the level of violence that children are exposed to in the course of their daily lives and what role they play in promoting that.” (1998: 1)

this happens is the domain of psychology or sociology. My focus here is visual representation, specifically film, which in turn suggests entertainment and spectacle.

### **Why violence? The attraction of violence on screen**

It is apparent that some people expose themselves voluntarily to on-screen violence; that is, violence as entertainment. I include myself here. Violence on screen has definite entertainment value (Goldstein, 1998: 2). It is sensational, and a powerful aspect of the contemporary entertainment spectacle. Trend points out that “violent events in movies or television undoubtedly heighten the emotions viewer’s experience” and he continues to explain that filmmakers are very aware of this fact and thus use it as a technique for holding the audience’s attention (2007: 35). Reviewers of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Frenzy* (1971) for instance applauded the film as a return to form after dull spy thrillers because of the “explicitness and blatancy” of the “razzle-dazzle” murder scene (Allen, 1985: 30). It is not an exaggeration to say that violence in film has become a norm and has in many cases become preferable for entertainment as opposed to non-violent dramas or comedies.

As in real violence, our perception of what is proper in terms of on-screen violence is affected greatly by our subjective positions in relation to the context and the content of the act. The way in which the violence is presented to us has great influence in our positions of perception and the way we make meaning from it.

One explanation for why people watch violent images is argued by Zillmann in *Media Entertainment: The psychology of its appeal* (2000). He proposes that people seek out violent imagery in order to monitor their environment, so that they may feel safe. Through this theory of “protective vigilance”, he argues, “the atomic bomb created a new climate of fear, and that because people now are more death conscious than ever before, they seek exposures to displays of violence and death to work out their fears.” (2000: 189). This argument also makes sense when one takes in account that some children (or adults), primarily boys, watch violent films in order to demonstrate their lack of fear, and through this establish their identities in relation to that fear (Goldstein 1998: 216). This hypothesis sees the watching of violent films as important social interaction, during which interpersonal dynamics and viewpoints are explored.

I remember well when Oliver Stone’s film *Natural Born Killers* (1994) was shown at theatres. Having watched it and talked about it (or simply stated that you were able to sit through the entire film) gave you some form of social status. This relates to what Goldstein notes with respect to reactions to *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), when he writes that “...people defined themselves in relation to screen excess”. (1998: 217). The film itself, in terms of narrative as well as its enjoyment factor, apparently meant very little and was barely discussed. Yet, although how we narrate our experiences of viewing

violence on-screen has a close bearing on our emotional response to what we have witnessed, it does not however satisfactorily account for the emotional and expressive motivations for enjoying representations of violence.

It is undeniable that our emotions play a key role in our enjoyment of films and if we enjoy the violence depicted in film, it should in some way be related to emotion (pleasure). Goldstein refers to five modes of viewing violence in relation to some form of emotion: Mood management, sensation seeking and excitement, emotional expression, fantasy and the justice motive (1998: 216 – 220).<sup>31</sup> Because some of the modes are very closely connected, I will only briefly discuss the most prominent of the five.

McCauley refers to Zillmann, who suggests that people “choose their entertainment to create the mood they wish to experience or to cure the mood they are in at that moment” (McCauley, 1998: 151). Both these possibilities apply to me in that I, myself may from time to time specifically choose violent films in order to manage my mood or to fit with the mood I am in at the time. In most of these cases I simply enjoy the emotional jolt that the “transitory shock and fear” of violent images offer (Trend, 2007: 35). Steven Jay Schneider posits that some violent representations in film can produce “a complex psychological and emotional response in the spectator, who has little choice, but to analyse, reflect upon, even appreciate, what he or she would normally despise, disavow or deny.” (Schneider, 2001). In viewing violent images, we enjoy the fact that we immerse ourselves in taboo issues or something we would normally consider inappropriate, but this enjoyment or pleasure may be highly complex.

It may be self-evident, but it is critical that there needs to be a degree of awareness that what is shown is not *real*. There is a trend in film to represent violence in increasingly realistic ways. The effects of this in contrast with ‘unrealistic’ representations will be discussed a little later, but it is necessary to assume that viewers are aware that cinematic violence is a fictional representation. As such, viewers are expecting to be entertained, and this renders them willing to enjoy the violence. We as viewers “become aware of the camera, of the music or of the special effects and in every case we are aware of our status as viewers”, which enables us to be taken in by dramatic violence”; “...attraction is enhanced by the viewer’s willing suspension of disbelief” (Goldstein, 1998: 2), which may be a requirement for a viewer to enjoy the violence.

Fairy tales and comics for children rely very much on violence to heighten the effect of “...comic exaggerations, burlesque humour and...earthly realism...” which children respond to with an undisguised glee (Tatar, 1998: 71). Maria Tatar notes that in most cases this enjoyment has more to do with the tale’s

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<sup>31</sup> It is also important to notice that most of these modes of enjoying violent imagery overlap and inform each other.

“staging of surreal excess rather than with physical violence” (Tatar, 1998: 72). This indicates that people may start enjoying violent entertainment from an early age, but that the enjoyment of the grotesqueness is already understood as ‘fake’, in the sense that it is imagined. Following this line of thought, we can accept that the representation of violence in films allow us to engage in ‘make-believe’ in order to “manage our fears”, which in turn evokes the notion of catharsis. As such, violent films may “draw our negative emotions, such as fear, rage and disgust, to render the mind more healthy” in that the viewing serves as a safe outlet for “unsafe” emotions (McCauley, 1998: 147).<sup>32</sup> This is of particular relevance to my discussion of *Preek* in Chapter 3.

Judith Halberstam extends this thinking, proposing that this violence is an “imaginary violence” and can be called a “place of rage”. She calls it a “strange and wonderful terrain...[located] between and beyond thought, action, response, activism, protest, anger, terror, murder, and destination...a place for resistance” (1993:188). In this case we are again confronted with the idea of catharsis, but instead of viewing violence as a purging of a certain emotion it may more likely be an expression of emotion or simply the enjoyment of the arousal of these emotions (Goldstein, 1998: 218).

In summary, the pleasure of watching violent entertainment may depend to two key factors: firstly, the viewer is consciously aware of it as fictional drama; and secondly, the violence needs to be adequately contextualised. The viewer willingly acts as witness and legitimises the act according to the narrative and his or her relation to the characters.

As an example I will use my viewing experience of the murder of Jesse James at the end of *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Dominic: 2007). At the point of the murder, the film has taken a certain course and I had established an emotional position in relation to the characters and the narrative. Although I understood Robert Ford’s character as a sociopath, I came to justify the murder and felt a powerful emotion in relation to the explicit representation of the violent death. This position is supported by Clark McCauley when he writes that “the instigation of viewer emotion depends upon knowing more about the protagonist than is conveyed in a few minutes of fighting ripped out of context” (1998: 148)<sup>33</sup>. Goldstein expands on this when he notes that “violent images lose their appeal when the

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<sup>32</sup> Goldstein notes that the viewing of violent entertainment is an occasion to express excitement; it not only provides a “psychological kick” for the viewer, but also serves as an opportunity to express intense emotion (Goldstein, 1998: 217). It is also closely connected to the “mood management” theory in that we sometime (or rather I know that I sometimes do) choose violent imagery to express a mood or emotion (McCauley, 1998: 152).

<sup>33</sup> This may indicate why explicit violence in the opening scenes of films, such as *Eastern Promises* (Cronenberg, 2007) and *Gomorrah* (Garronne: 2008) shocks the audience rather than allowing them to enjoy it.

viewer does not feel relatively safe” (1998: 219). This suggests that a viewer first has to be immersed into the film by willing suspension of disbelief before he feels that s/he may experience pleasure in the face of violent imagery.<sup>34</sup> Narrative strategy is necessary for an effective suspension of disbelief; for us to fully accept screen violence as fake or make-believe. Context and circumstance are critical motivations.

Another motive closely related to the “Emotional Expression” motive, is what Goldstein calls the “Justice Motive”. This motive proposes that some people enjoy the violent imagery because it assures them that good prevails over evil. Viewers act as willing witnesses who legitimise the violence in the film and may even feel that they have a right to rejoice in the actions which they understand as ‘righteous violence’. Our emotional relationship to protagonist and antagonist again plays a very important role as this allows us to decide what fate they deserve and ultimately enjoy it when it befalls them (Goldstein, 1998: 220). Let’s consider *Kill Bill Vol. 2* (Tarantino, 2004). In the first volume, Uma Thurman’s character Beatrix Kiddo / *The Bride* sets out to kill her previous colleagues and boss who murdered her fiancé and unborn child, and attempted to kill her. In the second volume, she comes to stand against Darryl Hannah’s character, Elle Driver, who we come to recognize as her chief adversary (apart from Bill who pulled the trigger to kill her). Through the course of the film we despise Elle even more for her malicious and ‘evil’ methods and it is thus with joyous anticipation that we await her execution and finally applaud when The Bride plucks out her only remaining eye and leaves her to be killed by a black mamba. We morally condemn Hannah’s character, which justifies her excessive demise. Not only is this a ‘safe’ environment, but I would suggest that this is a violence in keeping with mythological genres such as fairytales, as discussed previously with reference to Maria Tatar.

Following these arguments, it is safe to say that fantasy plays a significant role in the viewing of violent imagery. The willing suspension of disbelief and the eagerness to pretend is, in some cases, a requirement for enjoying violent imagery. Trend writes that the representation of violence actually contributes “...to the process through which viewers suspend disbelief and enter the fantasy world of the story” (Trend, 2007” 35). This is significant because it shows that violent images may enhance the imaginary qualities of films. This is supported by Goldstein when he points out that “Violent entertainment may be enjoyed repeatedly because it lends itself to imaginative experiences and to a temporary loss of self-consciousness” (Goldstein, 1998: 219).<sup>35</sup> Although these are all credible hypotheses for why people take pleasure in watching violent films, there still remains the argument that some people look at violent

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<sup>34</sup> This is an important point to make, as it has great significance for the viewer and filmmaker dynamic, which is a key issue in this thesis and will be discussed later in relation to other films, my own included.

<sup>35</sup> There are some problems with this point of view, but it will be discussed later in depth.

images simply for their aesthetic value. As Trend writes, “The aesthetics of pictures makes [violence] dazzling and even beautiful” (Trend, 2007: 117), this may be reason enough for the pleasure they provide.

While I have suggested that different motives for viewing violent imagery depend on the context of the viewer as well as the situation in which it is viewed, I am reluctant to accept a certain motive as preferable to another. I assert, however, that the motives for viewing violent imagery are as subjective as the legitimization of an act of violence, and depend on the subjective relationship of the viewer with the act, the characters and the reasons for the viewing. Further, the violence has to be motivated. As Goldstein writes: “It is not necessarily the violence that makes violent entertainment appealing; it is what the violence means to its audience that determines whether it will be entertaining or not” (1998: 6). Certain filmmakers, however, represent violence in order to evoke strong emotional responses in the viewers in order to perceive the diegesis in a specific way, and do not aim to entertain with violence. These two contrasting motives are crucial for further discussions, but at the moment I would like to maintain that the willing suspension of disbelief also depends on the way that the violence is represented to the viewer and in turn influences how the film is intellectually and emotionally perceived.

### **Filmic Violence – between representation and perception**

Through studies with her students, Karen Boyle discovered that a film that a certain student defines as violent may be in opposition to what his or her peers or the “prevailing attitudes of screen violence” may find violent (2005: xi). Here I can draw from my own experience, as I have regularly found myself confronted with peers who would exclaim about the explicitness of violence in a film, but which I hardly experienced as particularly violent. These films are usually an action or fantasy film where the violence becomes part of the norm of the diegesis for the characters and which some viewers accept easily. The amount of violent acts on the screen, however, does not necessarily result in being perceived as a violent film.

If one takes in account the framework within which I discuss violence, and count the amount of violent actions in an animation film like *Shrek* (Adamson, 2001) or a comedy like *Nacho Libre* (Jarred Hess, 2007), these should be counted as violent films. Trend (2007: 4) recognises that researchers in the 1960s and 1970s who attempted to measure media violence, made exactly the mistake of counting the number of violent actions and in so doing, arrived at the same weight of intensity to the representation of violence in films and television programmes like *Colombo*, *Star Trek* and *Get Smart*: “No distinctions were drawn between realism, fantasy, and comedy until the 1980s, when some researchers began considering the plausibility or effects of violent incidents, as well as psychological aggression.”

These ways of making meaning from representations of violence may be related to what Monaco refers to in his book *How to Read a Film* (1977), as “denotative” meaning, informed by semiotic theory. He states that a film image or sound has a “denotative meaning: it is what it is and we don’t have to strive to recognise it” (Monaco, 1977: 130). Through this way of making meaning one may recognise an act of violence very easily in a film, in that an act of violence constitutes an action or force which harms or destructs. Yet Monaco states that film also has connotative abilities. Here he refers to the understanding of cinematic representation as context based (Monaco, 1977: 131 – 132). Different meanings may be created and understood, firstly by the context of its representation and secondly by the context of the viewer. Monaco argues that the choices that the filmmaker makes in representing something, for instance whether something “is filmed from a certain angle, the camera moves or does not move, the colour is bright or dull...” function as connotative aids. The viewer should first perceive the way it is represented before s/he can continue to comprehend a meaning.

The idea of a pictorial representation has been the key factor in the theory of film as a mimetic art, supported by both classical film theorists such as Bazin and Kracauer as well as contemporary film theorists such as Christian Metz. Noël Carroll writes that “Mimetic, pictorial representations... are symbols whose referents can be recognised, in the picture, by viewers who have not been trained in any special method of ‘reading’ pictures” (1988a: 132). Yet representation cannot be seen as simple copying of an image. Referring to representation in art, Gordon Graham writes:

Foreshortening, perspective, the use of light and shade, which contribute so significantly to representation in Western art, were all important discoveries that greatly increased the power of the painter. But the power they give to the painter is not to reproduce what is “there” but to create a convincing impression that we are seeing the thing represented. The consequence is that even the most lifelike representations cannot be thought of as real copies. Their creators follow conventions determining how things are to be represented and employ techniques which oblige us to look at things in certain ways (Graham 1997: 105).

If we could apply this statement to film, it is clear that the decisions that the filmmaker makes in representing an image or more specifically a sequence, has a great effect on our perception of what we experience while watching the film.

Earlier I mentioned that the violence I am focusing on is that of the physical force of individual acting on the body of another, to harm, injure or kill. But when it comes to representing such acts within the space of a film, a filmmaker has innumerable options, which in turn will be responded to differently, by different viewers. It is a highly subjective process on both sides of the equation.

In adopting some of Monroe Beardsley's terminology in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Carrol shows that there are at least three levels of cinematic representation. The first level of representation is a 'physical portrayal'. This means that every shot in a film portrays its model - "a definite object, person, place or event that can be designated by a singular term" (Carrol, 1988b: 149). Carrol suggests that in this sense, the murderer in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) represents Anthony Perkins and not Norman Bates because it was Anthony Perkins who served as source for the image in that he was the actor portraying Bates. This level of representation seems to be inadequate for my discussion, for if we only perceive film images on this level, the images of The Bride in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* represents Uma Thurman who was the actress portraying the role. Even if we could accept this concept (which seems to remove all perception of the fictional world) it does not account for the representation of violent actions in the film, because it renders fictional representation useless.

The second level of representation that Carrol mentions is 'depiction'. He writes that film "*depicts* a class or collection of objects designated by a general term" (1988b: 150). In this sense a shot from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* may physically portray Uma Thurman while also depicting a woman who kills by hacking away with a katana. This level of representation comes closer to the fictional aspect of narrative film in that these depictions split the shot from its source and as Carrol writes: "...it is this depiction that makes the third mode of cinematic representation, 'nominal portrayal', possible" (Carrol, 1988b: 151). A shot that physically portrays Uma Thurman slashing at stuntmen with a katana in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* may depict a woman killing Yakuza soldiers in rage and with determination, while, given its context in the narrative of the film, nominally portraying The Bride / Beatrix Kiddo out to get revenge. "A shot is a nominal portrayal of an object, person, place, or event when it represents a particular object, person, place or event different from the one that gave rise to the image" (Carrol, 1988b: 151). Nominal Portrayal is thus the mode of representation that makes the fictional quality of narrative film intelligible to the viewer in that it shapes the diegesis.

Film is a mimetic representation in that it consists of images that represent their referents by way of resembling them. Most shots in live action fictional films are pictorial, which means that if we see the bloodied face of Uma Thurman we immediately recognise its referent in the moving picture before us as the face of The Bride covered in the blood of the Yakuza she has just hacked to pieces. This recognition is the first step to perceive the image in relation to others and to understand the context within which it is given to us. This process leads us to understand the narrative of the film.

To form a hypothesis of how this recognition of the referent works, I will first refer to an idea of the perception of cinematic images as 'illusory', which is in part derivative of Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror-stage, which Christian Metz and Jean Louis Baudry have used to investigate the relationship

between the film image and the spectator.<sup>36</sup> According to Lacan, the human infant between the ages of six to eighteen months “seems to go through an initial stage of confusing [his mirror] image with reality... Then comes the discovery of the existence of an image with its own properties. Finally there is the realisation that the image is his own – when he moves his image, and so on” (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1988: 53). This process that the child goes through, forms the infant's identity as something whole – it gives him a feeling of unity which “initiates the belief in its self hood and autonomy which continues throughout the rest of his life” (Singer, 1998: 92). Yet, this mirror image that the child uses in his ‘primary identification’ is in fact not the infant him or herself, but only an image, a fictional representation which, according to Singer, “Lacan claims...fosters illusory notions of the self and its representation of others” (1998: 93). It is the formation of the ego (Metz, 2000: 410).

This play of the construction of the self and the other as unities is referred to as an imaginary function by Baudry, which he and Metz believe can explain our perception and response to films. Baudry writes: “The psychological phase, which occurs between six and eighteen months of age, generates *via* the mirror image of a unified body the constitution or at least the first sketches of the ‘I’ as an imaginary function” (1985: 539). He continues that in film, “Just as the mirror assembles the fragmented body in a sort of imaginary integration of the self, the transcendental self unites the discontinuous fragments of phenomena, of lived experience, into unifying meaning” (1985: 540). Carrol, who gives an overview of this theory states that Metz is of the opinion that “The Imaginary is the mechanism that responds to apparent external unity by producing “subject unity” (1988a: 65). When we are addressed by nominal film representations, “the Imaginary swings into action, positioning the spectator as a unified subject” (Carrol, 1988a: 65). This means that we position ourselves in relation to an image as an other which makes possible the construction of the fictional film.

For this imaginary identification to come about, Metz believes that a cinematic play of “presence and absence” has to take place in our perception of the film, which is different from our perception of a play in the theatre (Metz, 2000: 410). In the theatre an actor is present to the audience and likewise the audience for the actor (Metz, 2000: 423). In a film, the actor is however, not present during the viewing, but (as Charles F. Altman states) “delegates its image to replace it when the film is projected” (1985: 522). What we acknowledge to be present is the representation. Metz writes: “I must perceive the photographed object as absent, its photograph as present, and the presence of this absence as signifying” (2000: 419). It can be thus understood that the objects and events in films are perceived as absent, but that we submit to the idea

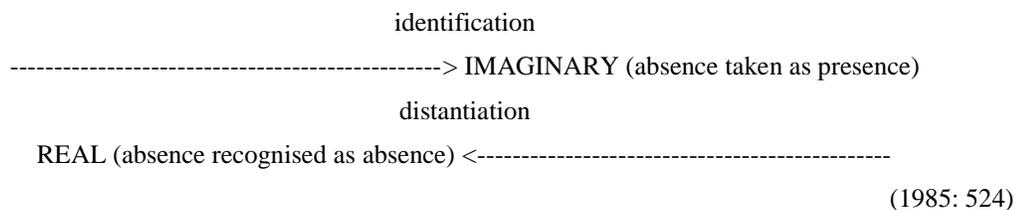
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<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that either Metz or Baudry believed film representations to be illusions which ‘ticks’ viewers into believing they are actually real, but some theories that followed had this prerogative.

that they are actually present in the photographic image represented to us, and that as a “unified subject” one is to acknowledge the image of the object and event as a “unified whole” itself. To understand the fictional film then, Metz sums up:

I must at one and the same time identify with the character” which is the imaginary procedure, “so that he benefits, by analogical projection, from all the schemata of intelligibility that I have within me, and not take myself for him” which is a return to the real “so that the fiction can be established as such as such (= as symbolic): this is *seeming-real*” (2000: 419).

In Altman’s article *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse* (1985) the word “seeming-real” is translated as “reality illusion” (1985: 522, 523). Altman extends this thinking, suggesting that fictional films mean nothing if we refuse to take them as reality during the viewing process, but he also stipulates that “they cannot achieve their true status as fiction if we hold permanently to that illusion” (1985: 523). This argument is illustrated by means of a diagram in Altman's article *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse*(1985):



It is thus clear that to perceive the representation on the screen, we must enter the order of the Imaginary by acknowledging that which is absent as present in the representation, and thus as a reality at that moment. This is represented to us in fictional films (or rather fictional films that do not deliberately make the audience aware of the cinematic apparatus<sup>37</sup>) in such a way that we are tempted never to proceed to the next step, which is evidently to return to the real.<sup>38</sup> Thus the experience of the spectator is key to the

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<sup>37</sup> In their book *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond*, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis assert that “Broadly speaking, the term cinematic apparatus refers to the totality of independent operations that make up the cinema-viewing situation, including (1) the technical base (specific effects produced by the various components of the film equipment, including camera, lights, film and projector); (2) the conditions of film projection”, like the darkened theatre ; “(3) the film itself as a text (involving various devices to represent visual continuity...); and (4) that “mental machinery of the spectator that constitutes the viewer as subject of desire” (1992: 143).

<sup>38</sup>This can take place in many different ways, as Altman explains - “when we remember that it is 'only a film' to lessen the effect of violence, when the film apparatus is foregrounded within the film itself, or simply when the lights come up and destroy the image on screen” (1985: 524)

fiction of the film<sup>39</sup>, but as I have previously indicated Altman believes that this theory relies on the idea of the perception of the mimetic representation to be an illusory one.

Many other theorists, such as Noël Burch and Richard Allen, agree that the viewing of a film is, in some way, an illusory experience. Burch for example argues that the viewing of a fictional film can induce “a perfectly full sense of being there” within the film. He refers to this notion as the “diegetic effect” (Burch, 1982: 30). Richard Allen extends Burch's argument, referring to it as “projective illusion”. He explains that “we may no longer be aware of the projected image as a reproduction or recording of anything and experience the events within the image as if they were present to us” (Allen, 1993: 41).

Let's consider the film *A Prophet* (2009) by the French filmmaker Jacques Audiard. The film tells the story of a young Arab man, Malik, who is sent to jail at the opening of the film, and shortly after arriving is forced by fellow inmates, who are members of the Corsican Mafia, to murder another Arab inmate, Reyeb, with a razor blade which he hides in his mouth. The plan for the execution is for Malik to first agree to have oral sex with Reyeb and just as he is about to perform fellatio, he would push the razor out of his mouth with his tongue, stand up and, with the razor between his teeth, cut Reyeb's throat. At the point of execution, the blade is hidden in Malik's mouth, but seems to have cut him on the inside of his mouth. While he is sitting on Reyeb's bed and is waiting for the opportune moment to strike, a thin trickle of blood starts to flow from the corner of his mouth. When he realizes this, he starts to panic and decides to abandon the attempt. When Reyeb calls him back aggressively, the camera shows Malik in the foreground with his back to Reyeb (blurred in the background), taking out the razor with his tongue and when Reyeb approaches him, a struggle begins. Reyeb tries to prevent Malik from cutting his throat, but after an intense conflict, Malik succeeds in cutting Reyeb's artery. The blood spurts as his heart pumps and Malik pushes Reyeb away from him while remaining sitting on the bed until Reyeb gives his last life spasms. The general progress of the sequence can be seen below in Figure 1 to 8.

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<sup>39</sup> In his essay *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz argues that the cinema engages processes of the unconscious more than any other artistic medium in that “the represented is by definition imaginary” (Metz, 2000: 426), and that “films themselves only come into being through fictive work of their spectators” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 139).



**Figures 1 and 2: Stills from *A Prophet* (2009), directed by Jacques Audiard**



**Figure 3 and 4: Stills from *A Prophet* (2009), directed by Jacques Audiard**



**Figure 5 and 6: Stills from *A Prophet* (2009), directed by Jacques Audiard**



**Figures 7 and 8: Stills from *A Prophet* (2009), directed by Jacques Audiard**

If we return to the argument for the illusory effect that film representation has, it can be argued that at the point of viewing, the viewer really believes that what is happening to Reyeb is really happening. Malik is really cutting Reyeb's throat and blood is really spurting. Therefore Malik is actually shocked about his own actions.

I would however like to move away from the idea of the pictorial mimetic representation, as our emotional responses cannot simply be affected by the images alone, but by the film as a unified whole, in other words, the entire cinematic apparatus. In the sequence I have described, I do not simply engage with the images, but I experience a ‘happening’, an event, which consists of the image, the sound as well as the movement. The noted film theorist Vivian Sobchack suggests that the film experience “entails the visible, audible, kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly, and haptically” (1995: 41). Sobchack rather poetically explains that “A film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood” (1995: 37).

This means that the illusory experience (if one believes film to be a illusory experience) is not simply a visible illusion, but that it is the experience of the film as a unity of image, sound and movement. Sobchack calls this representational quality of film the ‘modes of embodied existence’. Through this concept it is possible for the filmmaker to represent a sequence so that the viewer may have an experience which is unique to film. What is important to acknowledge here according to Sobchack, is that films not only use modes of embodied existence but that there is another aspect that comes into play, referred to as ‘structures of direct experience’. These point to “the ‘centering’ and bodily situating of existence in relation to the world of objects and others” (1995: 37). What Sobchack means by this is that film transposes those modes of existence embodied in the world – modes of being alive, which we as people would see as a direct experience – into cinematic space, by using modes of embodied existence.

Cinema can only truly be an illusory experience for this reason – it uses our knowledge of how the world works as the basis for the structures of its representations, and therefore we see film sequences as mimetic representations which are illusory. If we refer back to Metz's imaginary signifier, we can see how this can be applied. Let me use the scene from *A Prophet* again to explain this. As viewers we enter the Imaginary by identifying with the realm of the film. Firstly its modes of embodied existence: The mimetic image (the nominal portrayal) of the jail room and all its contents, but more importantly of the characters - especially Malik with whom we have identified with as a throughout until that point; Secondly, the sounds of the environment; reactionary sounds (like the blade between Malik's teeth when he bites on it, the sounds of the struggle and the sounds of blood spurting) and of course the sound of their voices as they speak, shout and groan (during the struggle). And lastly, movements and actions (and reactions), like Malik rocking nervously on the bed, standing up, and the aggressive movements of the struggle. Simultaneously, we acknowledge and identify with the structures of direct experience.

This means that the film functions within a set of structures, akin to the Symbolic (in Lacan). We also identify with the human traits of physical abilities, spoken language and emotion, and therefore it is

possible for us to identify Malik's fear, vulnerability and possibly also his desperation. We acknowledge that after Reyeb is cut, and the blood stops spurting and he stops shaking, that is he dead. We know this because the film represents this death in a very realistic way and we have a certain understanding of death in the real. At the same time, this realism works because its apparently 'plain' treatment (no elaborate choreography or heroics) creates a significant level of affect, which suggests that the real (the space in excess of language) may be functioning here too.<sup>40</sup>

In *Arguing about art* (2002), Alex Neill states that "we are moved by what we *do credit*", which means that our emotional responses are typically founded on 'belief'. This thought is central to the "cognitive theory of emotion, which takes beliefs and judgements to be central to emotions" (Neill, 2002: 250). As I have explained, the emotional response is triggered by first entering the Imaginary of the film and identifying the mimetic representation, but Neill takes this further and explains that this involves seeing things from another's point of view. This indicates that to have an emotional response to an act of violence, may depend on ones identification with the situation or rather one (or more) of the people involved. In the case of *A Prophet*, I identified with Malik very early on in the narrative, and came to see the situation from his point of view. During the sequence discussed above, I had a very strong emotional response, following Neill, "as a result of imaginatively adopting [Malik's] perspective on things" (Neill, 2002: 255). The experience of the representation is what makes this possible, but more importantly the mimetic representation of characters – of people.<sup>41</sup> Yet, one can also argue that the experience of the mimetic representation is a 'willing' participation in the fiction - That one willingly suspends one's

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<sup>40</sup> Another example may be given to support this hypothesis. Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* (2009) features a scene in which a small boy of around four years old is talking to someone who appears to be his sister. The conversation starts with the boy asking his sister: "What is that?" His sister replies, "What?" After a small pause the boy answers, "Dead?" From this inquiry an interrogative discussion is launched where the boy asks questions about death as he clearly does not understand it. His sister willingly (although sometimes hesitantly) answers every question truthfully even, when the boy asks if everybody has to die. The final question is whether his mother is also dead (it seems that he was only informed that she went on a trip) and after his sister has answered yes, with a hesitant pause, the boy acts out in anger by throwing his plate from the table. Even within this short scene I could identify with the filmic representation by entering into the Imaginary, and because I understood the concept of death and the situation in which it is explained (the boy is small and does not yet understand the concept and gravity of death), I had a powerful emotional response to the conversation and the boy's angry response; the affective register of this scene was significant.

<sup>41</sup> The fascination with the mimetic representation of a human body and face and how it influence our experience our reception of violence will be discussed later in the chapter.

disbelief in the fact that it is only a fiction and that through this willing suspension of disbelief, one is willing to identify with the situation and to 'feel'.

There are theorists who argue against the illusory phenomenon. Irvin Singer wrote that:

We are rarely deluded about reflections on screen, even when we become so greatly absorbed in them that we have feelings that are similar to those we would undergo if we were indeed deceived, the shock, anxiety, tenderness or revulsion that we may feel while watching a movie, carefully crafted to instigate these or comparable reactions in us, do not signify a cognitive distortion on our part (1998: 94).

Singer further explains that our emotional responses to the film representations are “an overt response to what is being portrayed or expressed by the images, and they usually indicate that we have understood the meaning of these images” (1998: 94). In this sense, we as viewers are not tricked into believing that what we see is actually real, but rather willingly engage with the fiction because we understand it and we entertain its propositions and imagery.

Murray Smith is of the opinion that it is enough for us to propose the diegetic narrative and the representations within it to ourselves in our imagination, that we entertain the fiction and therefore may respond emotionally to it (1995: 117). It is very obvious that we do not respond to violent representations in film the same way as we would respond to it in real life. If we were to be present during the real life murder of someone like Reyeb, the emotional affect would be inevitably more pronounced than the viewing of its representation on screen. Carrol asserts that “we must know that we are viewing mimetic representations in order to respond properly to them” (1988a: 96)<sup>42</sup>. For him, ‘suspending disbelief’ does not mean that one completely believes that the mimetic representation is real, but that one decides to accept the representations as probabilities within the fiction. In doing this one must be fully aware that one is viewing a film. While we know that we are undergoing an experience, we may be convinced of what is real for the characters in the film. This is supported by Murray Smith, who writes that “Being absorbed or

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<sup>42</sup> Metz also puts a very important argument forward when he writes about the viewer’s knowledge during the viewing experience: “I know I am perceiving something imaginary...and I know it is I who am perceiving it...that my sense organs are physically affected by it, that I am not fantasizing, that the fourth wall of the auditorium (the screen) is really different from the other three, that there is a projector facing it...and I also know that is I who am perceiving all this, that this perceived-imaginary material is deposited in me as if on a second screen, that it is in me, that it forms up into an organized sequence...”(2000: 413).

gripped by a fiction, then, amounts to concentrating on the characters, objects and events in the fictional world...” (1995: 121). I might feel pity for Malik by entering the Imaginary of Audiard’s film, and identifying with the event and the character, but I still know that it is a mimetic representation within a particular cinematic convention.

Singer further writes that “film [is] a transformation of visual and auditory possibilities into a coherent and intelligible totality resulting from the imaginary element of imagination” (1998: 98). This notion is also supported by Gerald Mast, who is convinced that we respond to films “because of the way we personalize, internalize, and, in effect, recreate the work imaginatively within us” (Mast, 1977: 46 – 47). The filmic Imaginary therefore puts us in a position to understand that which is represented, which is not real, in an intelligible way, so that we feel we are seeing a faithful representation of what is real to the fictional world of the film. Imagination, in this regard to reception of representation, is key to our emotional responses. Through the imagination we understand the situation the characters of a film are in and thus respond to it.

The conventions of cinema alert one to the fact that one is watching a film. I would like to expand on this statement because it seems different films allow for varying levels of awareness of this fact. On a basic level, one can assume that whenever a film narrative departs from representation in real time, “there can be no doubt that we are attending as much to the textuality of the fiction as to what it represents” (Smith, 1995: 120). If we look at a film like *A Prophet*, we acknowledge the space (the prison) and time (six years) within which the film plays off as narrative agents that manipulate “the temporal and spatial dimension of [the representation]” (Smith, 1995: 121). It is only through the understanding and our knowledge of cinematic convention that we accept it as the real time and space for the characters of the film, which in turn means that we accept the film’s diegesis as the world in which the characters experience and act, but we also accept it as fiction. Carrol gives an example when he suggested that “the use of framing, as a convention, emphasises the discontinuity of the subject of the representation and the adjacent physical environment, thereby forestalling the already possibility that the knowing viewer will be traduced” (1988a: 98). Smith further supports this notion by saying that if we do not accept this while viewing, we will be confused and believe what is represented to be an image of a world with other physical laws than our own (1995: 121).

So, for us to fully grasp the meaning of the representation and to place the character and events in a realistic or understandable diegesis so that we may respond properly to it, we should be aware that the fictional world before us is a mimetic representation founded on conventions. What is certain here is that the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence are subject to the cinematic conventions. One can however propose that there are two levels of representation of violence within this argument.

Devin McKinney proposes in *Violence: The Strong and the Weak* (1993), that a distinction between “strong” violence and “weak” violence should be made. He states that “weak” violence is “too articulate...in the limited sense of *nice* cinematic effects too well contrived to have any other content” (1993: 19). Strong violence “communicates the sense that a person who in one moment is fully alive, has been reduced to God’s garbage” (1993: 17). However simplified this outlook on the representation of violence in film may be (one representation might be violent to one viewer, but not to another) it does not seem unreasonable to accept that some representations of violence will be more graphic than others.<sup>43</sup>

Let us consider, for instance, the violence in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski, 2003) and the violence in *The Devil’s Backbone* (Del Toro, 2001). Although both films have a strong fantasy element to the narrative, the treatment of the violence differs greatly and one cannot argue that the violence is worse in one film versus the other.

*Pirates of the Caribbean* romantically portrays the swashbuckling adventures of pirates, soldiers and civilians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean, where an element of magic and of a ghost story is used in such a way that viewers may very easily distinguish the diegetic space and time of the film as fictional. Swords clash and slash bodies; muskets are fired and bullets hit their targets, yet one hardly acknowledges it as violent, because its representations do not lend itself to an expression of the terror and dangers of violence. There is little blood and no explicit harm to the bodies on screen. According to Rutsky and Wyatt, these “fun” viewings encourage a manner of looking at the violence that “slides over the surface of a text like a passing glance, never staying fixed for long, never “anchoring itself in the depths of meaning...” (1990: 11). Therefore, violent actions that occur frequently in the film can be seen as part of this imaginary world, which means that it may be related to what McKinney calls “weak” violence (1993:17).

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<sup>43</sup> Trend notes that in the mid-1990s, a group of American universities made a study of violence in the media and called it the “National Television Violence Study” (NTVS) (Trend, 2007: 4). Within it, they concluded that the way in which the violence is shown or not shown has great effect on how the viewer perceives it. Therefore, when violence is committed in a film, its effects depends on various elements of context like its visualisation, the characters and justification through the narrative, how the pain and suffering is depicted, and of course who the viewer is and in what context s/he is watching (Trend, 2007: 4). These elements contribute considerably to the process “through which viewers suspend disbelief” and what its effects are on the viewer’s experience (Trend, 2007: 35). Whether a film is violent to a viewer or not, thus depends on these constituents.

On the other hand, *The Devil's Backbone* is set in a Spanish orphanage during the reign of Franco<sup>44</sup>, and tells the story of a boy (Carlos) left behind at the orphanage by his uncle who fights in the revolution. The film opens with a boy (Santi) who has been bludgeoned to death, with another orphan standing over him shocked and appalled by the sight. This is shown with explicit detail of the gash on his head and blood siphoning from it. Aside from the other orphaned boys, we are introduced to a variety of characters such as the headmaster, an aged one-legged woman; the teacher, an aged doctor; the made, a young woman who has an affair with the caretaker, a young man (who also has an affair with the head mistress). As the film progresses, we realise that Santi's ghost is haunting the orphanage and starts focussing his attention on Carlos. The violence that follows (which contains a devastating scene where a group of orphans take revenge on Santi's murderer by killing him with sharpened sticks) are not mere fantasy representations, but intensely 'real' acts. It is also extremely explicit in that the special effects, make-up and sound effects focus on portraying the physical bodily harm as real as possible. One can thus clearly relate this type of violence to what McKinney refers to as "strong" violence.

What we can also recognise from this distinction between the two films is that the type of diegesis which includes the characters and their motives add to the outcome of the violence's perception. The diegesis in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is related to a fairy tale, which is not surprising as it is based on a popular Disney theme park ride with the same name. Although the 'ghost pirates' in this film may be recognised as threatening and scary villains, they are easily recognised as fictional antagonists, through the use of special effects applied to them and their exaggerated characterisations. We also come to expect that these characters are not so much driven to the acts of violence as it being part of the 'nature' of a pirate in fairytales. This might also be an indication why we don't find this kind of violence particularly threatening. Although fairytales might be some of the grimmest stories, there is always an element of the unreal in them and, as Maria Tatar notes, they "mostly represent a world in which villains are regularly decapitated or boiled in oil and giants are slain" (1998: 71). This also indicates that from the outset we accept the 'evil pirates' as villains who are going to get their comeuppance through the acts of the protagonists. These heroes are perceived in relation to the villains and their acts of violence against them may easily be justified by the viewers in that the fictitious actions of the antagonists permit a "justified hatred and the call for punishment", which "allows us to uninhibitedly enjoy the punitive action when it materializes" (Goldstein, 1998: 220).

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<sup>44</sup> Franco was a Spanish general whose armies took control of Spain in 1939 and who ruled as a dictator until his death (1892-1975).

The characters in *The Devil's Backbone* on the other hand, are set in a specific historical time and space where the threat of violence seems to have an effect on how the characters act and communicate with each other. The acts of violence are then committed by characters that are represented in such a way that we may easily perceive them as 'real people'. Even though the film is set in the past, the diegetic world is represented through modes of embodied existence as well as structures of direct experience similar to our understanding of reality. What makes the murder in the end of the film so shocking is the fact that it is committed by children who were driven by a need for revenge. Throughout the film, the children's characters are portrayed naturally so that the audience holds a particular disposition toward them and not merely accept them as fictitious characterisations. Goldstein argues that although the audience is aware that they are only watching a film, certain fictional characters, like the ones in *The Devil's Backbone*, "elicit effective responses and emotional involvement similar to real persons" (1998: 220). Therefore it seems all the more dreadful for the viewer to watch the orphans act out so violently, however righteous we may find their action.

With respect to representations of pain and suffering, Trend states that "people look at the images without seeing the actual pain" (Trend, 2007: 118). Whereas one may argue this with respect to *Pirates of the Caribbean*, where the violence "slides over the surface of a text", the violence in *The Devil's Backbone*, however, causes devastating and destructive effects on the performers and victims, which may have an effect of "fear, disgust and pity" on the viewers (and which, according to Goldstein (1998: 221) "can be experienced as pleasurable").<sup>45</sup>

This indicates that, very broadly speaking, two types of representation elicit different emotional responses to violence on screen. I want to stress, however, that the more familiar the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence are, which is to say, the more real the violence is represented with real physical effects on the victim, the greater the response will be, whether it be or shock or pity, or whether the experience is cathartic on some level.

Our responses of trauma or enjoyment, however, may not only be caused by the representations of the characters throughout the film, which bring forth strong emotions, but also through the actual physical expression of pain and suffering, which is related to the representation of the human body. Laura Mulvey suggests that "the cinema, as a medium of spectacle, coded sexual difference in relation to the look while also creating an aesthetic of extreme anthropocentrism, of fascination with the human face and human

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<sup>45</sup> Although some representations that cause shock may be experienced as enjoyable, I would like to put forward that this is very subjective and that some representations that elicit traumatic responses (such as the murder in *A Prophet*) very rarely cause enjoyment.

body” (2007: 164). The human figure in cinematic representation is thus a cause for visual pleasure that may lead us to gaze with curiosity. Mulvey refers to this fascination with the human body as scopophilia<sup>46</sup> and argues that: “...curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings” (Mulvey 2004: 59). Through Mulvey’s statement, one can understand that, through focusing our attention on the human form, we derive a certain understanding of the film because we recognise the human body and distinguish it apart from ourselves, as both similar to and other.<sup>47</sup> In the case of pain and suffering, we set our attention on the physical representation through the gestures and performance which “take on an enhanced value” on the part of the characters’ experience (Mulvey, 2007: 166). This experience may lead to emotional affect in a viewer’s response, which will be discussed later to some extent (especially in relation to my own film).

Certain viewers will nonetheless be more interested in the human body than others. Mulvey calls these viewers “fetishistic spectators”, and states that they become fetishistically absorbed by the image of the human body” rather than by plot (2007: 11 – 12). Yet some filmmakers draw specifically from the notion of the human body as spectacle. In the second sequence of *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1992), Quentin Tarantino immediately draws our attention to the agony of Mr Pink (Tim Roth), who has been shot in the stomach, by focusing the camera on his bleeding body and agonizing facial expression, not to mention his distressing rants and moaning from fear of dying. My point here is that the physical expression of pain and agony makes us more aware of the dire situation than the conversations about it later in the film. It holds our attention and makes us curious to watch further.

This sequence in *Reservoir Dogs* also indicates that the violence in the film may not necessarily depend on the physical actions on the screen as I have discussed with *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Devil’s Backbone*, but may be implied through other diverse means. As we have seen with the second sequence of *Reservoir Dogs* and the murder at the beginning of *The Devil’s Backbone*, the violence may be implied through visual elements such as emotional expression of the performer or witness and traces of physical harm to the body. The depiction of blood acts in many cases as a signifying device for the violent acts and people seem to respond very easily to it. In other cases, the actual act of violence may be shown without the physical effect of the act being depicted. This is the case in Matteo Garrone’s gangster film

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<sup>46</sup> Mulvey points out that Freud originally isolated scopophilia as “one of the component instincts of sexuality which exists as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (Mulvey, 1975: 58).

<sup>47</sup> This relates back to the mirror stage of Lacan previously discussed.

*Gomorra* (2008), in which some of the many murders in the film are shown by focusing the camera on the perpetrator, but leaving the audience to imagine the image of the victim's destruction and death.

The physical expression is a very obvious way to convey violent acts to audiences, but filmmakers may also depend on other cinematic devices such as sound and dialogue. Sound carries very strong signifying abilities, in that through the sound of a victim's pleading or physical sound of bones crushing and blood spurting, the viewer forms the act in his own imagination.<sup>48</sup>

Within these discussions on how violence may be represented, there are strong indications that the viewer's ability to make meaning from cinematic images and sound play a vital role in how the violence may be perceived and understood. This is especially the case with implied violence as I have just discussed, where the filmmaker relies solely on the perceptive abilities of the viewer.

### **How do we make subjective meaning from the representations of violence?**

To make meaning from what is represented in film, we first have to 'read' the sequence shown to us. If one looks at film from a semiotic point of view, it is like a language. It is not a language in the sense that English is a language, but it has a very clear set of visual codes which enable the viewer to understand the film at first on a "denotative level" and then, by using his cognitive perception abilities, on a "connotative level".

How exactly do we make meaning from film representations? To understand this, I will first explain how meaning is made from texts or signs in semiotics (also called semiology), which leads us to understand how meaning may be formed from representations of violence. It is not my intention to discuss semiotics and its relation to film in depth, but it is necessary to discuss how meaning is made from film representations in order to discuss how the violence is perceived subjectively.

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<sup>48</sup> Many of the conversations with my peers about the violence in Park Chan-Wook's film *Oldboy* (2003) pointed to the power that the use of sound has over the viewer's imagination. There is a consensus among them that the most violent scene of the film is the one in which Oh Dae-su tortures a man by pulling out his teeth with a hammer. The actual pulling of the teeth is not shown, but implied through various shots preceding it, the movement of Oh Dae-su's arm manoeuvring the hammer, the sound of the hammer against the teeth and the blood-soaked teeth being dropped on a computer keyboard. The gestures that the act is being committed at that moment caused a lot of viewers to cringe through using their imaginations to 'fill in the blanks', which is again a very powerful emotional affect.

A semiological understanding of signs depends in part on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1914).<sup>49</sup> In order to discuss how his theory may be related to film, I will refer to the image from Park Chan-Wook's *Oldboy* (2003) below (Figure 9). Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis gives an overview of Saussure's argument and states that the sign consists of two parts: the "signifier" and the "signified". In practice, they will always be integrated into each other. The signifier is the "sensible material, acoustic or visual signal", such as the image of a keyboard and bloody teeth below (Figure 9), "which triggers a mental concept, the signified", which in this case may be the pulling of teeth as well as the pain and anguish of the act (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 8).



**Figure 9: Still from *Oldboy* (2003), directed by Park Chan-Wook**

What is important to note, is that there is no necessary relationship between signifier and signified. For instance the signified may be explained by a different sign, such as an image of a dentist holding a bloody pair of pliers. The same signifier may also have different meanings like the ruining of the computer keyboard. The stability attached to the relationship between the signifier and signified then does not depend on the connection between them, but on the difference between that particular sign and many others at that point (Rose, 2001: 74-75). One also has to take in account that the image shown is only part of a shot, which is only part of a whole sequence in the entire film. From this it is evident that meaning is made through the relationships the shot has.

Monaco indicates that Saussure entered into two important types of relationship in his theory of semiology: Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic, which may also be applied to the reading of films. The

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<sup>49</sup> Within Saussure's writings we find the classical definition of semiology: "A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to exist, a place staked out in advance" (Saussure, 1966: 16).

paradigmatic relationship of the image or shot is the relationship it has with other images or shots with which it may be compared to, but which are not shown (Monaco, 1977: 131). If we return to the image of the bloody teeth on the keyboard, the paradigmatic connotations we make from looking at it, are made by comparing this image to other images of, for instance teeth, blood, pulled teeth as well as healthy teeth in the mouth. This makes it possible for the viewer to have an affective response to implied violence such as this, which is important for the later discussion of violence in my own film *Preek*.

Linguistically speaking, the syntagm and syntagmatic relationships “have to do with the sequential characteristics of speech, their ‘horizontal’ arrangement into a signifying whole...syntagmatic operations involve combining” (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 9). Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis further states that it is through this syntagmatic nature of film narration, that the film and language analogy operates and not at the level of basic units (1992: 37). Through this, it is argued that the meaning of signs or texts depends very much on the context in which they are read, which can be applied to film in that the meaning of the image or shot in relation to the narrative structure depends on it being “compared with actual shots that precede or follow it” (Monaco, 1977: 21). In Language phonemes and morphemes are combined to form sentences; “film selects images and sounds to form syntagmas, i.e. units of narrative autonomy in which elements interact semantically” (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 37).

Let us consider the image of the teeth again. As I have indicated paradigmatic connotations may be made by the image alone, but the particular connotations which Park is aiming at, can only surface once it is seen in relation to the shots which preceded it and the ones that follow it. This also allows for a clearer understanding of the violence and the cruelty thereof.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Figure 10 and 11 are from one shot that shows Oh Dae-su pressing his hammer on the victim’s teeth to such an extent that blood siphons from his gums. Figure 12 is from the next shot in which we see Oh Dae-su twisting the hammer. From comparing the first two shots (along with the agonising yells of the victim) one may start to assume that Oh Dae-su has uprooted a tooth. Figure 13 (the teeth on the keyboard) is the shot which follows, indicating that a couple of teeth have already been pulled. In the next two shots, Oh Dae-su tries to get information from the victim. Only by placing Figure 13 in relation to the others do we understand what it means. We understand who the teeth belong to, in other words, the identity of the victim; how it came about that it was pulled (who was the performer, what was used to pull it and how it was pulled); and through the shots that follow we understand that the teeth were pulled in order to torture the victim and why.



Figure 10, 11 and 12: Stills from *Oldboy* (2003), directed by Park Chan-Wook



Figure 13, 14 and 15: Stills from *Oldboy* (2003), directed by Park Chan-Wook

In the case of cinema, the narrative exists through the combination of sequences or scenes, which in turn consist of a combination of shots (yet in some films, like *Irreversible* (Gaspar No , 2005), sequences may consist of single shots, but constant reframing of angles). Consequently, violent scenes like the one in *Oldboy*, will only reach their full meaning if the viewer watches them in relation to all the other scenes that precede and follow it as well as the narrative and plot structures.<sup>51</sup> It is thus necessary for the viewer to make meaning from the narrative in order to take a position in relation to the represented violence. The viewer may thus be related to the witness in Riches' triangle, who takes a certain position according to his or her understanding of the context in which the act is committed as well as their relation to the performer and victim, which is strengthened by identification<sup>52</sup>.

One may argue that a certain threshold for violent imagery may expand through regular exposure. Yet the viewer's context in terms of social and cultural affiliation will always inform the meaning made, which

<sup>51</sup> Clark McCauley states that "the instigation of viewer emotion depends upon knowing more about the protagonist than is conveyed in a few minutes of fighting ripped out of context (1998: 148)

<sup>52</sup> However, in the case of film one has to assume that the viewer understands how the film language works. Through the connotative level one may argue that a viewer may become even more literate in film 'language' through regular viewing, for when we learn to understand a language better, it becomes easier to make connections between the different elements involved, which means that we can move easily from a literal to figurative reading of filmic signifiers. Monaco states: "An education in the quasi-language of film opens up greater potential meaning for the observer" (1977: 121). This statement may also relate to the representation of violence on screen and how a viewer may become adjusted to it.

indicates that meaning made from the representation of violence is subjective. This indicates that we might read representations in film as we might read a written page – physically as well as mentally and psychologically; it will be determined by the “subconscious connotations that each has” with the representation (Monaco, 1977: 128). To discuss this further I would like to refer to a representation of violence at the beginning of *Eastern Promises* (Cronenberg, 2007).

Monaco writes that “various individuals read images more or less well in three different ways”: physiologically, ethnographically and psychologically (1977: 125). On a physiological level, one sees the images on screen through the use of one’s receptor organs and recognises it. In this sense we recognise the image in *Eastern Promises* showing Azim’s nephew using a razor to cut the throat of a man, through the “interactive optical phenomena known as ‘persistence of vision’ and the ‘phi phenomenon’ (Cook, 2004: 1).<sup>53</sup> Because our vision may be distracted and move between objects in the *mise-en-scene*, Cronenberg frames our attention on specific details, like the characters, their expressions during the scene, the razor and finally the cutting of Soyka’s throat.

Ethnographically one draws on one’s experience and knowledge “of various cultural visual conventions” (Monaco, 1977: 125). In this sense our understanding becomes a bit more complicated and subjective. One may recognise that the sequence plays off in a barber shop through the knowledge that the character Azim is standing behind Soyka with scissors cutting his hair through the understanding that this is customary in a barber shop. One may recognise the razor, which the barber opens up and hands to his nephew, as a sharp and potentially dangerous instrument. The actual violent act on the other hand relies on its structures of direct experience and our familiarity with it: Our understanding that a sharp instrument cutting someone’s throat causes pain, and ends in bloodshed which possibly leads to death. Ethnographic understanding can thus be connected to our experience.

Psychologically one would incorporate the various sets of meanings they perceived and integrate the experience (Monaco, 1977: 125), which means that one may start making meaning from the scene in *Eastern Promises* by connecting our own understandings with experiences and acts on screen.

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<sup>53</sup> Cook, in *A History of Narrative Cinema*, describes the definitions of the two elements of interactive optical phenomena. The Persistence of vision “is a characteristic of human perception, known to the ancient Egyptians but first described scientifically by Peter Mark Roget in 1824, whereby the brain retains images cast upon the retina of the eye for approximately one-twentieth to one-fifth of a second beyond their actual removal from the field of vision”. The phi phenomenon, “whose operation was discovered by Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer in 1912, is the phenomenon that causes us to see the individual blades of a rotating fan as a unitary circular form, or the different hues of a spinning color wheel as a single, homogenous color“ (2004:1).

Psychologically speaking, how we identify with the cinematic image and position ourselves in relation to the violent act, depends on the emotional affect we experience through our independent understanding of the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence. We understand the pain and the suffering in the scene differently from one another, and it is thus imperative to acknowledge that one person's perception of the representation will differ to the next person in that different points of view will be formed, different meanings made, and so different experiences of the violence will follow.

With this example, it is clear that we should not exclude our respective socio-cultural backgrounds from the meaning-making process. The meaning of the representation can be defined by our cultural standpoint as well as our previous knowledge and experiences (Eco, 1979: 179). Because most people have never and will hopefully never experience real violence to the extent that it is represented in the films I discuss, most of the meanings made from violence in film are informed by other films. I will expand on this further, in order to explain my motivations for certain choices made in the representation of violence in *Preek*.

From the discussions above, it is clear that a certain sequence or film may “convey many kinds of messages simultaneously that will be understood differently by viewers” (Trend, 2007: 35). How one perceives a film depends on the knowledge, experience and background one brings to the encounter, as well as the context it is viewed in. Because of this, we do not simply take in the violent sequences that are represented but engage with it and negotiate our position in relation to the violence on screen. We seem to be witnesses, yet what is shown is still made up from a multitude of choices made by the filmmaker(s).

## **Conclusion**

In this second part of chapter one, I have suggested that there are different motives for viewing violence and that the viewing of violence may elicit some sort of emotional response, which in many cases can be related to catharsis. The response however depends on the way the violence is represented as well as the context of the viewer and the situation it is viewed in. I have pointed out that film is a mimetic representation and that an acknowledgement of this –by entering the film's imaginary – enhances our acceptance of what is shown and makes it possible for us to identify with the image and make meaning from it.. Drawing on Metz and Baudry's psychoanalytically-informed film theory, which refers to the Lacanian mirror stage, mimetic representation may become a sort of illusion. This may be related to what Jean-Louis Baudry when he states that the film offers an experience which viewers believe to be a projection of “objective reality” (1985: 533). But if this is, as Carrol critiques, something that “deceives or is liable to deceive” the viewer (Carrol, 1988a: 95), the representation on the screen may elicit false beliefs in the violence's realness.

Where the ‘belief’ theory does offer a valid point is that violence depicted in films like *A Prophet* are presented to us in such a way that we believe it is a representation of something real and dangerous to the characters of the film. We do not believe that the violence on screen is real to us per se, but real in the diegesis (the fictional world of the film). In films like *A Prophet* there is a sense of intensity to the violence, which Newman states as a prerogative for real violent acts when he writes that, all of the definitions of violence “clearly refer to one central element of violence, which is *intensity*” (1979: 2). This however can be experienced on different levels. It is also possible, not to engage and not to suspend our disbelief to such an extent so that that we keep to the foreground our awareness that it is only a representation (experience the representation on the surface – aesthetically) and therefore it is possible for us to enjoy the pure aesthetic qualities of violence represented in the film. This also makes it more possible to have a cathartic release while watching violence on screen as well as laugh at violence where it is contextualised in the film as a humorous act. We stand at a distance and engage with the human bodies represented on screen, but do not fully care for them. Smith states: “Because it is fictional, imagined, we are released from the concern we have with the consequences of real actions” (1995: 123). This is more prominent in films where violence is represented in excess and in such a way that the conventions of cinema become or stay prominent to us.

There are two things my argument refers to. Firstly, it points out that different people experience representations differently. Superficially, it refers to two prominent ways of representing and reasons for representing violence: the representation of violence as an instrumental act within the film’s diegesis and the representation of violence for its expressive or aesthetic value within the narrative and on the surface. The first type of representation strives towards a realistic representation of violence so that it may have the intensity the narrative longs for, and the second representation strives for violence as an expressive and aesthetic act through an excessive overload of cinematic convention. This allows me to engage in a discussion centred on the two classical film tendencies: realism and formalism.

## Chapter Two: Real vs. Excess - Representations of Violence from Realist and Formalist Perspectives

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In his book *What is Cinema? Vol. 1* (1967), André Bazin points to two broad opposing trends in filmmaking: “Those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality” (1967: 24). Whereas the realists like Bazin saw the key ontological element of film as the resemblance that the photographic image has to empirical reality, the formalists, champions of montage, believed that film can go beyond this reality and transform it instead of simply reproducing it. Bazin saw the screen as a window through which we look on to a reality and therefore do not doubt the existence of that which is hidden from the screen. In a formalist sense the screen can rather be seen “as a frame, organizing internal space and concentrating interest on specific spots within the frame” (Altman, 1985: 521). Leo Braudy writes, “Too often we accept a film as a window on reality without noticing that the window has been opened in a particular way, to exclude as well as to include” (Braudy, 1976: 22). What Braudy explains here is that, what is seen is completely subjective; firstly for the filmmaker, because the manipulation of this image is “always the result of a conscious choice” (Hedges, 1980: 29) (which is a result of external influences); and secondly to the viewer, because as I stated earlier, the narrative is constituted by the viewers’ imagination and the viewer’s context. My question is then: To what extent do I understand and work with film as a reflection on reality on one hand, or to what extent do I engage with film as an experience beyond the real (in excess), as a result of formalist choices driven by subjective aesthetic and imaginative ideas on the other?

This chapter thus deals predominantly with the two classic film tendencies – the realist tendency and the formalist tendency (that has also been referred to as creationist tendency), which can be traced back to two of the first prominent figures in cinematographic productions: Lumière (a strict realist) and Méliès, who gave free rein to his artistic imagination. It is thus evident that these two tendencies are reflections of different styles. They are normative and descriptive theories and may thus be seen to recommend different techniques of direction. With this said, I need to point out that the discussions around the realists and formalists (or creationists) will rather revolve around their preferred film styles and therefore their preferred use of cinematic techniques, rather than their ideas around perception of the representation.

Although I have indicated that the two styles can be traced back to the beginning of cinema, I will focus my attention on two contemporary filmmakers who are currently active directors, and I will refer to two specific films which I will use as examples for the different tendencies: *Hidden* by Michael Haneke (realist), and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* by Quentin Tarantino (formalist). I will also focus on a specific sequence

within each film. It is also important to note that when I refer to responses evoked by the representation of the violence, they will be my own subjective responses.

## 2.1 The Realist Tendency: *Hidden's violence*

The writer synonymous with the realist tendency is André Bazin. I focus closely on his work here, as well as those who have taken up his critical work in their own scholarship.

Bazin was of the opinion that man's desire to control nature by fixing it in the form of art, was more accomplished through the invention of cinema than any other art form before it. In his book *What is cinema?* Bazin states that

The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image... (1967: 21)

Proponents of the realist tendency thus believed that film 'contains' nature in a way that no other art 'contains' nature itself, except still photography. According to the realists, still photography or the photographic image can be seen as the point from where film and the language of film developed, because, as they argue, still photography and film share the same objective identity relation between their referents and their representations. Bazin writes: "But photography is something else again, in no sense is it the image of an object or person, it is its tracing...As such it carries with it more than a mere resemblance, namely a kind of identity..." (Bazin, 1967: 137). Following this statement, the image then is seen as objective in nature which bestows upon it a "quality of credibility absent from all other picture making" (Bazin, 1967: 137). This means that Bazin and his followers like Kracauer was of the opinion that a cinematic representation has the capability to affect viewers in such a way that they believe they are in the presence of the referent of the image. This understanding of representation was re-dubbed as re-presentation (Bazin, 1967: 13).

Noël Carroll argues that a strong version of this re-presentational theory maintains that: "For any photographic or film image  $x$  and its referent  $y$ ,  $x$  represents  $y$  if and only if 1)  $x$  is identical to  $y$  (in terms of pertinent patterns of light), and 2)  $y$  is a causal factor in the production of  $x$ " (2004: 83). This is what Carroll states to be a physical portrayal. As I have indicated earlier with the discussion of nominal portrayal, the theory of re-presentation or physical portrayal does not hold water with fictional films which represent objects and events within the diegetic space and time within the diegetic narrative of the film. What seems to be the key argument against the re-presentation theory of Bazin, is the transformational

qualities of fictional film, as Irvin Singer writes: “Film reproduces reality by recreating it, by transforming it through the visual and auditory technologies designed for that purpose” (1998: 10). To respond properly and fully understand the film as a fictional narrative, the viewer should be aware of the conventions specific to film.

What I would like to point out here is that Bazin's hypothesis that “the realism of cinema follows from its photographic nature” (1967: 108) –its ability to record space in time– to some extent disregards particular choices made by a filmmaker to represent a sequence. As Alfred Guzetti writes of Bazin: “The requirements of spatial verisimilitude and narrative are, in his view, independent of these decisions to such an extent that he willingly associates different sets of decisions with exactly the same meaning” (1975: 380).

Thus, the problem that I have with Bazin and Kracauer is the extreme weight that they put on the close relationship that film (especially fictional narrative film) has with the photograph. Not necessarily with the photograph as object, but how they understood the function of still photography as a recording of reality, (but which is a construction in film). First of all, by acknowledging the cinematic representation as a nominal portrayal and a type of depiction, as I have stated earlier, I am putting forward that the type of representation that fictional films produce are not specific or unique to the photographic image. Carrol states that “nominal portrayal and depiction, as various techniques of physical portrayal are available in other than photographic media” (2004: 95).

It is very important in respect to any art form, to understand what it does. How does a viewer comprehend what he sees? It certainly comes from that which embodies the medium. Bazin was clearly of the opinion that through acknowledging film as the same as still photography and treating photography as “a transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction” (1967: 13), makes it possible for us to determine what film can and does do. To some extent I understand Bazin's claim that film shares its core with still photography. The basic recording apparatus works on the same principle and both produce photographic images traced in light to the likeness of its referents. Yet, by pressing on these similarities, one ignores what film and especially fictional film does.

The crucial element of film which sets it apart from the photographic image (and which I already stated earlier), is that it moves. It is a time-based, rather than an object-based, medium. Cinema has made possible an age-old desire of the human being – to create the illusion of movement, which strengthens a

viewer's ability to identify and enter the Imaginary and thus to suspend his or her disbelief.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, although Bazin and Kracauer argue that film shares its ontology with still photography, the fact that film 'moves', separates it from still photography in nature because it completely changes the way it communicates with a viewer and inadvertently changes the viewer's perception of the image. Laura Mulvey supports this when she says that "The reality recorded by the photograph, relates exclusively to its moment of registration; that is, it represents a moment extracted from historical time. However historical the moving image might be, it is bound into an order of continuity and pattern..." (2007: 13). Whereas the still photograph communicates an instant of recording, the moving image of the film constitutes a continuous flow where the viewer engages directly with a temporality of space and time, which then brings it all the more closer to an experience of an event. After the viewing of a film, the viewer is thus left not with a single image in his recollection, but with a series of sequences, which together form the understanding of the story communicated. The engagement and identification is far more complex than with a photograph, which thus results in a far more complex and affective response (this is important for later discussions).

That is not to say that the Bazin and Kracauer were ignorant about movement and temporality within the narrative of a film, but they seem to feel that the advent of movement and sound only furthers cinema's ability to record physical reality. According to Bazin, movement within a space is objectively captured and should also be kept that way, so that there should be a spatial continuity (unedited) in order for the image to "have the spatial density of something real" (1967:48). Bazin writes that, "It is simply a question of respect for the spatial unity of an event at the moment when to split it up would change it from something real to something imaginary" (1967:50). Bazin's support for what Carrol calls "spatial realism" (1988b: 113) is based on his belief that essential cinema "is to be found in straightforward photographic respect for the unity of space", and it is for this reason that Bazin was opposed to montage (1967:46).

When Singer writes about Bazin in this respect, he argues that Bazin's attack on montage was motivated by his persuasion that a montage sequence will always be unfaithful to the spatial continuity within our perceptions of reality (1998: 85). Spatial realism would, for Bazin, impart an aura of authenticity to scenes. Bazin saw Jean Renoir as the champion for the realist film that focused attention on physical reality and explained that Renoir had from the very first "...forced himself to look back beyond the resources provided by montage and so uncovered the secret of the film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, that would reveal the hidden meanings in

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<sup>54</sup> Film has just as much descended from wondrous devices such as the Phenakistoscope, Zoetrope and von Uchatius drawings between 1832 and 1850, which all aimed to give the illusion of movement.

people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them” (Bazin, 1967: 38). There is something important in what he says. Within support of spatial realism, Bazin argues that through ignoring montage the filmmaker allows

...both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. (1967: 36)

It is through the viewers attention and will that Bazin states, the meaning of the representation is formed, in that the filmmaker grants the spectator an opportunity to select certain features or instances to respond to. Bazin refused to acknowledge the crucial importance of cinematic devices which give meaning to images, such as close-ups, camera movements, montage sequences and so on, and that these meanings are made by the viewer in order to understand the diegetic world of the narrative. He stipulates that “The changes in the camera’s point of view add nothing. They only present reality in a more effective manner. First by permitting a better view, then by putting the accent where it belongs” (Bazin, 1967: 132). Although I agree that they permit a better view and that it puts the accent where it belongs, I disagree that it adds nothing. I believe that the use of cinematic devices are conscious choices made by the filmmaker, that may more adequately serve the narrative and give meaning to it so that the film may be understood in a certain way. Jean Epstein writes that through these devices “a revolver in a drawer, a broken bottle on the ground, an eye isolated by an iris, are elevated to the status of characters in the drama” (Epstein, 2004: 52). This suggests that the way in which the image is articulated through cinematic devices imbues it with a certain meaning within the narrative.

Bazin does not argue against the choices of a filmmaker per se, but he stipulates that the outcome of a film will only be successful if they strip away everything that cannot be directly perceived in terms of physical appearances. He argues that “human meaning” cannot be invented by the filmmaker, but that it should rather be a discovery made by the viewer. The filmmaker then should, according to Bazin, selectively choose “from the immanent significance that is already part of the world” (Singer, 1998: 91).

What is of course evident from this discussion of Bazin is that he had a certain ‘ideal’ style of filmmaking in mind that would focus its attention on the representation of physical reality. He favoured a style in which the images would be stripped from all the expressive film techniques, which was particularly favoured by the Russian Formalists, in order to re-present reality in a way that viewers would acknowledge the cinematic image as a pure recording of reality. As I have stated, I do have certain oppositional opinions to Bazin's theory of representation, yet I cannot deny that some of his arguments for

a realist style of representation do have merit and may be applied to some representations of violence in film. To discuss this I will refer to Michael Haneke's film *Hidden*.

### **Realist representation in *Hidden***

What attracts me to Bazin's realist tendency is his preference for a spatial realism, in that certain cinematic techniques could be applied to "articulate events in a spatially and temporally continuous manner" (Carrol, 1988b: 102), which according to Bazin heightens the realism of the film. Bazin thus perceived that there was a style of filmmaking that supports his ideal of spatial realism.<sup>55</sup> Noël Carrol gives a clear outline of this preferred style within his chapter on Bazin in his book *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (1988), which I will refer to in order to determine to what extent the representation of violence in *Hidden* is a realist representation as according to Bazin's ideals. Firstly, however, I will give an overview of the scene in *Hidden* which I will discuss.

*Hidden* is a film about a host for a literary television programme, Georges Laurent, who is being harassed by a mysterious person that sends him video surveillance material of his home's facade, postcards with childlike drawings (crude figures with blood pouring out of their mouths) and other video material. The cassettes and messages lead him to a man, Majid, who was at one time adopted by Georges' parents, but later sent away because Georges asked them to. When Georges confronts Majid and accuses him of taunting him out of resentment, Majid denies it. One becomes aware that the feud between them had a ruinous effect on Majid's life. Later in the film Majid asks Georges to visit him at his apartment. He explains that he knew nothing of the video cassettes, but that he wanted him to be present. After this, he takes out a razor and cuts his own throat. The scene consists of one single long-shot in which Majid explains himself, cuts his throat and Georges, shocked, walks out of frame and in again as he tries to hold back being sick. The progression of the sequence until Majid falls down can be seen in Figure 16 to 19.

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<sup>55</sup> These preferences in style were recognised by Bazin in the films of Jean Renoir and thus as Carrol notes: "Much of Bazin's theoretical work represents a sustained meditation on Renoir's films..." (Carrol, 1988: 105).



**Figure 16 and 17: Stills from *Hidden* (2005), directed by Michael Haneke**



**Figure 18 and 19: Stills from *Hidden* (2005), directed by Michael Haneke**

From the outset, this scene may seem quite straightforward, but there are very particular responses it evokes in this particular viewer, which I believe can be attributed to the style in which it is represented. This style bears close resemblances to Bazin's preferred style of representation, which I will explain accordingly.

Firstly Carrol lists Bazin's preference for the use of medium-long shots - "shots in which the whole bodies of actors [are] visible on screen, often with space between the top of their heads and the upper frame line" (1988b: 105). This feature can clearly be noted in the scene described above. Throughout the whole scene the shot stays the same (the camera is 'locked off'), in which both actors are fully visible, except for the instance where Georges walks out of frame and in again (although his imprint, stays constantly present). The second feature of Bazin's preferred style, according to Carrol (which in many respects can be seen in tandem with the medium-long shot) is the use of deep-focus, where "every point in the image [is] in hard focus, as opposed to soft-focus techniques of the Hollywood thirties' composition" (1988b: 105). In the suicide sequence of *Hidden*, everything in the frame is in focus and so the focal depth of the camera does not give one direction as to where to focus one's attention. Carrol also lists the long-take as key to this preferred style. In the long-take shot the dramatic action in the scene is worked out and tackled in one shot of long duration on "multiple planes of a deep-focus shot" (1988b: 105). If one acknowledges again the

scene described above, it is even more clear that Bazin's preferred style is evidenced here, in that the action is not analytically fragmented into a series of shots, but developed into a long-take, medium long shot with deep-focus.

Bazin argues that the deep-focus and the long-take sequence shots “brings the spectator in closer relation with the image than he is with reality. Therefore, according to Bazin, it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, that its structure is more realistic” (1967: 35). For Bazin then, the deep-focus and medium-long shot puts the viewer in a position to experience the representation of the suicide in *Hidden* closer to an actual perception of the suicide than what an edited version would have offered. Rather than having the relationship to the drama of the sequence spelled out for them<sup>56</sup> the viewer of the scene can scan the whole space and everything in it for the complete duration that it takes place in (as if it was a mere recording in real time), in order to make their own subjective meanings of what just played out in front of them. This suggests that according to Bazin's theory, following Carroll, the continuous dramatic space that Haneke offers “allows a certain freedom to the spectator that is more like our ordinary experience of actual events” (Carrol, 1988b: 107).<sup>57</sup>

Carrol notes that Bazin seems to argue that “since reality is ultimately ambiguous – at least in terms of the judgements we make about people, [objects and actions]” (1988b: 115), and since the use of a long-take, medium-long shot and deep-focus gives the audience the ability to discover the meaning of the sequence independently, it allows a certain “ambiguity of potential response, directly related to this natural “ambiguity of reality” (Harcourt, 1968: 23). Bazin's argument for the use of his preferred techniques can thus be thought of as a moral argument, in that the viewer of a montage sequence is seen as passive, whereas spatial realism requires the viewer to be active. Bazin's opinion was then that within a film which focuses on spatial continuity, the viewer has a greater role in the communication process and relies on imagination and intuition in order to pass his or her own judgement on the actions in the diegesis, for he or she selects certain features on the screen to respond to. Harcourt goes on to explain that a filmmaker who “depends more upon editing, is more concerned to direct the response of the spectator, diminishing this ambiguity” (1968: 23). Thus, according to Bazin's idea that spatial realism in film offers a chance for an ambiguous response from the viewer (which is more likened to his or her responses to reality), the suicide

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<sup>56</sup> For instance if the scene was cut to a close-up of Majid's throat as he sliced it, followed by a close-up of Georges's face in reaction.

<sup>57</sup> This can be related to Bazin's comment on the Italian neorealist style. He says: “In Roberto Rossellini's *Paisan* and *Allemania Anno Zero* and Vittorio DeSica's *Ladri de Biciclette*, Italian neorealism contrasts with previous forms of film realism in its stripping away of all expressionism and in the total absence of effects of montage...neorealism tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality”. (1967: 37)

in *Hidden* has the ability to be as ambiguous as the viewing of a real suicide in that it offers only a window to an action that we would, in reality, have a subjective response to.

The relationship that the viewer has with the film is based on what is offered in terms of image and sound, and not implied or driven at by cinematic techniques such as montage. The scenes prior to the suicide in *Hidden* can also be regarded as *Bazinian* in style, and thus at the point of the suicide, which is shown in complete regards to Bazin's notion of spatial realism (with long-take, deep-focus and medium-long shot), we are faced with an image of the whole event for the duration of the whole event, which then requires of us to react in our own personal way and to “discover the dramatic point of the scene for ourselves” (Carrol, 1988b: 107). In effect the violence has the ability to evoke a strong affective response from the viewer, as opposed to a fragmented scene, which draws attention on the aesthetic qualities of the film. Again, this will be discussed later in relation to *Preek*.

This also brings us to the last two techniques that Carrol lists as Bazin's prerequisites to an essentially realist film, namely a “nontheatrical, nonpainterly use of the frame” as well as “the use of camera movement rather than editing to follow the action” (1988b: 105). In this respect, Bazin was against the artificial staging of a scene one usually found in films of his day (which started with Miérlès with his theatrically staged shots). All the action was usually set up in front of the camera and the actors were framed in such a way that they never stepped out of the camera's set up perspective (Carrol, 1988b: 101).

Bazin's compatriot in realist cinema, Siegfried Kracauer, writes that staging is “surely legitimate if the staged world is made to appear as a faithful reproduction of the real one” (1960: 34). Bazin however (with his notion of the window metaphor and preference of spatial realism) again championed Jean Renoir who “favoured awkward, geometrically irregular, and unevenly paced camera movement”, which followed the actors and actions around, instead of blocking them off in a frame (Carrol, 1988b: 101). Bazin favoured Renoir's techniques for their emphasis on the possibility of film as the “spontaneous recording of events” (Bazin, 1973: 89).<sup>58</sup> Within Bazin's theory there seems to be a definite desire for films to be objectively recorded. I reiterate that because filmmaking relies on the filmmaker's conscious choices, choices that will always be subjective. As such, the planning and execution of a particular sequence will also be thus.

But with respect to Bazin's ideal of spatial realism, it can be argued that the set up of long-takes where the camera follows actor and action lends a feeling that the sequence and the action is filmed independent of

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<sup>58</sup> This might not be a claim that Renoir's sequences *are* in fact spontaneous recordings, but a claim, as Carrol (1988: 102) explains, that “in contrast to the corpus of ordinary films of the period, Renoir's films subverted certain standard techniques in a way that could be interpreted as dismantling a kind of artifice...”

the camera and not that is staged aesthetically to capture everything in a perfect frame. If one considers the suicide scene described in *Hidden*, it may be thought from the outset that this ideal technique of Bazin cannot be applied to the sequence, in that the camera is set up and is still throughout. When Georges walks to one side the camera does not follow him, but stays fixed to the space where Majid's body lies on the floor. What is important to note is that although the camera does not pan, Georges does not stay within the frame set-up to show the action, but moves out of it (Figure 20 and 21), just beyond it (Figure 22), and back into the frame again (Figure 23).



**Figure 20 and 21: Stills from *Hidden* (2005), directed by Michael Haneke**



**Figure 22 and 23: Stills from *Hidden* (2005), directed by Michael Haneke**

What I would like to stipulate here is that, although Bazin preferred camera movement that follows the action in order to create a spatial realism, the sequence in *Hidden* in which Georges moves beyond the frame and back again, supports Bazin's notion of the screen as window even more, and that it thus qualifies as a representation of physical reality (which Bazin praised so much) to just such an (or maybe even to a greater) extent than it would have if the camera had moved. The fact that Georges moves beyond the frame (yet his shadow and his physical sounds remain as proof of his presence), adds even greater authenticity to the scene, because there seems to be no relationship between the camera and the image and therefore offer an interpretation of the image as an objective recording of the suicide, which may result in powerful emotional affect in the viewer.

I agree with Bazin that the stylistic techniques such as the long-take, deep-focus and medium-long shot used in the scene has great effect on the authenticity of the representation and that it may elicit an emotional response closer to that of witnessing a violent action in reality (although not identical, for we experience it through the mediated language of film).<sup>59</sup> The problem with Bazin's concept of realism, however, is that he lays claim that the authenticity lies in the image: that the recording of physical reality is sufficient for making a representation realistic. If one assumes this as Bazin assumes it, the representation may only refer to its referent, and as Carrol explained, it can thus only be perceived as a physical portrayal, which means that Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* stays Uma Thurman and Daniel Auteuil who plays Georges in *Hidden* stays Daniel Auteuil.<sup>60</sup>

This suggests, rather ludicrously, that a recording of a man in a monster suit can be seen as a realistic representation, in that it is a re-presentation of just that: a man in a monster suit. Yet this seems removed from the diegetic narrative. What of the fiction then? How can the film in itself, the diegesis, be realistic if one only attends to the surface of the representation of the referent? According to Bazin's theory of realist representation, costume dramas and fantasy films may be counted as realist insofar they employ a style in which physical reality may be portrayed. I do not however agree with this. Earlier in this discussion, I asserted that the representation in fictional films can be seen as nominal portrayals (the image of Uma Thurman nominally portrays The Bride), and it is my opinion that the realism of a film also depends on the familiarity of nominal portrayals; that is, the structures of direct experience and the modes of embodied existence. These representations, it must be noted, are derivatives of conscious, subjective choices made by the filmmakers. My argument against Bazin thus calls for a re-evaluation of the suicide sequence in *Hidden*.

### **A re-evaluation of *Hidden*'s violence**

Whilst watching the suicide sequence in *Hidden*, one is aware that one is viewing the sequence through cinematic conventions. Singer writes that

...what is present to us in the photographic image are the resemblances themselves...In fact the presentness of the photographic image is forced upon us such by our knowledge of conditions that

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<sup>59</sup> I would also like to point out that, as this response is completely subjective as any response of a viewer, there may also be cases where people are so anaesthetised by the viewing of violence in films that they have little or no response to represented violence.

<sup>60</sup> Carrol writes that through Bazin's re-presentation theory: "Films seem to become records of actors and actual places; their fictional references dissolve in a manner of speaking" (2004: 81).

explicitly *preclude* our confusing the image with any prior reality: the flatness and the two dimensionality of the surface, the enormous size to which the objects have been magnified, the artificiality of the shimmering light in the darkened hall (1998: 45).

Although Haneke used a technique in this sequence through which the camera has no definite or visual relationship to the characters, so that we may believe in its authenticity as a recording of a suicide, we know we are still looking at this spectacle as mediated through the camera because we are experiencing the suicide as a sequence within a fictional narrative, in which we have come to recognise the representations of both actors as nominal portrayals within the diegesis of the film. It is thus evident that it cannot solely be the image as representation of physical reality that gives the suicide sequence a level of authenticity that we may call 'realistic'.

While watching Majid cutting his own throat, falling down and bleeding to death, as Georges looks on and becomes nauseous, one may still be aware of the fiction in that the narrative has been structured through the editing and connecting of sequences, yet because the diegetic world has been represented throughout the film in such a way that it kept close to very familiar (real) structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence, the representation may elicit an emotional response from the represented suicide, which can be closer to a real emotional response than a film with an unauthentic diegetic world.<sup>61</sup> This can be supported by Gerald Mast's notion of "conviction" within the viewing of a film. Mast writes that "We will only suspend disbelief to participate in the fiction as *real* if the work convinces us to do so. And once we have been convinced, we accept the *realness* of the fiction until the work does something to unconvince us" (1977: 47). This "conviction" that he talks about is of course possible because of Sobchack's notions of structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence which, in the case of *Hidden*, are familiar to our ontological understanding of the world.

With this conviction I came to accept *Hidden's* diegesis as a world, a Paris (for that is where the film is set) in which violence is, just as in my immediate understanding of it in the world, something brutal – something that has a devastating effect on victims and witnesses and maybe even performer, which in this case is the same as the victim.<sup>62</sup> I do not deny that the stylistic approach has great effect on this acceptance

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<sup>61</sup> This can of course be taken back to my argument in chapter two where I discuss the different responses between *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Devils Backbone*. As I argued the similarities that the diegetic world in *The Devils Backbone* has with my understanding of the world I live in, is what made the violence all the more real than the violence in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

<sup>62</sup> This also raises the question whether the witness in this case is not a victim as well and whether the true witnesses are the viewers of the film?

of the diegetic world as authentic or even familiar to us. On the contrary I believe that because the cutting has been kept to a minimum during and up to that point (with no excessive or stylised camera movements) the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence could be regarded as part of a complete universe. This makes it possible for one to identify the situation represented as authentic and experience the violence as something all the more real to the characters.

The response that I had to the represented violence here may thus be described as one of affect. Because the representation of violence are identified through entering the Imaginary, one can assume that the perception of Majid's suicide which plays itself off in front of us, "takes place in the life of the psyche", which according to David Macey, is where an affective response takes place (Macey, 2001: 5). Thus, the knowledge or subjective opinion that I have of the "devastating effect on victims and witnesses" and previous experience of physical pain and suffering (however little it may be) gives the realistically represented suicide sequence a certain meaning to me, to which I respond affectively. Even though, as I have previously indicated, we as viewers are aware of the fact that the mimetic representation is not real, I conclude that the representations of violence like the suicide of Majid can affect us emotionally for the reason, as Irvin Singer (1998: 26) argues, that "What we see...and what we feel, is meaningful to us because of realities that we are familiar with in life". Therefore, if there is a strong identification with the real representation, there will be more powerful emotional affect in the response.<sup>63</sup> Through identification, we enter the Imaginary and position ourselves in relation to the traumatic event within the narrative, which has strong implications on my own film.

Edward Branigan states in *Narrative Comprehension and Film* that narrative is a global interpretation of changing data measured through sets of relationships" and that "...these changes of state are not random, but are produced according to principles of cause and effect" (1992: 4 – 5). He stipulates that there are two fundamental kinds of predication for these changes to take place. Firstly there need to be 'existents' which can typically be seen as the characters and settings, (Georges, and Majid and his apartment space); and secondly there needs to be 'processes' which are the actions of the characters and forces of nature. From here, Branigan indicates that the changes of state, which are made by the processes, "create an overall pattern or 'transformation' in the narrative structure up to that point" (1992: 5). Within *Hidden*, the suicide (process) of Majid in front of Georges (an existent) creates a significant transformation in the narrative, which changes the state of affairs completely. It is within this changed state that Georges would

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<sup>63</sup> Violence in a film like this can be seen as instrumental (for the viewer as witness), in that it has a very distinctive function within the narrative and the plot structure. The narrative of a live action fictional film like *Hidden* and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* involves a play of "equilibrium and disequilibrium", in that the human actions in the film transforms one state of affair to another (Carrol, 1988 a: 161 & 163).

have to function for the rest of the film. It seems reasonable to conclude then that although the suicide of Majid may have had an expressive function for him as character (in a way he wanted to express to Georges that he caused his life to be ruined and thus his untimely death), it mostly has an instrumental function in the film to further the transformation of the narrative.<sup>64</sup>

The narrative of the film imparts meaning on to the violence within a certain context because the perceiver of the violence “constructs the diegetic space and time of the narrative” through the “visual and auditory information presented in successive moments of screen time” (Hedges, 80: 288) This means that the viewer places the suicide sequence in the context it is represented within the narrative in order to make meaning of the act.<sup>65</sup> This indicates that inside the narrative the violence has a function. Outside of it, it is just a spectacle. It is however important to note that although the violent act in *Hidden* may have instrumental function within the narrative of the film, its realness and the shock response one may have to the act can be set apart from the narrative.

Let’s reconsider the violent opening sequence of *Eastern Promises* discussed previously. Here, the viewer has not yet been given ample information about the diegetic narrative. The viewer has limited information about the film’s diegesis, although it seems quite authentic, and therefore approaches the sequence according to his understanding of his own world. A shock or an affective response to the violent sequence, which seems so real, is almost inevitable. *Hidden* also evokes its intense response outside of the narrative of the film because of the two factors discussed: The Bazinian style in which it is filmed, as well as the diegetic world which seems similar to ours where violence has intense physical and psychological effects.

The conclusion I draw here is that the realistic effect that a representation of violence has, relies on both a stylistic formative approach, as well as the nominal portrayal of people, objects, spaces and actions which are set in a diegesis where the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence are authentic in relation to our own world. Through the identification with the diegetic world and the characters in it, we need to acknowledge that the characters are experiencing a violence that is very real to them – a violence with devastating outcomes.

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<sup>64</sup> The instrumentality may also be attributed to Haneke, who aimed the violence at the viewer for very specific instrumental reasons.

<sup>65</sup> Carrol writes that:...a spectator internalizes the whole structure of interests depicted in the drama, and this structure includes alternative outcomes to various lines of action which the spectator must keep track of in some sense before one alternative is actualized in order for the film to be received as intelligible (1988a: 173)

## 2.2 The Formalist Tendency: *Kill Bill Vol. 1's* violence

While Bazin was of the opinion that film's most important contribution is its ability to reproduce reality, the formalists understood that film offered opportunities far exceeding those of still photography. They believed that it could become an art form when the mere desire to record was forsook in the hope of representing images by special means exclusive to film. Rudolph Arnheim writes that:

These means obtrude themselves, show themselves able to do more than simply reproduce the required object; they sharpen it, impose a style upon it, point out special features, make it vivid and decorative. Art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off (1958: 55).

This ability to transform reality was not merely a quality that the formalists believed film possessed, but that it was its nature. Their argument was that a cinematic image, however realistic it may have been represented, is very different from its referent in the real world. Offering a description of the formalist approach to film, Irvin Singer writes that: "Compared with what we usually perceive in life, cinematic images are tremendously distorted, expanded in some respects and truncated in others" (1998: 21). The formalists nevertheless believed that we respond to cinematic images "as the realities they resemble", and that these responses ascribe to subjective reactions that the filmmaker skilfully instils in the viewers (Singer, 1998: 21). In this respect the formalist theory has a lot in common with the work of German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg.<sup>66</sup>In his book *Film: A Psychological Study*, first published in 1916, Münsterberg states that, through film, the objective world is remoulded so that it concords with the subjective movements of the mind:

One general principle seem to control the whole mental mechanism of the spectator, or rather the relation between the mental mechanism and the pictures on the screen...In every case the objective world of outer events had been shaped and moulded until it became adjusted to the subjective movements of the mind... The mind is filled with emotions; and by means of the camera the whole scenery echoes them (1970: 58).

Thus, Münsterberg contends that techniques that are possible in film, such as camera movements and angles, close-ups and montage editing, may relate to the subjective functioning of the mind. Cinematic techniques thus placed filmmakers in a position to not be confined to exploring physical reality in front of the camera, but to move on to the areas of memory, imagination, emotion, attention and unifying perception. The form and structure of the film comes to the foreground as communicative medium and

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<sup>66</sup> According to Nicolas Tredell, Münsterberg's *The Film: A Psychological Study* (1916), was the first sustained work of film theory published (Tredell, 2002: 20).

allows the narrative to be told on different levels. For instance, if the mind can concentrate its attention on a specific detail, a film can draw our attention through the use of a close-up; emotions can perfuse our subjective perceptions of situations, and film techniques such as rhythmic montage editing and especially camera movements and angles can represent this suffusion (Tredell, 2002: 21). It is thus evident, from Münsterberg's theories that the communication of subjective perceptions depends on the effects that the formal qualities (which are specific to film) have on the viewers. This argument was then later taken up by formalists such as Sergei Eisenstein (1898 – 1945) and Rudolph Arnheim (1904 – 2007) who believed that film's essential ability to communicate to the viewer rested on the formal uses of techniques artfully applied by the filmmaker in order to have a desired effect on the viewer.

This suggests that, according to the formalists, the filmmaker has ultimate power over the image. Sergei Eisenstein offers an argument for film which is in direct opposition to Bazin's preference for a spatial realism which offers an ambiguity relating to reality. He writes that “The basic materials [of the film] arise from the spectator himself, and from our guiding of the spectator into a desired direction or mood... every element that can be verified and mathematically calculated to produce certain emotional shocks in a proper order within the totality” (Eisenstein, 1924: 99). This also relates to the opinion of Rudolph Arnheim, a noted formalist film theorist, who argues that to understand the film “it is essential that the spectator’s attention should be guided to such qualities of form, that is, that he should abandon himself to a mental attitude which is to some extent unnatural” (1933: 43).

By ‘unnatural’, Arnheim is referring to the perception and understanding of a three-dimensional object or character offered to us on a two-dimensional surface within a frame, in which the objects can be shown “large or small, increasing and decreasing, according to the mood of the scene” (1933: 75). By moving away from normal perception, the representation on the screen designed by the filmmaker enables us to see the object afresh with expressive qualities. Whereas in normal perception one’s eyes are free to move about in any direction (which Bazin wished to be mirrored in film), the film image on the other hand is bound by the frame. Arnheim believed that the control over the frame that the filmmaker has is a source of the artistic and expressive effects of the film and therefore he refers to a filmmaker who skilfully uses it, as the film artist. Showing objects or people singled out in a frame serve to focus our attention. Arnheim writes:

The film artist chooses a particular scene that he wishes to photograph; within the scene he can leave out objects, cover them up, make them prominent... He can increase or decrease the size of details, can make small objects larger than big ones, and vice versa... He can eliminate at will sensations and emotions, and thereby bring others into higher relief, ingeniously making them take place of those that are missing. (1933: 135).

The formalists thus believed that all possibilities and choices available to the filmmaker within a frame line, allows for the expression of feelings. It is due to the “difference between how we would normally see a scene in everyday experience [or even in the theatre] and how we see the scene under the peculiar conditions of cinema...” (Carrol, 1988b: 40; my addition in parentheses). The inserted comment about the theatre here is important. The formalists stressed the differences between cinema and theatre in order to argue that cinema goes beyond the normal perception into the realm of “the subjective faculties which, created through a dialectical interaction, enable us to see and appreciate the newly emerging beautiful things” (Balázs, 1952: 30).<sup>67</sup> The “subjective faculties” which Béla Balázs mentions makes reference to the shifts in perception made possible by the entire cinematic apparatus at the filmmaker’s disposal.

Balázs, the pioneering film theorist associated with the formalist tendency, stated that there are three principles of theatrical art that had been supplanted by the new methods of film. In theatre, one always sees the “enacted scene as a whole in space, always seeing the whole of the space”. The second theatrical principle is that “the spectator always sees the stage from a fixed unchanging distance”; and the third principle is that “the spectator's angle of vision does not change” (1952: 30). Film, on the other hand, offers “Varying distances between spectator and scene within one and the same scene, hence varying dimensions of scenes that can be accommodated within the frame and composition of a picture”. There also exists in film changes in “angle, perspective and focus of 'shots' within one and the same scene” (1952: 31). It is precisely because of the fact that actions, objects and people can be singled out, shown in different angles and focussed on, that our imaginations may be stimulated and induce the right mood in us (Balázs, 1952: 36).

Through these methods, Balázs argues, that we are able to identify with what is shown on the screen. Especially with the character we follow through the narrative, because there is, according to him, a certain “loss of critical distance” (Tredell, 2002: 33). He states that: “In cinema, the camera carries the spectator into the picture itself. We are seeing everything from the inside as it were and are surrounded by the characters of the film”. He further stipulates that the techniques used to take us into the film makes it possible for us to not only see what the characters see, but see it as they see it (1952: 48). Rather, I believe that what is meant by this is that the representational style employed shapes, for us as viewers, the type of experience (emotional or otherwise) the character has. The method which most supports this “loss of

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<sup>67</sup> The “subjective faculties” which Béla Balázs mentions makes reference to the shifts in perception made possible by the entire ‘cinematic apparatus’ at the filmmaker’s disposal.

critical distance” and greatly affirms the ‘identification’ theory, is the use of variation of distance, especially the promotion of close-ups; and the division of scenes in shots. Balázs writes:

One of the specific characteristics of the art of the film is that not only can we see, in the isolated 'shots' of a scene, the very atoms of life and the innermost secrets revealed at close quarters, but we can do so without any of the intimate secrecy being lost... The new theme which the new means of expression of film art revealed was not a hurricane at sea or the eruption of volcano: it was perhaps a solitary tear slowly welling up in the corner of a human eye (1952: 31).

With this, Balázs indicates that the formal principles add great emotional detail so that we might identify with the film in an intimate way. It is also clear that great emphasis is put on the close-up as way of conveying these intimacies. These intimacies were however seen as something new as it puts us in the position to see the world afresh.<sup>68</sup> As Balázs notes: “The close-up can show us quality in a gesture of the hand we never noticed before when we saw that hand stroke or strike something, a quality which is often more expressive than any play of the features” (1952: 55). This statement supports Balázs’ conviction that the formal principles put us in a position to see an event from a character's position. The close-up and other variations of distance is not enough for this effect however, but the change of the camera set-up, and angle, is crucial to this effect of identification: “By the means of such set-ups we see the scene of the action from the inside, with the eyes of the *dramatis personae* and know how they feel” (Balázs, 1952: 90).

These formal principles may be used to create individual shots, but this does not account for their assembly into a temporal coherence. Thus, the last method that Balázs stated as unique to film is also the method which came to be seen by the formalists as the ultimate cinematic technique through which ideas and expressions could be conveyed to the audience, namely montage, “...the assembly of 'shots' in a certain order in which not only whole scene follows whole scene (however short) but pictures of smallest details are given, so that the whole scene is composed of a mosaic of frames aligned as it were in chronological sequence” (Balázs, 1952: 31).

Montage can be seen as “the associations of ideas rendered visual; it gives the shots their ultimate meaning” (Balázs, 1952: 119). Eisenstein, who is regarded as the father of montage, claimed that montage (in the technical, cinematic sense of the word) is “fundamental to cinema, deeply grounded in the conventions of cinema and the corresponding characteristics of perception” (1988: 40). While watching a

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<sup>68</sup> The Russian Formalists such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin called this *ostraneni* or 'defamiliarisation' in which “art strips the scales of familiarity from the eyes...” (Tredell, 2002: 35).

montage sequence, the viewer acknowledges that there is an intentional predetermination and interpretation and therefore they look for the meaning offered by the filmmaker, who steers them to it.

Arnheim agreed that montage could well be the “royal road to film art” (1930: 87) in that it offers one of the greatest differences between normal perception and the perception of the cinematic image. Firstly, the obvious reason is that film offers a jump in time and space, as he notes: “Montage means joining together shots of situations that occur at different times and in different places...” (1930: 87). This goes beyond the artistic capability of the single shot, which is taken in one instance where space and time are continuous. It is through montage that Arnheim believes “man takes a hand in the process – time is broken up, things that are disconnected in time and space are joined together” (1930: 87). This suggests that montage offers new possibilities in the way that things can be connected, emphasised and articulated so that certain things or events can be given greater significance and others left out altogether. This also indicates that the filmmaker (or editor) has the power to choose that which is relevant for the sequence to bear the meaning and have the effect that needs to be experienced by the viewer (Arnheim 1930: 89). I would rather say that s/he chooses that which is relevant for the sequence in order to convey an intended meaning, or prompt the desired response from the viewer.

The viewer’s act of watching is shaped by an assembly of skilfully constructed shots, which have a creative intention. This is what Balázs believes makes it possible for viewers to be moved beyond physical reality.<sup>69</sup> Balázs stresses the importance of the meaning-making process during the watching of a montage sequence, which is something we consciously engage in, because we believe there to be a preconceived or embedded meaning:

This consciousness, this confidence that we are seeing the work of a creative intention and purpose, not a number of pictures thrown and stuck together by chance, is a psychological precondition of film-watching and we always expect, presuppose and search for meaning in every film we see” (1952: 31).

This seems contrary to Bazin's argument against montage, and was also the opinion of Eisenstein and his theory of montage. Through this he stresses exactly that which Bazin was opposed to.

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<sup>69</sup> He believed that this is an ability which we have required through the familiarity with the medium, and stated that we have learnt “...to integrate single disjointed pictures into a coherent scene, without even becoming conscious of the complicated psychological process involved” (1952: 35). Further, we have also developed the skill to render “picture metaphors and picture symbols”, which communicates indirectly to our emotions. We have learned to make meaning from the film sequences. However, our abilities to make meaning from film sequences are not necessarily “new human faculties”, but rather “an example of a general function of human consciousness engaging with a new medium” (Tredell, 2002: 40).

Eisenstein called for a “montage of attractions” (1988: 40), which means that the scene is cut so that the “conscious combination” of shots can “exercise a definite effect on the attention and the emotions of the audience and that, combined with others, possesses the characteristic of concentrating the audiences emotions in any direction dictated by the productions purpose” (1988: 40). This effect of “attraction” is made up of the juxtaposition of different shots which builds “accumulations, in the human psyche, of associations that the films purpose requires” (1988: 41). These associations are aroused by the separate elements stated in the montage, but which produce a stronger effect if taken as a whole. Eisenstein thus believed that the juxtapositions of shots in a montage “give rise to ideas”, which he also believed “is a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process” (1988: 236). It is thus evident that Eisenstein put his faith in certain combinations of images which would elicit a particular response in most people. As he stated “We are almost automatically prone to draw a quite specific, conventional conclusion – a generalisation, in fact – whenever certain discreet objects are placed side by side before us” (1991: 297).

What I would like to point to is the fact that Eisenstein believed that every emotion, every reaction, of the audience could and ultimately should be controlled. To what end, one might ask? He did not believe that the idea or abstract meaning created by his and his peers films were made concrete by the plot of the story, “but by finding directly in an image or in a combination of images the means of provoking emotional reactions that are predicted and calculated in advance” (1988: 199).<sup>70</sup>

This shows that the formalists held that formal cinematic techniques offer something to the audience that goes beyond physical reality: “It is a matter of producing a series of images that is composed in such a way that it provokes an effective movement which in turn triggers a series of ideas” (Eisenstein, 1988: 199); Ideas that would bring us closer to the subjects on the screen to such an extent that we would not perceive them as we would perceive them normally, but intimately, which may result in strong responses. I would like to investigate a sequence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* through the application of formalist ideals in order to calculate my position in relation to the theoretical positions above, and the film’s representational style.

### **Formalist Representation in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.**

To continue with this practical application I will give a quick synopsis of the film up to the scene which will be the focus of the discussion. The film opens where The Bride, as she is referred to in the credits of

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<sup>70</sup> This is in contrast to Bazin, who knew that the reaction and the meaning were not completely attributed to the filmmaker, but that the viewer had subjective responses to it. One can however not deny that there are certain techniques that can attribute to certain responses.

the film (it is only in *Kill Bill Vol. 2* that we discover her name, Beatrix Kiddo) lies panting on the floor of the church where she was to be married. She is beaten, bruised and pregnant. The groom, the pastor and all the other guests have already been killed before a ruthless team of assassins called the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad rounded on The Bride (who was a member of the notorious team). After they have beaten her to a pulp, their boss, Bill, walks over to her and shoots her in the head. At first she is presumed dead, but survives and is taken to a hospital where she stays in a coma for four years. After she wakes up and assumes that she lost her baby to the physical torture she endured, she swears revenge on all the members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, especially Bill.

The first member she tracks down is O-Ren Ishii, who at the point of The Bride's pledge of revenge, had managed to become the boss of Tokyo's Yakuza (Japanese Mafia) clan. With the help of Bill's former martial arts teacher and master sword smith, Hattori Hanzo, The Bride is trained again and armed with a deadly Katana (traditional Japanese sword), ready to take vicious revenge. She arrives at a club where O-Ren and her posse is having a night out, and confronts her by severing her second lieutenant and best friend's arm. O-Ren quickly sends soldier after soldier to kill The Bride, but she seems unmatchable and wipes out all that O-Ren throws at her.

When O-Ren appears to be left by herself, The Bride is hopeful, but this is quickly stopped by the eminent arrival of the rest of O-Ren's army – The Crazy 88, as they are called in the film, lead by her general, Johnny Mo. What follows is a great battle in which The Bride fights her way through wave after wave of soldiers, hacking, slicing, cutting and stabbing them to pieces, until O-Ren is finally left with no protection and forced to face The Bride on her own.

I am using as an example the great violent confrontation between O-Ren Ishii's Yakuza army and The Bride, but because it is such a long sequence I will only refer to the part where the main force of O-Ren's army (The Crazy 88) arrives, until her killing of O-Ren's general Johnny Mo.

The whole sequence is a montage within which different techniques were used: Fast cutting, slow motion, various types of angles and set-ups, various distances and even different colour schemes.



**Figure 24 and 25: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), directed by Quentin Tarantino**

The scene starts out in colour, but in the middle of the ‘battle’, as she plucks out the eye of one of the soldiers, the whole scene changes to black and white – as shown in Figure 24 and 25. This switch changes the reception of the sequence and even furthers the viewer’s acceptance of the violence as fabricated and part of the fiction in that they become even more aware that they are ‘looking’.

Tarantino carefully and skilfully constructed each frame in which all the action takes place. He concentrated on the objects within the screen, which is mainly the characters and their bodies as well as the weapons with which they hack at each other, but he filmed them in ways which goes beyond normal perception in order for the viewer to interpret the sequence and have a heightened experience of the events, especially the violence. As Arnheim writes:

In order so that the film artist may create a work of art, it is important that he consciously stress the peculiarities of his medium. This, however should be done in such a manner that the character of the objects represented should not thereby be destroyed but rather strengthened, concentrated...(1930: 35).

If I apply Arnheim’s statement to the sequence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, I can deduce that Tarantino’s specific choices of framing and editing engrosses the actions, bodies and weapons in the sequence, which intensifies our experience of them and engagement with them. To explain this, I will again refer to Balázs’ formal principles pointed out earlier, namely “varying distances”; “division of integral picture of the scene into sections, or ‘shots’”; “changing the angle, perspective and focus of ‘shots’ within one and the same scene”; and “montage” (1952: 31).<sup>71</sup> Referring back to the Lacanian mirror stage, which Metz applied to film as well as the identification phenomenon described by Balázs, we realise that throughout the film the viewer has identified with The Bride. This can be ascribed to the fact that she has been the general focus of the narrative up until that point. In the battle sequence against the Yakuza, the viewer’s identification

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<sup>71</sup> This suggests that the representation is ultimately aesthetically motivated.

with The Bride is further enhanced by the various shots which consist of different distances, angles and set-ups. These formal principles render the frame as an enhanced point of view that never evades The Bride or the results of her actions, but carries the viewer into it and presents him or her with a representation of violence which in a way reflects The Bride's experience of it. This also intensifies the viewer's perceptual response to the actions.

Let me refer to the section of the sequence in which The Bride, feeling cornered, uses Johnny Mo as shield, after which she kicks him away and rolls around on the ground hacking off limbs.



**Figure 26 and 27: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino**



**Figure 28 and 29: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino**



**Figure 30 and 31: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino**



Figure 32 and 33: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino

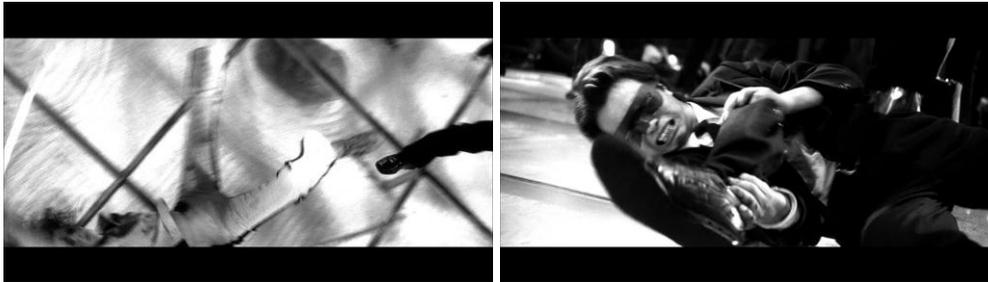


Figure 34 and 35: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino



Figure 36 and 37: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) directed by Quentin Tarantino

The first three frames come from several shots in which the camera circles The Bride as she looks all around her at the enclosing Yakuza. The frame closes in on her after each cut, just as the soldiers do. Through these shots, we can relate to how The Bride feels in her desperate situation. Identification here comes from the focus on The Bride's face and body, which refers back to the operations of the mirror stage through which we recognise and identify.<sup>72</sup> The dire situation The Bride is in is reflected in her face and enhanced through the camera movement around her. The close-up of The Bride's face and then the

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<sup>72</sup> Laura Mulvey states in her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), that the images shown to us, like this shot of *The Bride* “give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” (59). This relates very closely to Balázs's statement earlier that we see the sequence from the *dramatis personae's* point of view and know how they feel.

limbs she cuts off, take us out of the space and confronts us only with the meaning of the objects in the frame and in relation to other frames.<sup>73</sup>

The relationship between the actions and the bodies (and cut off limbs), are thus strongly connected to The Bride and her facial expressions in that the viewer has identified with her and understand the actions and its results (the limbs in Figure 36 and 35) as pertaining to her and her experience of the situation. In Figure 28 we see her smile slightly and determinedly, which indicates that she may have seen a way out of the situation. She then kicks Johnny Mo away from her, and we see him fall against some soldiers from her point of view in Figure 29. Figure 30 is a frame from a slow-motion shot in which The Bride readies herself for the attack. The determination on her face and the slow-motion gives the viewer a feeling of the deepened suspense The Bride may be experiencing at that point before she lunges into an attack, in that it focuses the viewer's attention more acutely and builds up the tension. Figure 31 to 36 indicate The Bride's attack in short shots from a multitude of angles. She slashes at a couple of Yakuza's in the frame of Figure 31, and then rolls around on the ground (shown in Figure 32, 33 and 34) while hacking at the soldiers who loses limbs as indicated in Figure 35 and 36, after which she jumps up again to continue fighting (Figure 37). The quick disjointed shots of The Bride rolling and hacking away as well as the violent results of her actions, clearly gives an impression of the discombobulated 'merry-go-round' experience of The Bride as she whirls around violently on the floor.

Because we experience these images connected with one another, not as "a phenomenon pertaining to space" (Balázs, 1952: 62), but as isolated expressions offered to us through various distances and angles, our perception of what is happening goes far beyond normal perception and extends into an emotional identification with The Bride and her actions. This indicates the great contrasts between the formalist tendency and that of the realist ideals of Bazin, who opted for spatial continuity. Above all it is the montage through which these shots are assembled and connected in a continuous manner so that meaning as well as identification can be made. Montage creates associations of ideas, either by suggesting indirectly "the inner sequence of the spectators' idea-associations", as in the case of this sequence where shots of The Bride's facial expressions, camera movements along with the slow-motion shot and the fast cutting of the attack suggests the Bride's state of mind during the violent confrontation; or by "actually showing the pictures which follow each other in the mind and lead from one thought to the next", which in this case is the images of The Bride, her actions and the violent results of it (Balázs, 1952: 122).

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<sup>73</sup> As Balázs indicated, the close-ups, particularly on the Bride's face: "...takes us out of space, our consciousness of space is cut out and we find ourselves in another dimension: that of physiognomy" (1952: 62).

The British film theorist Ernest Lindgren also acknowledged this in his book *The Art of the Film* (1949) in which he states that:

The fundamental psychological justification of editing as a method of representing the physical world around us lies in the fact that it reproduces this mental process in which one visual image follows another as our attention is drawn to this point and to that in our surroundings (55).

Lindgren's statement that our "attention is drawn" to a point is similar to Eisenstein's montage of attractions theory, in which he states that a conscious combination of shots or images into a unified whole can possess the characteristic of steering a viewer's response into a desired direction (Eisenstein, 1988: 40). If we again take in account the 'rolling-around' sequence portrayed in Figure 32 to 36, we hardly ever see The Bride's blade actually cut the limbs. We rather see quick shots of her rolling around, followed by shots of the Yakuza soldiers screaming in agony as well as shots of already severed limbs spurting unusually large amounts of blood. The other ingredient that plays the role of signifier of the violence here is the sound of the cuts, slashes and gushing of blood.<sup>74</sup>

According to Eisenstein's Theory, it is the combination of shots with different angles, distances and movements that provoke the emotional reaction and not the shots in themselves. He writes that an analogous process occurs in the montage of attractions: "it is not in fact phenomena that are compared but chains of associations that are linked to a particular phenomenon in the mind" (1988: 41). In this sense, according to Eisenstein, the desired meaning and response to a shot like the one referred to in Figure 35 where a Yakuza soldier is holding his own severed leg, can only be acquired once it is "joined with another piece, when it suddenly acquires and conveys a sharper and quite different meaning than that" which it had on its own (1957: 10). Thus, when the shot of the Yakuza soldier holding his leg moves beyond its independent pictorial quality and placed within the sequence, juxtaposed and combined with the other shots so that it may be viewed in context, it is experienced by the viewer as a result of The Bride's bloody revenge - a revenge which the viewer has come to justify through the film's narrative.

It is clear from this application of the formalist ideas on this particular battle sequence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, that the representation of the violent acts can be seen as having great expressive function within the film. Although the violence has instrumental function within the narrative as well (in that The Bride has to kill The Crazy 88 to move on to O-Ren), the formalist approach seems to be pre-occupied with the expressive qualities of the film medium and that the way in which it is presented, with certain combinations, can

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<sup>74</sup> This again relates back to the syntagmatic relationships between shots which indicate that the meaning of signs is dependent on the context in which they are read.

induce certain responses (particularly emotional) from the viewer. Within the sequence of the battle there is no doubt that the violence have certain emotive qualities connected to our identification with The Bride and that we rather perceive the actions as experiences which she has while acting out the violence. It is also evident that the representation of the violence is quite excessive through the action, fast cuts and enormous amounts of blood gushing from severed limbs, which also affects not only the expressiveness of the violence, but also our willingness to accept it as mere fiction.

### **A re-evaluation of *Kill Bill Vol. 1*'s violence**

The example of the representation of violence in the Battle sequence, which I have discussed, seems to be the opposing representation to the scene in *Hidden*. In order to indicate the ontological difference between the representation of violence in *Hidden* and of that in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, it is important to mention those techniques that point to the excessive nature of the representation in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.

Within the sequence discussed, Quentin Tarantino keeps one very aware of the fact that one is watching a film, through the use of formal cinematic techniques such as the complex editing, varying distances and angles, and of course excessive, over-aesthetized violence. This is also strongly aided by the switch from colour to black and white during the sequence, which has no real function for the diegetic narrative, but rather aids as a formal convention pertaining to cinema that influences the perception of the violence as part of the fiction. This colour switch also sets the violent sequence that follows apart from the previous sequences. The viewer who has been digesting the narrative of the film within a certain set of conventions, of which colour images are one, is all of a sudden diverged from that set of formal norms and thrown henceforward into a new section without the aesthetic quality or traumatic signification of the blood's red colour. We are here confronted with the formal choices of Tarantino to rather focus our attention on our identification with the actions as justifiable expressions of The Bride, and to set it apart from normal perception. Although we also acknowledge this switch as removed from the diegetic world of the film and continue to follow the narrative, we are thrown back by it and become more aware of the act of looking, through which we may acknowledge the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the representation.

The structures of direct experience of the film we have followed also seem more unfamiliar, in that the representations of the characters are over stylised and that the 'super-human' abilities that The Bride and some of the other characters have, are improbable in reality (not to mention the excessive and comical blood spurting). We nonetheless identify with The Bride through the focusing of the narrative as well as the images of her nominal portrayal.

There seems to be a contradiction here. Whilst the formalists like Balázs believe that the formal techniques, used in sequences such as the battle in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, take us into the film and allows us to experience the violence from The Bride's point of view (Balázs, 1952: 90), contemporary theorists such as Trend argues that the formal techniques used in a heightened manner, focuses our attention on the fictional quality of the violence (Trend, 2007: 55). I would like to argue in favour of both.

The formal techniques have a great mental effect on our perception and acceptance of the violent acts. As previously indicated Tarantino used numerous camera angles and movements to heighten the aesthetic and expressive effect of the representation as well as the responses we may have to the representation (as indicated through Figures 38 to 41).



**Figure 38 and 39: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), directed by Quentin Tarantino**



**Figure 40 and 41: Stills from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), directed by Quentin Tarantino**

Margaret Ervin Bruder argues that the real violence in representations like these comes exactly from this aggressive use of techniques. She suggests that,

...we as spectators are violently pushed and shoved around the space of the action by the constant repositioning of the camera. Like the attackers, we are thrust down by extreme low angles, hurdled forward by fast tracking, slapped up against bodies through low angled close-ups emphasized by slow-motion and further exaggerated by overlapping editing (Bruder, n.d.).

One may say that our response to the multitude cinematic techniques used in the combat sequence “...heightens our perceptions of fact, movement and excitement, slow-motion segments draw attention into the scene... audio effects in the foley studio and dramatic music stir excitement further” (Trend, 2007: 117). In *Screening Violence* (2000), Stephen Prince called this excessive use of cinematic techniques in the representation of violence the stylistic rendition of violence and states that through it “the viewer is moved to cognitively grasp psychological or social truths” (2000: 187). This statement implies that, through these techniques we clearly grasp the effect of the violence on The Bride. We travel and identify with her (through entering her Imaginary) and understand the actions she commits within the film as justifiable. We are constantly searching the images of her, and we find it, not only in the images of her facial expressions and her body, but also in the quick images of severed limbs, which she hacked off so gloriously and with great satisfaction. Alfred Guzetti (1975: 383) writes that: “The cut, like the glance, registers intention; it externalizes something that happens in the characters mind... As the actor looks downward, our tendency to identify with his gaze redefines the field of our attention to conform with his.” This may indicate that these techniques do not take away our ability to understand the film's diegetic narrative, but actually enhances it by appealing to our senses and our emotions which of course points to the fact that it goes ‘beyond’ reality and as Arnheim argued, normal perception.

The filmmaker and film theorist Sam Peckinpah claimed that excessive use of technique, which heightens the dramatic action, shows violence for what it really is, “a horrifying, brutalizing, destructive, ingrained part of humanity” (Prince, 2000: 176). I however, do not agree with this statement by Peckinpah, as I have previously indicated that cinematic convention makes us more aware of the fact that we are watching a fictional film, and that the stylistic rendition of violence may render the viewing of it an enjoyable experience, which may not be possible otherwise. To support this further, it is also notable that the visual and audio stylisations in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (particularly the exaggerated physical portrayal of the violent acts and the effect it has on the bodies of the victims) give the violence represented very clear aesthetic values and as Carrol states: “to appreciate many of the aesthetic features of mimetic representations...one must know that one is looking at a certain form of representation” (1988a: 98). Our enjoyment thus comes from the act of looking and the knowledge that what we are looking at is not real, as Tom Gunning writes: “The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment” (1995: 120).

Although I agree with Gunning on the opinion that the viewer remains aware of the act of looking in the case of *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, I am of the opinion that the narrative of the film furthers the enjoyment in the actions and representation of violence. This is supported by Stephen Prince, who writes about the excessive use of visual techniques in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. Prince argues that “These

techniques gave the violence an elaborate and explicit aesthetic frame, which was intensified by the picture's narrative of heroism and moral redemption" (2000: 29). While looking, we engage with The Bride's narrativised quest for revenge. Through the narrative we understand her desire to take revenge and this puts us in a position to approve of it, but at the same time we stand at a distance where the pressure of an actual real response and intervention to the violence is removed. We look on and may acknowledge the fast-paced editing, slow-motion, camera angles and movements and music (which play a large part in our emotional reception of the representation) as the emotional rendition of The Bride's experience.

In films like *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, where the performer of the violence is the antagonist and justifies the actions through a concept like revenge, we very easily accept it as justified as well and find pleasure in it. This is connected to the idea of catharsis, which in turn is connected to mimesis (there may be a cathartic release as we watch the violence on screen only because it is a mimetic representation). Kracauer writes that "Since time immemorial, people have craved spectacles permitting them vicariously to experience the fury of conflagrations, the excess of cruelty and suffering, and unspeakable lusts" (1960: 58).

Where does this desire to look at violence come from? Freud was of the opinion that the enjoyment of violent images comes from our "tendency to push death aside, to eliminate it from life" (Freud, 2005: 183). J. M. Bernstein continues with this idea and argues that we keep death other by representing it: "death always happens to an other self as we look on. This naturally infects our relationship to the death of actual others" (2008, 39). Through the viewing of violence then we become relieved that it is the other that died, and not ourselves.

If this craving can be seen as desires for the death of an other, I would like to refer to desire in the sense that René Girard refers to it. Chris Fleming (2004) states that Girard's fundamental suggestion is that we learn what to desire from copying the desires of others (2008: 10): "To say that our desires are imitative or mimetic is to root them neither in their objects or in ourselves but in a third party, the model or mediator, whose desire we imitate in the hope of resembling him or her" (1963: 144).

This statement may be from the point on the outset, yet, if it we can hypothesise that we imitate The Bride by entering the Imaginary and identifying with her and that through the representation we experience the actions of violence through The Bride's point of view, we 'purge' some of the 'elicit' desires and therefore have a cathartic release. The desires for violence and destruction, as Kracauer refers to, can thus be seen, according to Girard, as imitative desires we acquire through mediators such as other films, literature, history, media and so forth<sup>75</sup>. The represented violence then, becomes a scapegoat to our desires of these

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<sup>75</sup> This will be discussed later in Chapter Three in relation to *Preek*.

spectacles. This leads me to state that the violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* has very strong expressive function apart from its obvious instrumental function and that the expressive representation supports this function.

In summary, the stylistic representation of violence in films like *Kill Bill Vol. 1* not only takes us beyond normal perception and supplies us with heightened experiences, but supplies us with an emotional identification with the characters. Tarantino takes us into The Bride's state of mind and throws us around in the scene, showering us with quick flashes of guts and gore, but he does this excessively with each frame signalling something specific so that we may understand the experience of The Bride in a particular way and form the narrative progression in our minds. The filming and montage techniques used allow us to perceive certain things in a way that would normally pertain to the human mind. Eisenstein wrote that “montage form as structure is a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process”, which activates a mechanism of the human mind (1988: 144).

The excessiveness of the representation creates an exuberant response and allows us to enjoy the violence and approve heartily with The Bride's actions. Yet, the contrasting argument is that its excessiveness also makes us aware of its fictitious nature, which has a great effect on our emotional response in that we only allow ourselves to enjoy it through this knowledge, which may elicit a cathartic release.

Through the identification then, we become intimate with the violent actions, yet we also tolerate and enjoy the aestheticization of it through its excessiveness. One comment even contends that Tarantino represented violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* with such excessiveness that he makes “critical comments on the genre” (Trend, 2007: 56), which makes sense in that he repeatedly references other films through techniques of representation. The responses and the enjoyment of the violence depends on the stylisation of the representations, which evokes and draws attention to both the expressive and the aesthetic quality of the actions.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown that there are two main styles of cinematic representation and that they can be attributed to the classic film tendencies: realists and the formalists. Whereas Bazin believed that within a single shot lay the most significant quality of film, a way to represent physical reality, Eisenstein was of the opinion that the separate shots were “mere playthings and an end in themselves” (1988: 287). The formalists were rather concerned with an act of expression, which I clearly indicated through the previous application. They considered it to be imperative for the filmmaker to move beyond a mere recording of the action within the space, which Bazin preferred, to a representation of it in such a way that it evokes a specific response from the viewer. Bazin on the other hand, called for a style which focussed its attention

on the spatial continuity where the actors could always be seen in relation to their surroundings so that the viewer may perceive the image as he would experience life through a window.

Whereas the formalists opted for excessive stylizations with various framed shots assembled together in order to thrust the viewer into a specific calculated experience, Bazin and his fellow realists wished the viewer to perceive the sequences on their own, with less spatial and temporal interruptions designed by the filmmaker, but through an image (a single shot if possible) that evokes the same kind of ambiguous response as real life.

I have also indicated that where the realists fall short, is that realism in cinematic representation not only derives from the style of the recording, but it also greatly relies on the representation of the diegetic world – a world in which the structures of direct experience and modes of embodied existence resembles our own. I also pointed to a contradiction pertaining to the formalist ideals, which argues that the formal techniques allows the viewer to experience a sequence from the points of view of the characters and that we acknowledge and engage with what they are experiencing or feeling. On the other hand, the stylisation constantly makes the viewer aware that he is looking at a film, which allows him to step back from his engagement.

By investigating these ideals through the representation of violence in *Hidden* and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* I have shown that their particular arguments have merit within these films respectively. Because violence affects us on so many levels and so intensely, the representation of it in film also has great potential to affect us. The way it is represented will however determine our response. On the one hand I have argued that the violence in *Hidden* (which is predominantly a realist representation), which is represented in a style related to a mere recording and set in a diegetic world closely related to our own, may evoke a shocking response from the viewer as it seems real. We recognise that it affects Georges intensely and grievously, which may result in a grievous response from ourselves.

On the other hand I have shown that the representation of violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1's* battle sequence, which is represented in highly stylised way (resembling ideals of the formalists), induces a specific heightened response from the viewer, which is not necessarily one of revulsion or shock, but excitement and justification. This response can directly be related to the identification with The Bride, through the way the sequence is filmed and assembled as a whole using formal principles, focussing on her, her actions and its consequences. We acknowledge her actions as justified in her diegetic world (where all is not so familiar in relation to our own) and because we recognize the representation as make-belief we endorse it. Through the excessiveness of technique and violence we look and enjoy looking because we are fully aware that we are looking.

It was of great importance for me to investigate these two distinct styles of cinematic representation. It demonstrated that, through applying them to violent sequences, they are not only different in nature, but that they also point to different motives of the filmmakers. The different motives define the specific style of representation which in effect, results in a specific type of response from the viewer. This is crucial for my next chapter in which I investigate *Preek's* representation of violence, for I am convinced that I have used elements from both representational styles.

## Chapter Three: Reconciling the Realist and Formalist Tendencies in *Preek's* Representations of Violence

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Through the first part of chapter one I have chosen to focus my attention on violence as physical force by one or more people, which in turn leads to physical injury or damage of others. Through Riches' triangle I have shown that violence consists of a performer, victim and viewer, and that the one's relationship with the others leads to his or her subjective position in relation to the action. I have also demonstrated the subjectivity of both the violent act and its filmic representation, and how this affects perceptions of both the act and its representation.

The realist and formalist styles in film may elicit two different types of responses from the viewers. When applied to the representation of violence in films, I have suggested that a realistic representation may elicit a stronger emotional response related to affect, whereas a viewer's response to a formally stylized representation of violence may be heightened and intensified.

What this comparison shows is that there is not one specific ideal style of representation which in turn elicits one ideal type of perception and response, but that the subjectivity of the filmmaker and the creative choices s/he makes plays a role in directing our responses to what we see on screen. The representation of violence in films is particularly good at demonstrating this, because the responses we have to it rely on both ethics and aesthetics. The style of representation is, I contend, a principle factor with respect to how we, as viewers, opt for the one above the other. Although it may not always be as simple as this, for viewers will always respond subjectively in certain contexts, there is no doubt that Haneke and Tarantino both had the emotional responses of their viewers in mind while constructing the scenes in their films.

When we are confronted with a 'real' representation like *Hidden*, we frame our references in such a way that we may respond to the ethical elements within the representation and become devastated by the acts. If we are presented with violence expressively – in excess – as in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, we acknowledge the aesthetic quality of the violence and we temporarily suspend our “cognitive rules and moral rational laws” (Black 2000: 784), and allow ourselves to justify and enjoy such horrid acts. Thus these skilfully crafted representations dictate our experiences and our responses to violence, for that is their job.

The question then arises again: To what extent do I rely on the realist ideal of spatial realism in the representation of violence on the one hand, and to what extent do I engage with the expressive function of film favoured by the formalist tendency? This question is important for it will form the basis for my discussion about violence in my own film.

In this chapter I will discuss the representation of the murder scene at the denouement of my film *Preek*. This discussion will be self-reflexive, demonstrating the specific motives and desires for the representation of violence and the role I wished it to perform in the narrative, and by extension, in the perception of the viewer. So the discussion will disclose, so to speak, my understanding of the relationship between me as filmmaker, this particular sequence and the viewer. I will position this discussion in relation to the arguments introduced in earlier chapters in order to form a clear understanding about the murder sequence. I would just like the reader to note that, although the film was shot in colour, various arguments formulated a decision to transform it to black and white (Please see Appendix B for a discussion on this).

For the film to have taken shape there had to be a motive for making it and a motive for representing murder. Understanding this in relation to the narrative structure of the film up to the point of the murder in the film will make it possible for me to discuss the relationship between the viewer and the characters within the narrative of the film. The final murder sequence within the film will be explored in relation to the extent with which I have employed aspects of the realist and formalist styles respectively, and where I position myself in relation to these two tendencies. This will allow me to move on to aspects of viewer identification within the murder sequence and what responses it may evoke. I conclude with some thoughts around the representation of violence in the service of the communication of an idea, subjective as it may be.

As I stated in the introduction, the starting point for my film was a desire to tell a story (Please see Appendix A for a detailed Synopsis). Within the narrative it was important for me to represent a diegetic world within which modes of embodied existence and structures of direct experience were similar to the world in which we live in. For this reason, I also opted for a social or cultural structure which was familiar to me and which enabled me to structure the diegesis so that it may seem authentic. I come from an Afrikaans, middle-class background where I have dealt with many parts of the social structures within the Afrikaner culture and felt certain that I would be able to represent a narrative in which I focused on characters within various areas of this culture with which I am familiar. In this sense I desired a mimetic diegesis for the film. However, I did structure the plot or *syuzhet*<sup>76</sup>, as Victor Shlovsky originally referred

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<sup>76</sup> The *Syuzhet* “can be understood as the artistic organization or ‘deformation’ of the causal-chronological order of event”. Within the *Syuzhet* the events of the story is rendered into a certain form “through the use of artistic devices such as *in medias res* construction, retardation, parallel plots, ellipses, and other” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 71).

to it, within a story, or *fabula*<sup>77</sup>, that consists of some patterns of actions and relationships unfamiliar to me, in that they are not situations with which I have had direct experience. For some of the *fabula*'s ingredients I referred to other media, rather than my immediate experience, as the source for the plot structure, the most important of these being the use of violence in the story.

Violence has had great influence on me through various visual and literary representations. Through its aesthetic and emotional representations of violence, film has been a primary vehicle for me to experience cathartic release. I identify with fictional characters through entering their filmic imaginary, and imagining myself in their positions. I envisage myself committing acts of violence which, instead of a real act, serve as gratification without the attendant consequences. As I explained earlier through the arguments of René Girard, this is a form of mimesis where the identification with the image becomes like a scapegoat through which I purge violent fantasies. If we acknowledge the viewing of violence in such a way, the viewing becomes a sort of ritual sacrifice.<sup>78</sup> By watching violence on screen we do not only remind ourselves of the actual horrors of violence, but we participate in the mimetic recreation of it in order to keep it other and be relieved that we are still alive and well. Freud argued something similar in his paper *Timely Reflection on War and Death* (1915). He stated that in the sphere of fiction (like a film), “we find the plurality of lives that we need. We die in our identification with one hero, but survive him and are ready to die a second time, equally unharmed, with another” (Freud, 2005: 185). Freud’s point is made about death and the othering of it through our identification with fictional characters that die, in that we reassure ourselves that we are alive and they are not. Although I agree with this hypothesis to some extent, I am rather focusing on the act of violence, which in a lot of cases is committed by the actual characters with which a viewer identifies. The viewer takes the position of the performer and through the viewing, participates in (or at least becomes complicit in) the violence represented. This is also the case in *Preek*.

Mimesis in relation to the representation of violence seems rather ambiguous here. As I explained through Girard’s arguments, we learn to desire through copying what others do. Fleming notes that “Girard describes desire as mimetic because of what he sees as the overriding importance of imitation in the

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<sup>77</sup> The *Fabula* can be understood as the “Pattern of relationships between the characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 71).

<sup>78</sup> In his studies about the sacrificial rituals of the Dinka tribe in Sudan, Girard argued that a ritual sacrifice “enacts a mock mimetic crisis and its resolution – it reiterates in displaced form the collapse of distinctions and their subsequent reinstatement through the sacrifice of a scapegoat” (Fleming, 2004: 55 - 56). The ritual keeps violent reiterations in check by “tricking it into unleashing itself on a victim whose death will precipitate no reprisals” (Fleming, 2004: 55 - 56). I believe that this can be applied to the viewing of film in that we substitute representations of violence for actual violence to “keep it in check”.

constitution of our desires” (2004: 10). This indicates that I not only purge these violent desires through the mimetic representation, but that my desire for violence may also derive from these representations in films. By constantly subjecting myself to violent actions performed by the “focalised” characters<sup>79</sup> (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 87) on the screen, I started to rely on them as ‘mediators’ of my desires. By the mimetic process of identification through the Imaginary, I re-enact those violent actions with them. I would like to further this argument by putting forward the possibility that within the case of my own film, the ritual re-enactment turned to actual representing and structuring of violence, instead of only watching it; and that a cathartic release may also be derived from the act of representing. Through the representation I already re-enact the violence, which becomes a substitution in itself, and becomes a mimesis of desires which are thus kept in check. I thus become the performer of the ritual who enunciates the act and controls it through “fixing it permanently in the form of art” (Mast, 1977: 39). This can perhaps also be described as a form of sublimation.

According to Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, enunciation in film theory refers to “the production and control of subject relations through the imaginary link established between the narrator and spectator by way of their mutual investment in the discourse of the film” (1992: 105). The narrator in this citation refers to the focalised character within the narrative.<sup>80</sup> Thus, as enunciator I was given the ability to position the spectator within a mimetic narrative in which he/she identifies with the character that acts out the violence and be affected by it. As Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis write: “The concept of *spectator positioning*, often referred to as *subject-positioning*, is another way of referring to the way the spectator is ‘placed’ in (and by) the text and made to assume roles based on identificatory participation” (1992: 155).

Violence in the media, such as in television and newspaper reportage, has also led to my decision to represent it in film. This indicates that a real threat of violence in my immediate surroundings affected me,

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<sup>79</sup> Focalization refers to a narration of events of a fictional world recounted “from the activity of the character from whose perspective events are perceived, or focalized” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 87). This character is thus the focalized character.

<sup>80</sup> The focalised character may not only pertain to the person whose physical point of view one adheres to while subjecting oneself to the narrative. Rimmon-Keanon writes that focalisations “purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive emotive and ideological orientation” (1983: 71). She expanded focalisation to include “the *perpetual facet*, which concerns the sensory range of the character”. This in turn refers to two sub facets. The “*psychological facet*, where the cognitive and emotional focus of the text resides with a particular character, and the *ideological facet*, whose perspective could be set to express the general system of values, or the ‘norms of the texts’” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 71).

which had great influence on my decision to focus on violence within the narrative. South Africa is infamous for its high crime rate, especially violent crimes, and I felt it necessary to focus my attention on violence specifically in order to purge a sort of desire to physically act out that which has become such a great part of our social structure in South Africa. Through the media, the violence has entered our public and private spaces and we have become more and more aware of it as a personal area of concern. The desire to represent or, as I indicated earlier, to ‘perform’ the violence, may also have been induced by a willingness to give it social meaning within the context of my social culture.

Artist and academic Colin Richards states that the performance of violence is a “very efficient way of transforming the social environment and staging an ideological message before a public audience” (2006: 95). Yet, from the outset it was important for me to have a focalised character within the narrative and not to focus the narrative on violence within a community. I wanted to explore certain situations in which social and mental contexts may drive someone to act out in violence. The act itself was important for me, but its instrumental and emotional implications in relation to power and legitimacy and its affect on the performer and victim even more so<sup>81</sup>.

The reason for the representation of violence within the *fabula* can then not only be seen as a cathartic ritual, but also as a social communicative tool. The aim was thus to represent a narrative in which violence played a role as both instrumental and expressive function in the plot, which would have an emotional affect on the viewer through identification with the character and the action of violence.

### **3.1 The Diegetic Narrative of *Preek***

*Preek* is set in contemporary South Africa and follows the story of two step brothers, neither aware of the other’s existence at the start of the film. The diegetic time of the film spans one week. Lourens, who can be seen as the primary character, resides in Stellenbosch, my hometown, with his mother, Stephanie (a nurse) and step-father, Bertus (a retired teacher with heart problems). During the course of the film’s narration Lourens is preparing his final sermon in order to receive his degree in theology. Egbert, the secondary character (yet with equal focalisation during his scenes), lives in Cape Town and operates as a narcotics dealer with the single objective of vengeance against those responsible for the death of his closest friend. Please see Appendix A for a detailed Synopsis.

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<sup>81</sup>To support this notion, I refer to Richards who quotes Inge Schröder and Bettina Schmidt: “Violent acts are efficient because of their staging of power and legitimacy, probably even more so than due to their actual physical results” (2006: 95).

There are two social structures represented in the diegesis. One consists of a structure close to that with which I am familiar with through my own social relationships, as well as those of friends and acquaintances. I drew from personal experience to structure and enunciate Lourens' immediate diegesis. Egbert's social position and relationships on the other hand, were structured through various discourses. Although he still falls under an Afrikaans 'middle-class' culture through his background, the danger of the criminal underworld in which he is actively implicated was formulated through my engagement with external texts, such as films, novels and the South African media. I therefore argue that the diegetic world of the film may be seen as a mimetic diegesis, which I have formulated from my understanding and experiences through combining experience and discourse, incorporating aspects of autobiography and fiction.<sup>82</sup>

Through these two worlds in which the two characters reside, I also wanted to explore two different conditions for violent actions. In the case of Lourens, the violence, which can be seen as primarily instrumental in nature, is induced by personal beliefs and responses to Egbert's threat. Lourens' response, to Egbert's destructive acts as well as his fanatical religious ideologies drives him to act out in violence in a calculated way. At the beginning of the film it is already established that Lourens has come to believe that violent actions may be necessary behaviour in certain situations by certain people. Thus, when Egbert intervenes in Lourens' ultimate goal, of being acknowledged by Bertus and, along with his mother, is left without any money, he acts out in violence in order to resume a certain position of equilibrium. Of course the equilibrium does not return as he wishes.

Lourens did not learn to act out in violence through experience. Yet a certain sociopathic tendency within his personality and strong ideological beliefs has set him on the path of violent retribution. Egbert on the other hand, through his constant exposure to sanctioned violence within his social institution (the people with which he surrounded himself), has rendered him to accept violence as part of the norm. Because of this he acts out expressively in aggression as well as instrumentally - as a way to obtain his goals.

### **The Narrative Structure and Focalisation**

The narrative of *Preek* is coherently structured in a chronological order of events which have been applied formally within the plot structure. The *syuzhet* of the narrative consists of a conventional narrative schema, artistically applied in order for the series of events to be held in relation to transformation, which

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<sup>82</sup>This is supported by a statement made by Marie-Laure Ryan when she argues that the narrative "...concerns what is, from the point of view of author and reader, an alternative possible world, but on the level of the embedded contract, speaker and hearer communicate about what is for them the real world" (1981: 524).

forms an aesthetic fabula. The narrative of *Preek* is thus a classical film narrative which “always works to bind the flow into *fictions of coherence* holding, suspending and fixing its process” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 157). Through this structured schema, the flow of the fabula is experienced in a logical and accessible way.<sup>83</sup>

This schema “stabilizes the potential disruption of the centering work of perspective” which may be seen as the focalisation of the narrative (Carroll 1988a: 162). This process in turn positions the spectator through identification with the focalised characters – Lourens and Egbert. Although I have argued that the narrative of *Preek* is a classical film narrative, I would like to put forward that the focalisation on two characters also renders the film into two narratives within a greater narrative. This supplies the viewer with two identifications, which potentially has a significant effect on his or her response to the violence, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

The narrative of *Preek* can be applied to the general narrative schema offered by Edward Branigan in *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992). He explains that the schema contains eight components, or functions (a hexagon) “which may be repeated in various patterns to model our understanding of a given story; one can move through the hexagon” (1992: 18). The eight elements can be described thus:

1. An *abstract*: “...a title or compact summary of the situation which is to follow” (Branigan 1992: 18). Within the narrative of *Preek* this can be seen as the sequence where Egbert finds Stefan in the lavatory, which sets in motion his vengeance. As Stefan lies on the floor dying, Egbert shouts: “I will find them. I will fucking shoot them!” It can also be seen as the first scenes in which Lourens practices his sermon and in which we recognise his desire for acknowledgement, which is clearly an indication of what is to follow.
2. An *orientation*: “...a description of the present state of affairs (place, time, character)” and ‘exposition’ which “gives information of past events, which bear on the present” (Branigan 1992: 18). The first scene of the film where the fellow drug dealer talks to Egbert can be seen as orientation within Egbert’s narrative as it at once makes the viewer aware of Egbert’s situation as well as the type of social situation he finds himself in. Within Lourens’ narrative the orientation and exposition may refer to the scenes ranging from the conversation with Marius about his relationship with his family and Sonja, until the end of the discussion with his mother outside

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<sup>83</sup>As Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis write: “Narrative logic in the *syuzhet* can be linear and proceed according to a distinctly causal development, presenting the *fabula* information in a direct and accessible way” (1992: 74).

Sonja's apartment block. These scenes all contribute to the viewer's understanding of Lourens' position within his social dynamics as well as his emotional and ideological perspectives. The most important exposition within the narrative is Bertus' return to his previous house and his confession of having another child. This not only serves as an exposition to Lourens' narrative, but to Egbert's as well.

3. "An *initiating event* alters the present state of affairs" (Branigan 1992: 18). Apart from being the strongest exposition, the trip to Bertus' previous house, his mild heart attack and his confession of previously being married, with a child, serves as the initiating events in Lourens' narrative. Because this implicates both Lourens and Egbert, these events can also be seen as the key initiating event of the whole film's narrative. Another initiating event within Lourens' narrative is when Bertus gives away his savings to Egbert, which sets Lourens' next goal in action. The lavatory scene where Egbert finds Stefan can thus also be seen as the initiating event as this is the point that changes Egbert's state of equilibrium to that of disequilibrium from where his goal follows.
4. A *goal*: "a statement of intention or an emotional response to an initiating event by a protagonist" (Branigan 1992: 18). This is where there are clear distinctions between the two narratives. Egbert's goal is clear from the outset – he wishes to take revenge on those responsible for Stefan's death. After Bertus' mild heart attack and confession, Lourens decides to search for Egbert. The goal here is not simply to re-unite father and son, but to receive long-desired acknowledgement from Bertus. The next goal in Lourens' narrative is of course the murder of Egbert, which he justifies by the initiating event that precedes it.
5. "A *complicating action* (linked to an antagonist)...presents an obstacle to the attainment of the goal" (Branigan 1992: 18). In Egbert's case there are two complicating actions. Firstly he needs to discover the identities of the ones responsible for Stefan's death, which he solves by torturing his accomplice. The second arises with the theft of his car, which disables him from positioning himself in the space of Stefan's murderer(s) and taking bloody revenge. The obstacles for Lourens to obtain his goal are firstly the problem of tracking Egbert down, which he quickly solves through Marius, his policeman friend. Secondly Egbert's murderous actions, witnessed by Lourens, have such an emotional impact on Lourens that he walks away from his goal. The emotional response also contributes to a new goal, namely Egbert's murder. Thirdly, the obstacle confronting Lourens' goal to murder Egbert, is an emotional rather than physical obstacle. Lourens' emotional turmoil in the face of the act is all that stands between him and the act.

6. “The Climax and *resolution* end the conflict between the goals and obstacles and establish a new equilibrium or state of affairs” (Branigan 1992: 18). The climax within Egbert’s narrative is his act of revenge by murdering Duncan and Bret in their house. Lourens’ climax of his first goal (the acquiring of acknowledgement from Bertus by reuniting him with his son), is cut short because he runs away and discards the goal. The final climax of his narrative, which is also the primary climax of the film, is the actual murder of Egbert. By prevailing and overcoming his emotional obstacles, Lourens persuades himself that it would be in the benefit of all (including God) if Egbert was dead, and thus murders him.
  
7. “The *epilogue* is the moral lesson implicit in the history of these events and may include explicit character reactions to the resolution” (Branigan 1992: 18). Egbert’s reaction to his violent retribution on Duncan is one of destruction. The act has thrown him into a state of emotional agitation, which leads to further aggression. He gropes at the last hope of salvation and decides to meet his father. Lourens’ response to the murder at the end is even worse than Egbert’s. His entire ideological belief system collapses and he falls into a state of devastation. He no longer believes in his theological opinions he so fervently preached at the start of the film and runs away from his final year sermon.
  
8. “The *narration* is constantly at work seeking to justify implicitly or explicitly (1) why the narrator is competent and credible in arranging and reporting these events and (2) why the events are unusually strange, or worthy of attention” (Branigan, 1992: 18). The act of narration can thus be seen as the reading of the film data within the diegesis, which forms the ‘procedural knowledge’.

The narrative schema of the first seven elements generates a ‘declarative knowledge’, which “yields a series of episodes collected as a focussed causal chain”. The viewer processes this data and associates sequences with each other, which forms an experience of time in the film (Branigan, 1992: 116). Through this process, the viewer constructs the temporal flow of the narrative of *Preek* by reordering scenes which switch between Lourens and Egbert. The act of narration however, uses the structure which is associated and focussed on certain agents, in this case Lourens and Egbert, to form a certain procedural knowledge of how and why the characters function as they do and thus to understand and accept the narrative as intelligible.

From this application it is noticeable that the two characters of the film offer two parallel narratives within a single narrative structure. To understand a film narrative, according to Branigan, “a spectator employs top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes to transform data on the screen into a diegesis – a world – that contains a particular story, or sequence of events” (Branigan, 1992: 115), but it is also evident that the

data offered is focalised in film narratives, as in *Preek*. The focalisation of data does not necessarily create a full picture of the diegesis, but forms a subjective world according to the character. Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis suggest that “Narrative information in film [or data] will often be channelled through a particular character or group of characters, restricting our knowledge of the fictional world to their perceptions, knowledge or subjectivity” (1992: 88). Lourens and Egbert can thus be understood as the focalisation of the narrative, since the diegetic world and events are seen from their perspective. This does not mean that the camera sees everything the same way as the character, but that the characters’ actions, as well as their gazes and expressions, dictate the flow of the narrative.

Because we are constantly made aware of Lourens’ and Egbert’s personal opinions and their emotional responses to actions and relationships within the fabula, the focalisation can thus be acknowledged to include strong ideological and psychological elements. The way the characters serve as psychological and emotional interest, also clearly indicates that the narrative is internally focalised in that the “narrator only says what the character[s] knows” (Hedges, 1980: 290). However, the internal focalisation is varied and not fixed to one character, which also indicates that the viewer has access to more knowledge than one character possesses. By focusing the narrative on both Lourens and Egbert, I offer the spectator a chance to construct the diegesis from both characters’ perspectives so that their position within the murder sequence does not only rely on their identification with the murderer Lourens, who believes the murder to be justified, but also with Egbert who influences the viewer’s response and understanding of the murder. The murder sequence is of course the focus of this discussion, because through this cinematic representation of violence it is possible to evaluate my relationship with the film and the viewer.

### **3.2 The murder sequence and its relationship with the realist and formalist style respectively**

In this section I would like to discuss the murder sequence at the end of *Preek* and investigate how it relates to the realist and formalist styles which I discussed in Chapter Two. This investigation is important for me in order to position myself in relation to the styles as a filmmaker and to come to an understanding of how I approach the filmmaking process.

The final murder scene, which also represents *Preek*’s denouement, takes place in Egbert’s room, which has an en suite bathroom. Egbert has gone to the bathroom to defecate, leaving Lourens in his living room. The murder scene opens with a shot in which only Lourens’ shadow is visible, illustrating him as he slowly opens the door and walks quietly towards the bathroom door which is standing slightly ajar (see Figures 42 and 43).



**Figure 42 and 43: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

Lourens comes to a halt inches away from the opening, barely breathing, and apparently highly emotionally conflicted. He prays again, and after a lengthily pause, in which he overcomes his turmoil, he enters the bathroom (see Figures 44 to 47). From the beginning of the scene up to this point, a couple of shots were used, but from the shot that follows there are only two cuts until the end of the scene. The significance of this will be explained later.



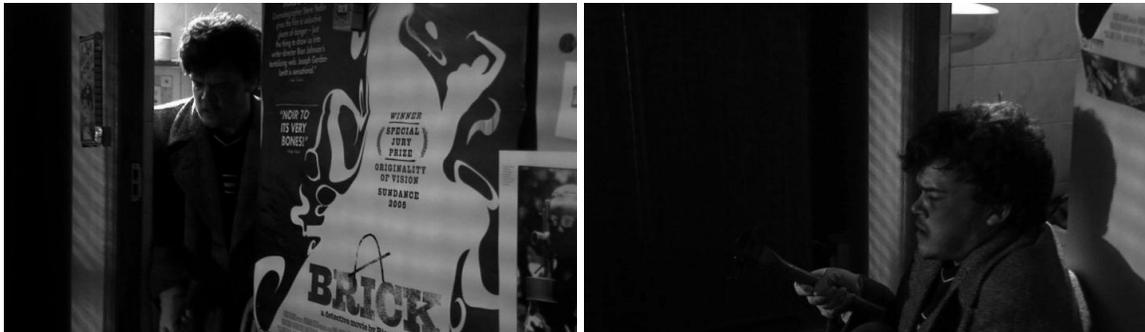
**Figure 44 and 45: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**



**Figure 46 and 47: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

As Lourens moves into the bathroom the camera moves away from the door and the screen fades to black while the sound continues. The murder is implied off-screen, through the vicious sounds of hammer hitting skull and blood splashing.

Shortly after the last hit, the image fades in again on the door. Lourens exits the room barely able to stand, shocked to the bone of what he has just done (see Figure 48). He is barely out of the door when he collapses and sits down on the floor just outside the bathroom (see Figure 49).



**Figure 48 and 49: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

His state of emotional distress is too much for him to bear. He has convulsions and tries to hold back being sick. Here I cut from a side angle to an angle almost straight on him, which not only shows his face, but also the body of Egbert in the background (see Figure 50). The camera moves in and focuses on his face, body and actions. A voice is then heard. Egbert's mother has come to retrieve her car which he borrowed to visit Bertus. She knocks on the door and calls him (and all the while the camera stays on Lourens) (see Figure 51). She talks through the closed window and tells him she wants to see him again, that he never visits, and then she walks away.



**Figure 50 and 51: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

This seems too much for Lourens to bear (see Figure 52). He had formed an image of Egbert as a monster, as an abomination before God that needed to be destroyed, and he fancied himself his Biblical judge and executioner, a hero. Yet here, after the gross deed has been done, someone who loves Egbert, someone who acknowledges him as a human being with a history and a family, calls for him. Thus, everything Lourens has forced upon himself, seems entirely iniquitous and an abhorrence. He starts to cry (see Figure 52 and 53).



**Figure 52 and 53: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

He cries until even his crying becomes distorted (see Figure 54) like a perversion, and he stops and looks about, confounded. The scene closes (see Figure 55).



**Figure 54 and 55: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

As with Chapter Two, I do not want to focus the relationship between the murder sequence and the two classic film tendencies on the theoretical arguments, but on the stylistic approaches preferred by the two tendencies. In fact, through the murder sequence in my film (the writing, filming and editing process) I have come to the conclusion that I am not supportive of either theory in its entirety, but that there are certain positions within the theories which I do affirm within my work.

Firstly, as I stated earlier, I do not agree with Bazin and Kracauer's notion that realism in cinema is completely dependent on its photographic nature; and secondly I am not convinced that the representation of an object is only a physical portrayal of its referent. This embodies Bazin's ontological opinion of film, which also refers to his desire for films to resemble recordings of events as they are in reality. I can however not deny that there are certain times within the filming process of *Preek*, and more specifically the murder sequence, that I did allow myself to record the event and to react to the actor's interpretation of the murder and its effect on the character. This however, does not mean that I recorded completely spontaneously, as I constructed the event as a whole and knew how and from where I was going to film. The actor knew when to move in a certain way (although I gave him the freedom to interpret the event on his own). The light was constructed in order to support the scene and the space was arranged and decorated for the same reason.

The sound of the scene is crucial to the representation of the violence and is also the most significant element that disregards Bazin's recording and re-presentation theory, as it was recorded in post-production and creatively constructed to support the represented sequence in a way that was not possible on the night of filming. By 'sound', I do not only refer to diegetic sounds but also to the music. I was very clear that the music should only be used as a supportive medium to indicate (to some degree) Lourens' internal state of mind. This however, strongly indicates the subjective decisions made by me as well as the composer and removes the representation of the scene even further away from a recording of an event. As I arranged and filmed the event, I also interpreted Lourens' emotional response and juxtaposed music with the image in order to represent the murder to the viewer as a whole experience. The diegetic sound of the actual murder was done in post-production for the obvious reason that it had to represent the sound of a hammer crushing a skull. For the actual murder, the foley artist and I constructed a sound from various experimental recordings by striking (with a hammer) objects such as coconuts, watermelons and other various fruits and vegetables with hardened shells. Some of the recorded sounds were then mixed in order to portray the violent sound of the skull crush, the brain pulp sloshes (oatmeal porridge) along with blood splashes (the porridge fluids). I wanted a very coarse and raw violent sound which is clearly discernable to the viewer (and listener) as the sounds of the act. In other words, a sound that is insistently visual.

While I do not support Bazin's notion of re-presentation and film as mere recording of events, there are other elements of Bazin's theory that I embrace. These can be clearly seen in the murder sequence. As previously indicated, Bazin believed that film has the ability to recreate "the world in its own image", through a number of techniques of mechanical reproduction and that through these techniques reality can be represented more fully than any other medium (1967:21). For this reason Bazin also opted for films which promoted a spatial continuity through the representation of images, as I have argued with the

representation in *Hidden*. I would like to point out that within the final murder sequence in *Preek*, I do represent the action through a spatial continuity by using certain techniques that Bazin encouraged (and which I discussed in depth in Chapter Two). I accept his suggestion that responses to the event are left up to the attention of the viewers through their experience of the action, something demonstrated so clearly in *Hidden*. Like Haneke, I wanted to offer the viewers the chance to acknowledge Lourens' emotional response, and in turn respond to it in their own way, but for this I used specific techniques, some of which are those that Bazin endorsed.

Lourens enters the room with a medium-long shot, which, as I stated in Chapter Two, is the first technique listed by Bazin that promotes a spatial realism. Almost Lourens' whole body is seen as he comes closer to the door. This might not be as long as the shot in *Hidden* which shows Georges and Majid's full bodies, but we are clearly made aware of the space, in that the camera tracks across the room with Lourens as he approaches the bathroom door. Except for the opening shot, the shots that follow up to the murder may not be medium-long shots, but they are long takes, through which I intended to show the full weight of the decision bearing on Lourens. Previously, I explained that Bazin believed that long-takes and deep-focus shots bring the spectator closer to the reality of the situation within a sequence than he would be with a montage sequence. Although I did not specifically use deep-focus, I believe the long takes I implemented and the duration of the sequence before Lourens enters the bathroom does encourage the scene to carry a sense of reality within the film as it focuses on Lourens' struggle inside a clearly defined diegetic space and time. These techniques, such as the medium-long shot and long-take, can be seen even more extensively and predominantly in the sequence after Lourens has committed the actual murder and exits the bathroom. The actual murder on the other hand, has no real affiliation with Bazin's preferred style in that I represented it through implied sound. The sound serves as representation where the image fades away and the interpretation of the murder is left to the viewers' imagination and ability to semantically relate the images leading up to the murder with the sounds of the act. As Lourens exits the bathroom, the image fades back into a medium-long shot in which Lourens collapses into a sitting position and the viewer is left to witness the full effect that the act has on him.

As I explained there is only one cut within this long sequence of more than five minutes, which again allows for an intense experience of the situation within the diegetic space and time. Jacques Audiard's *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005) was a critical influence on this sequence. Throughout the filming process of *Preek* I viewed this film quite extensively. The film revolves around a young Frenchman, Thomas Seyr (Thom), in an existential crisis as he struggles throughout the film to form his identity from either his diseased mother's artistic background as concert pianist or his father's as a crook. Near the end

of the film, Thom enters his father's apartment and discovers him brutally murdered on the floor (showed through Figures 56 to 61).



**Figure 56 and 57: Stills from *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005), Directed by Jacques Audiard**



**Figure 58 and 59: Stills from *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005), Directed by Jacques Audiard**



**Figure 60 and 61: Stills from *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005), Directed by Jacques Audiard**

The scene opens with close-ups and point-of-view shots as he moves through the apartment, but as he discovers his father on the floor, the shot continues for a couple of minutes as we are faced with his reaction to his father's violently murdered body. Just as Lourens, Thom tries to hold back not being sick as the camera moves closer and for very short intervals pans to his father's body and back again. As in this scene of *The Beat that My Heart Skipped*, the long takes in *Preek's* murder sequence and the focus on Lourens' body and face allow the viewers to experience the full extent of Lourens' anguish without

montage interruptions and fragmentations, which in turn grants them the opportunity to form an understanding of the event that has taken place.

As I previously stated, Bazin felt that this lends a certain freedom to the spectator, which makes the experience of the scene more authentic than an event represented through montage. Although I do not continue with the medium-long shot and cut to a closer shot on Lourens, the length of the shot, the movement of the camera within the space as well as the figure of Egbert's body visible in the background enhances the experience of the scene as something real to Lourens and also heightens the experience of spatial continuity within the sequence. The camera movement, which takes us even closer to Lourens' face during Egbert's mother's monologue, has other implication closer to the formalist arguments (which I will discuss later), but it also highlights the last technique endorsed by Bazin that I mentioned in chapter two. Bazin believed that camera movement that follows the action departs from artificial staging of a scene and creates a spatial realism where the action happens independently from the camera. I employed camera movement within the sequence (after Lourens exits the bathroom), which results in, to my mind, a more direct interpretation of Lourens' emotional response than a perfectly framed shot would have. With the movement of the camera, the blood splatters come into frame at some points. Although it is not the focus of the shot, the viewer is supplied with glimpses of the event, which provide prompts for an imaginative reconstruction of the murder, which took place off-screen.

I employed certain Bazinian techniques to film the sequence, which allow for a degree of ambiguity in response. The diegetic space and time of the scene is offered to the viewer through spatial continuity and the image and the movement of the camera is rather a response to Lourens' reaction and emotional turmoil than a staging of it. According to Bazin, as I have argued, this allows the viewer to discover the meaning of the sequence severally, which may lead to a certain ambiguity of a potential response related to real events. I do however acknowledge that the structuring of the scene and the implied violence through sound as well as the strict focusing on Lourens' face is not an objective interpretation of the murder, but a creatively articulated one through which I depended on the viewer's identification with the characters. This is related to the formalist approach to representation, especially those argued by Balázs.

Like the formalists such as Balázs, Arnheim and Eisenstein, I believe that film offers opportunities far exceeding those of still photography not only in representation, but also in the expression of ideas and emotions, which can be argued clearly through the use of the murder sequence as example. As I previously stated, the murder sequence may in some way relate to a recording of an event, but that it is far from a document of an actual event, as it was constructed through certain creative choices and with the use of certain techniques exclusive to film. I am however sceptical about the formalists notion that the spectator should be driven to a specific experience through calculated uses of formal techniques. I am not

stating that it is inadequate in all films; on the contrary I believe that in films like *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, it is a stylistic approach on which the success of the film experience rests. But within my own film and the viewing experience of the murder scene, I wished to supply the viewers with a representation within a space and time frame likened to a real event in order for them to look and search for their own understanding of the sequence. I do use certain techniques such as close-ups and music for certain desired emotional responses in the viewer, but I do believe that the more Bazinian techniques previously discussed, allows a viewer greater degree of interpretive – and perhaps even emotional – freedom with respect to their response to what is presented on screen.

Arnheim's argument that within film one should abandon normal perception to understand a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface however stays important to the construction of a sequence, which can be recognised in the murder scene. Lourens enters the room, walks into frame and as he nears the door I cut to a shoulder shot in order to take the viewer further into the sequence and identify even more with Lourens in the situation. I then cut to a close-up of Lourens' face as he comes to a halt at the door, which supports the identification with him and allows the viewers to recognise his anguish to a certain degree. I draw the viewers back to the situation as something real within a space and offer them a glimpse of Lourens' body within the diegesis, cutting back to a medium-long shot of Lourens standing at the door. When he looks down, I needed to indicate what he sees and therefore cut to a shot behind him that shows a photograph of Bertus and Egbert lying on the bathroom floor (see Figure 62).



**Figure 62: Still from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

After this I cut back to a close-up on Lourens' face to indicate his reaction. This shot continues to show his last hesitation after which he reaches out to push open the door. This part of the sequence I have described is supported by a formalist position, as in Balázs, who stated that the viewer of a film is carried into the picture itself and sees everything from the inside. Here I can refer again to *The Beat that My Heart*

*Skipped*, which very effectively cuts from a close-up of Thom's face as he enters the apartment, to his point-of-view as he walks across the floor and back again before he discovers his father. The viewer is thus taken into the space through different angles. I do acknowledge and support the notion that film can show an event differently from how we normally experience it and therefore allow for expressions of feelings through the use of formal techniques, but as Lourens exits the bathroom, I abandoned these techniques in order for a more ambiguous response, as Bazin would have it.

Through the different angles before Lourens enters the bathroom, I did not intend to invoke a calculated response from a viewer, as Eisenstein and Arnheim argued should be done.<sup>84</sup> My aim was rather to show Lourens' situation, not only his physical state, but also, to some degree, his psychological state, through a variation of medium-long shots, close-ups and shoulder shots, just as Audiard used. The fact that the shots are predominantly long-takes affirms that they are not put together in a combination set apart from the event within the narrative, but that they are there in order to represent the event and Lourens' emotional response to the situation as effectively as possible within the narrative of the film.

The combination of shots within the scene before Lourens enters the bathroom does contribute to the construction of a certain meaning, allowing the viewer to identify with Lourens more intimately. Yet I am convinced that the elemental meaning of the scene lies in the event as part of the narrative. I do believe that the essential meaning of the scene would have remained if I kept the scene as one single shot (as originally intended). This said, throughout the whole sequence a viewer experiences the situation through a focalised representation, one which may not have been possible with a single medium-long shot. The combination of images, as well as the two shots after Lourens exits the bathroom, brings the viewer close to Lourens so that s/he may intimately identify with him and his emotional response to the violence.

The actual violence, which is only represented through sound and which I aimed to be as realistic as possible, is given more weight through Lourens' emotional response before and after the murder by focusing the images on him. In fact, my critical aim was for the viewer to respond more to the effect that the murder has on Lourens than to the actual violence. The viewer's position as a witness is determined by

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<sup>84</sup> As I stated previously, Eisenstein believed that the abstract meaning should be created by combining a series of images in order to invoke certain emotional responses which can and should be controlled and calculated by the filmmaker. This was not my desire during the production of this sequence, for the combination of images in the sequence were reactions to the violence (before and after) as an act within the narrative. They are represented to the audience without a strict calculated response in mind, but rather a subjective opinion of the event. Balázs and Eisenstein were convinced that montage lends to the shots their ultimate meaning in that the viewer constructs a coherent flow out of a combination of different shots.

his relationship with the characters involved rather than the act. This also means that the viewer is not intimate with the act itself and does not experience it as intimately and from Lourens' point of view, as one experiences the violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. It is rather as if a window is shut before us for the duration of the horrible act until it is finished, almost like a shameful deed that Lourens tries to hide.

After Lourens exits the bathroom the camera moves slowly about and closes in on his face, as one can see in Figures 50 to 55. Although I ignored formal techniques, this representation and its perception by the viewer can be related to Balázs' argument that the viewer identifies with the character through close-ups and facial expressions. This identification with Lourens is strongly supported and strengthened by Lourens as focalised character throughout the narrative and the camera's relationship with his body and face throughout the film which, according to Balázs, is related to physiognomy. The viewer's position in relation to the violence of the scene is thus greatly shaped by his or her relationship with Lourens and his face, which he or she has identified with above all<sup>85</sup>. Through Lourens' bodily reactions and facial expressions the viewer comes to an understanding of the violent act and responds to it accordingly. This also makes reference to the Lacanian mirror stage, which I will refer to again later on.

The experience of the murder in *Preek* is not as in *Kill Bill Vol.1* derived from isolated expressions through various shots (pulled out of spatial continuity), but as I argued, it is connected to the space within scene. There is an understanding of the space formed through the movement of the camera and the long-take which is more likened to the suicide scene in *Hidden* where the action and characters are not isolated in shots. The characters roam in and, as Georges moves, outside the space showed to the viewer, which indicates a world beyond that of the frame. As the camera closes in on Lourens we glimpse pieces of the result of his violent action in the background (Egbert's motionless body and splatters of blood on the floor), which is juxtaposed (and contrasted) with his own body shaking and squirming. The space is crucial to the perception of the event as something real to Lourens and therefore it is crucial to the viewer's acceptance of the act in that he understands fully what has taken place inside a specific space and time.

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<sup>85</sup> The long duration of the shot on Lourens and the focus on his facial expression as response to the violent act which he performed, however, allows the viewer to have an emotional response directly related to his or her identification with the character. This is related to my discussion in Chapter Two, where I argued that the viewer understands the action and its results through their identification with The Bride and her facial expressions. When Lourens exits the bathroom, the camera focuses on his reaction as he goes through several emotional peaks.

Throughout this section I have argued that within the realist and formalist stylistic approaches to film, I have found essential elements that relate to my own filmmaking process, and also those which I do not embrace. Spatial continuity (as endorsed by the realists) is a crucial component to the representation of violence within my film because it lends a level of authenticity to the sequence and allows the viewer to experience and understand the event and the actions to have taken place within a diegetic world. Within the spatial realism I opted for, the shots as well as the narrative were focalised in order for the viewer to identify with the character. The formalists' preference for montage and their argument that a specific combination of isolated images should be used in order to invoke calculated responses ignores the effect that the understanding of diegetic space and time has on the viewer's response to violent actions. This was very significant for the representation of the murder sequence in *Preek* and therefore I affiliated myself more with the realists' approach to spatial continuity than with formalist montage.

### **3.3 Drawing on/from a mirror: Identification and Communication within the murder sequence**

The realism of *Preek* is however not only dependant on these techniques, but as I discussed, it is also dependant on the diegetic world of the film which closely resembles our own. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the realism of the violence lies in the emotional responses that it has on the characters and that violence is seen as something with destructive effects on the ones involved. It was thus important for me to focus on the effects that Egbert's murder would have on Lourens as the performer of the action. Imagination has thus played a crucial role in the process of representing the murder sequence. As I wrote the sequence, I had to imagine Lourens' emotional response and in effect, I had to rely on the actor's imagination and capabilities in order to interpret the written pages and perform adequately what I required from the scene. It is evident however that the audience's response to Lourens and their identification with him, is the most important element in the understanding of the sequence and the violence.

The identification with Lourens' character can be related to what Mulvey wrote when she stated that the cinema satisfies a "primordial wish for looking" and that the wish may lead to scopophilia with its focus on the human form (2004: 59). Although she adds that it is more applicable to the conventions of mainstream film, the attention with which I focussed on Lourens' face and body within the murder sequence clearly drives the viewer to look and identify with Lourens on a very intimate level. Leo Braudy wrote that "The people that we see in movies are both reflections and ideals, bridges by which we enter the film and extensions of parts of ourselves" (1976: 212). If we can approach the murder sequence in such a way, I would like to argue that the recognition of the human face and its expressions, as well as the body of the 'living' Lourens, drives us to understand the violence in relation to Lourens. As viewers we do

not position ourselves in relation to the motionless body of Egbert or an objective perspective, but engage with Lourens' repulsive response to his violent action.

This can also be argued within the sequence of *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* in which Thom finds his father brutally murdered on his apartment floor. Because the viewer has identified with Thom's face and body throughout the film, as well as the fact that the focus is kept on Thom's reaction to his father's body on the floor, one position and identifies with the act of violence in relation to Thom's distorted expression and reaction just as one does with Lourens. In both *Preek* and *The Beat that My Heart Skipped* the living is in the foreground, juxtaposed with the dead in the background. Through this juxtaposition we experience the violence and death as removed from us and identify with 'alive', in a way reassuring ourselves, as Freud argued, that we are not the ones suffering horrific deaths. The juxtaposition of 'alive' and 'dead' also colligates the theory of the filmic violence as scapegoat, which according to Girard (as I have argued) keeps the desire for violence in check. It thus keeps the violence other as the viewer participates in the sequence and identifies with Lourens' emotional response to the act.

Yet, the identification with Lourens as well as Thom is far from joyous participations, but is more appropriately understood in relation to trauma and affect. I would like to relate this element of identification with Lourens, to viewer responses discussed in Jill Bennett's article on the work of Sandra Johnston, whose work deals with memory and trauma, among other phenomena. For the discussion. Bennett describes Johnston's work, *To Kill an Impulse* (1993) as follows:

*To kill an Impulse...consists of two sets of slide footage screened simultaneously from opposing walls onto a single sheet of glass in the centre of a room, producing a backwash on the wall behind and on the bodies of spectators wandering through...One set of slides shows media images of political funerals – both Protestant and Catholic – in Northern Ireland, focusing on woman mourners, while the other depicts a confrontational performance in a mound of garbage by Johnston herself, intended as a cathartic enactment of grief (2002: 333).*

According to Bennett, Johnston's work expresses a need for "bodily and emotional connections to be established" in relation to trauma (2002: 350). Through the use of the mourning faces at the political funerals and her interpretation of the trauma through a performance with her own body, Johnston does not "offer us images that are themselves traumatizing; rather trauma is mediated to us in terms of embodied perception" (2002: 350). Therefore, as Bennett writes, Johnston explores "ways in which the artist can act as mediator for trauma" and in doing so she considers the ways in which the spectator "is positioned in relation to that trauma and also the way visual imagery might trigger an affective response" (2002: 335).

Although there are issues of public and private trauma present in this work which finally separates the discussions surrounding it from my own work, I would like to point out that Bennett's arguments about *To Kill an Impulse*, has great significance for the murder sequence in *Preek*. As in Johnston's work, the murder sequence induces an affective response from the trauma of the other, in this case Lourens' face. Even though I have represented the violence through sound and show the blood and Egbert's body in the background, I have stated that my intent was for the viewer's perception of the sequence to be affected rather by Lourens' traumatic response to the act, offered to him or her through my interpretation with the camera, than through the actual violence. Thus, like Johnston's work, the trauma (as well as the violence) is mediated to the viewer through the traumatised body and face of Lourens as well as my own experience and interpretation of the trauma, which is imprinted onto the screen through the camera movement. Bennett writes that "Johnston describes wanting to 'puncture' the image, to 'excavate' the moment of pain, feeling or stifling" (2002: 337 – 338). Through this metaphor Johnston shows that she aims to interpret as well as invoke the way the traumatic images trigger an affective response in her, but as Bennett writes, "she also points to a more invasive process by which she ruptures the image and renders herself present in the *mise-en-scène*" (2002: 338).

Although perhaps not immediately obvious, this point of view can be productively applied to the murder sequence in *Preek*. As cameraman I responded quite spontaneously to the actor's reactions, especially with the first take of the scene, which I chose in the end specifically for this reason. I knew what was to happen in the scene as I constructed it, yet I did not rehearse with the actors and therefore my camerawork shifted in direct response to the event within the space. I do remember being greatly affected by what I saw in front of me (which can be attributed to the actor's credible performance). Although my body is not physically present on screen, the handheld movement of the camera thus serves as a type of fingerprint of my presence in the space, which offers my affected interpretation and response to the sequence for the viewer with which he or she identifies with.

Within the murder sequence there are therefore two kinds of identification present: The 'primary cinematic identification' and the 'secondary cinematic identification'. The primary cinematic identification is the viewer's identification with the act of looking itself, which according to Baudry is not the viewer's identification with what is represented, but "with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees" (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 151). In this sense the viewer identifies with my viewing of the sequence through the view-finder of the camera. As I looked at the act and responded to it, I used the camera as a sort of relay, which the viewer then identifies with as an enunciation off the sequence. According Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, Metz described the cinematic enunciator as producer of the fiction, which points to "that process by which every filmmaker

organizes the image flow, choosing and designating the series of images, organising the diverse views”. This “organisation of the image flow” then creates the relay between the one who looks and what is being looked at (1992: 161). It is thus through this enunciation that the viewer is positioned in relation to a trauma, which, like Johnston’s work, may lead to an affective response. Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis states that according to Metz this can be supported through the psychoanalytical studies of the mirror stage in that the

...film viewer’s fictional participation in the unfolding of events is made possible by this first experience of the subject, that early moment in the formation of the ego when the small infant begins to distinguish as different from itself, and in so doing, begins to distinguish a self” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 151 - 152).

The identification with the look, the enunciation of the traumatic sequence in *Preek*, is thus, according to Metz, the primary identification because through the primary identification with the look, like the mirror, the viewer is positioned in relation to the event and Lourens’ response. In a way I can say that I have drawn *on* a mirror, by viewing the event through the viewfinder, and passed it on to the viewer of the film.

Following Metz, the identification with Lourens’ body and his emotional response can then be seen as the secondary cinematic identification. Metz writes: “As for identifications with characters with their own different levels (out of frame character, etc.), they are secondary, tertiary cinematic identifications, etc; taken as a whole in opposition to the simple identification of the spectator with his own look, they constitute together secondary cinematic identification, in the singular” (2000: 419). Lourens’ act and response is passed on to the viewer as an enunciation through the camera, which the viewer acknowledges as a unified whole. Through this identification, Lourens’ face and body, however, becomes the other, the object which the viewer both distances himself from and identifies with<sup>86</sup>. Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis writes that according to Lacan the “first differentiation of the subject begins on the basis of an identification with an image in an immediate, dual and reciprocal relation, but it depends precisely, on a recognition of the self as distinct and distanced from the other” (1992: 150).

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<sup>86</sup> The identification with Lourens has little to do with empathy, which is a conscious response, as opposed to identification which Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis describes as an unconscious process of the psyche. They explain the difference through a small example: “*Empathy* = ‘I know how you feel’... *Identification* = ‘I see as you see, from your position’” (1992: 151). This means that the viewer does not simply understand the violence and feels a certain emotion towards Lourens because of his perception of it, but that the identification leads the viewer to respond to the violence and Lourens’ reaction as something he engages with.

The subject forms a singularity, its identity in relation to the other and through this, learns to identify and relate. They further suggest that all future relationships in a subject's life will contain some element of identification, on the model of infantile transitivity, which can be described as thus: "...when a child attributes its own behaviour to another, as when in seeing another child get hurt, it begins to cry" (1992: 150). This relates directly to the viewing of the murder sequence in *Preek*. By acknowledging Lourens as a unified whole, the viewer also recognises the self in the situation, enters the imaginary and identifies with Lourens and his response, which may lead to affect. Because Lourens is the focalised character throughout the narrative as well as the visual focalisation (on his face and body) in the murder sequence, the spectator is within a fixed position of identification. In this sense, one may conclude that the viewer 'draws from a mirror' in his identificatory participation with Lourens.

Identification is thus what builds the triangular relationship between me as filmmaker, the image and the viewer. As the unrehearsed scene played off in front of me, I interpreted and identified with what was happening. Even though I was removed from the realness of the event (I was aware that I constructed the event), I was entranced by the event as I looked through the viewfinder and responded affectively to the actor's emotional response of the violence. The viewer is taken into the scene and positioned by first identifying with the act of looking, which is made possible by my 'affected' enunciation of the event, which is what Baudry and Metz argued the viewer primarily identifies with. Through this identification the viewer enters the Imaginary and is able to identify further with Lourens and positions himself in relation to the violence. However, through his previous identification with Egbert in the film, as well as Egbert's corpse and the blood spatter on the floor, the viewer's understanding and interpretation of Lourens' response is strengthened.

Within this chapter I have engaged in a critical investigation of filmic representations of violence in both stylistic and affective terms. Representations of violence have, I suggest, become a type of scapegoat for desires which I purged or sublimated by engaging with violence on screen, but also by finally performing these desires through my filmmaking process. Yet my understanding of violence and accepting of it in my social and cultural relationships have been rather ambiguous in the sense that my desires to act out in violence have always been a fantasy in contrast with my perception of the violent society we live in and the dangers of it. In *Preek*, I tried to present violence as having both an instrumental and expressive function that allows the viewer to engage both emotionally and intellectually, inducing an experience of violence as something harsh, destructive and real.

In order for this dual function of violence to have taken shape, I drove the narrative flow to focus on the two characters, Lourens and Egbert, whom I stated have different perspectives on violence and the use of it. Through this split focalisation, I consciously position the viewer in relation to these different views in a

diegetic world similar to ours, where the violent events have a serious impact on the characters. It was important for me not to dictate a perspective of violence from an idealised point of view, but to investigate and communicate ideas of violence on different levels. A viewer's identification with the characters, Lourens in particular, is crucial to this engagement. The communication of the violence is primarily accomplished through a stylistic approach, which enables identificatory participation on the part of the viewer.

By applying my earlier assessments of the two classical tendencies, the realist and formalist, on an investigation of the murder sequence at the end of *Preek*, I came to the conclusion that there are essential elements in their formal approaches to the filmmaking process that related to my own. I showed that spatial continuity makes it possible for the viewer to identify and engage with both the event as well as Lourens, in such a way that it evokes a strong emotional response. Therefore the ethical implications of the act come to the fore, pushing back the aesthetic response of the violence.

What I would like to conclude with in this chapter is that through the theoretical, and practical creative research in the production of my film, I have arrived at an understanding that the relationship between a filmmaker, film and viewer depends on the filmmaker's desired approach of communication. This can clearly be seen in the filmmaker's approach to the representation of violence, which has both ethical and aesthetic implications. Yet, the approach of the representation (desired form of communication) of violence as an act can implicate one more than the other. Thus, as I have regarded *Preek* as a film in which the diegetic world should resemble our own where violence is physically and emotionally destructive, I decided to approach the representation of the violence from a certain point of view that may result in a traumatic affective response from the viewer as opposed to an appreciation of the aesthetic value that some of the violent images in film offer. This affective response is not only a result of simply viewing the images on screen, but an engagement with the event, which is the result of identificatory participation. The identification that takes place forms the relationship and ultimate communication between me as filmmaker, the film itself and the viewer, who in the end completes the process.

## Conclusion

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In a world where violence has taken on different forms and meanings, physical violence still elicits stronger emotional affect in that it is often visible on the human body. The body is an emblem of desire, difference and mutual identification. This is a subjective point of view, for, as I have discussed in chapter one, individuals will have subjective positions in relation to violence. An important point was made in the first part of chapter one, when I argued that violence points out the differences of what is proper for some and condemned by others however one understands violence (as psychological, socio-cultural or driven by instrumental motive or emotional responses) (Steward & Strathern, 2002: 3). Although this refers to all forms of violence, it is very clear in physical violence<sup>87</sup>.

Because film representations are mimetic representations based on more elements of human perception than a still photograph, the emotional response film elicits is more powerful, for the viewer engages more intimately with the modes of embodied existence and structures of direct experience (Sobchack, 1995: 37). From this point it was noted that the perception of a film representation was likened to the Lacanian mirror stage which Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry re-evaluated for the viewing of films. We enter into the Imaginary, a realm where the film representation is seen as present to us, by identifying with the cinematic image, but in order to respond properly to the image as the other, we return to the real and acknowledge the referents of the image as absent. There is thus, as I explained a definite engagement with the image which (although I am not convinced causes a loss consciousness and illusion of something real) one willingly submits to as a diegetic world real to the characters and with which one identifies and respond to.

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<sup>87</sup> A recent article in Time Magazine reported on an incident in Afghanistan where an eighteen-year-old girl was dragged from a house where she escaped to from her husband and abusive in-laws. A local Taliban commander gave the verdict that she had to be made an example of, after which her brother-in-law held her down while her husband used a knife to cut off her ears and nose (Baker, 2010: 12, 14). This article enraged me, yet this does not change the fact that the violence was condoned and sanctioned by the Taliban commander as an acceptable warning to other girls in the village lest they do the same (Baker, 2010: 14). This points out very clearly that there is a very definite conflict of opinions when violence and especially physical violence is legitimized by someone. Therefore I also indicated that the visual nature of physical violence was a key element in my thesis. The powerful emotional affect that the story of the girl elicits in me is due to both the physical nature of violence inflicted by a performer on a victim's body, as well as the photographs of the traces of the traumatic event (which enhanced my identification with the event). Therefore, as I dealt with the representation of violence in film (which is primarily visual), I focused my discussions on individual performers who act out in physical violence.

In relation to the representation of violence in film, and especially the viewing process, I however indicated that there is a strong contrast: The power of film to induce emotional affect, due to the viewer's identification with traumatic events and the enjoyment of the cathartic release that the violence on screen elicits. Just as a witness' response to actual violence depends on the subjective position of his or her relationship to the act, these two responses depend on the viewer's subjective position or disposition towards on-screen violence. I explained that this position and response of the viewer is not only a prerogative of the viewer's subjective perception of the act of violence within the film (in terms of legitimization or condemnation), but also the way in which it is represented stylistically and in a specific diegetic world. I argued that some approaches offer an intensity of the violence through a style that does not point to the cinematic apparatus and is shown explicitly in an authentic diegetic world, which results in powerful emotional affect. I also pointed out that a representation that allows us to recognise its *falseness* through a stylistic and diegetic approach, which makes us aware of the fiction and the surface, may result in our experience of the violence as a spectacle and therefore allows us to enjoy the cathartic release offered by the violence. It was therefore argued that these two opposing points of view broadly pointed to the stylistic approaches of the realist and the formalist tendencies respectively.

Through an investigation of these tendencies with examples of violence in *Hidden* (Haneke, 2005) as a realist representation, and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (Tarantino, 2003) as a formalist representation, I discussed how these representations differ ontologically from the point where they are constructed by the filmmaker, projected on the screen as an image to look at, to the point where the viewer engages with them and perceives them. The violence in *Hidden* is represented through spatial continuity and a single shot, which allows the viewer to be aware of the event in a diegetic space and time and perceive the violence as something intensely traumatic to Georges, the witness of the suicide. It also allows the viewer to experience and understand the event subjectively, without expressive directions from the filmmaker. On the other hand, the violence in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* which I discussed, is represented in an over stylized and aesthetized manner, where the complex editing and angles takes the viewer beyond natural perception and into the action, experiencing the events from The Bride's point of view. As I have argued, by focusing on The Bride's face, body and actions (and their consequences) the viewer identifies with her and sees as she sees. Yet the experience is heightened, and the viewer allows him or herself to be subjected to the actions and violence dictated by the filmmakers. This also points to the cinematic apparatus which the viewer stays aware of in order to respond properly to the on-screen violence and applaud it, which may allow, as I have indicated, the enjoyment of the cathartic release.

These investigations suggest that where the realist (Bazinian) identification with the event (more specifically the violence such as the suicide in *Hidden*), depends more (not exclusively) on how the viewer

positions himself (in the Imaginary) in relation to the diegetic space and time; the formalist (especially Balázs') identification, such as with *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, is with the event as a spectacle, an expression pertaining to a character's experience. Therefore it depends more on an intimate relationship with the character or objects apart from the space. The viewer responds emotionally to the image of the character and his actions by seeing as he or she does and therefore there can be a cathartic release. It was this intensity and intimacy of the viewer's relationship with the character and her actions that became the most important element of the formalist tendency further in my discussion.

Both these styles of representation of violence have the ability to invoke an affective response. However, the trauma in a strict realist representation derives from the event as a 'happening' in a world, but the trauma in a strict formalist representation, may be more connected to the intimate experience of a character. These are extreme examples for there are films such as *A Prophet* (Audiard, 2009), where these traumatic experiences are derivative of both point of views. This was crucial for my investigation of *Preek's* representation of violence, for there is evidence of both representational styles.

Within the last chapter of my thesis I have discussed my contrasting relationship with violence, which ranges from the cathartic purging of desires to the powerful emotional affect I experience when confronted with the results of real violence or violence represented in film with intensity or explicitness through familiar modes of embodied existence and structures of direct experience. Through the filmmaking process, both these elements were addressed. As filmmaker I was 'performing' the violence by constructing it and therefore in a way (similar to a ritual sacrifice) I purged desires. Therefore the filmmaking process became type of scapegoat through which I had a cathartic release. This however stands alone from the communication process in *Preek*, through which I wanted to express the intensity of violence and the traumatic consequences. Through this point of view I wanted to induce strong emotional affect in the viewer, such as the violence in *Hidden*. Yet, as I indicated, I wished to communicate the intensity of the violence through the emotional expression of a focalised character within a diegetic space and time, which the viewer could then identify with. I therefore needed to employ a stylistic approach that utilizes both realist and formalist elements.

To support this statement, I focussed my discussion on the murder sequence at the end of the film and indicated how I applied both realist and formalist styles of representation. I concluded that from the realist approach I implemented a spatial continuum within which characters resided and through which I enunciated the act. Through particularly long takes, the viewer was given the chance to identify with the enunciation through the camera movement and also experience the event subjectively in a diegetic world similar to ours. I also concluded that from the formalist stylistic approach I focussed the viewer's attention on Lourens in order for the viewer to identify with his emotional response, expressed through his body

and face. The combination of the styles created a communication of the intensity of the violence and induced emotional affect through a particular identification with the image. Within this sequence the viewer does not only position himself in relation to the diegetic space and time of the event, but also with Lourens and his experiences, with which he or she has identified with intimately.

Through this investigation of the representation and perception of violence in film, I have shown that there exists a triangular relationship between the filmmaker, image and viewer. This starts with the filmmaker's self-appointed task of constructing a visual, audio and kinetic work. Before he does this however, there needs to be a motive for communicating in such a way. I have indicated earlier that my starting point for the making of *Preek* was a desire to tell a story, but during the filmmaking process as well as the self-reflexive investigation of writing about it, I have come to the conclusion that the desire to tell a story is only a secondary point of departure for the making of a film. As an artist using film as medium the question of why one makes films has confronted me from my first attempt of producing moving images. The answer to this will always be subjective, as I have shown through different film representations. I have also come to the conclusion that the reason for making films changes as one develops as filmmaker, but at this point of my career, I constantly re-evaluate and answer the question in order to approach the filmmaking process with a conscious understanding of the medium.

I have come to regard fictional filmmaking as an art of communication in a similar way that novels are. As in novels there is an investigation into a subject, which will always possess an element of experience, such as violence in *Preek*. This is then constructed into a visual narrative in order to convey something about the subject matter to a viewer in an intelligible way. The film is thus a communication about a human aspect (or experience) through an experience. In *Phenomenology and the Film Experience* (1994), Sobchack stated that "More than any other medium of communication, the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience" (1994: 37). Film is thus, because it possesses the ability to convey intelligibly the modes of embodied existence and structures of direct experience of a diegetic world, the medium that best transposes experience and affect. The way it conveys this results in different responses as I have indicated through the discussions of violence, but it is clear that this transposition, which occurs and which allows for the experience "to belong to both the film and the viewer" (1994: 41), can be attributed to the viewer's identification with both the act of looking as well as the image. Therefore this engagement with the image forms the relationship between filmmaker, film and viewer. As I have indicated through *Preek*, the filmmaker enunciates and the viewer first identifies with this enunciation, which Metz (according to Carroll) attributes to the camera (2000: 414), after which the viewer may identify with the image or more specifically with the character and his actions.

The communication, or ‘experience by experience’, and the responses it evokes are thus made up of this relationship, which starts with the enunciation or as I have investigated it, the stylistic and narrational approach of the filmmaker, but is only made complete when the viewer returns to the real and perceives the film as a representation. Yet, the style of representation the filmmaker employs, depends on what the filmmaker wishes to communicate to the viewer as well as why he wishes to communicate something.

Through the representation of violence in *Preek*, my desire was to communicate an intense and powerful affect, which conveyed my subjective understanding of an act of violence, or specifically the affect it may have on a performer. As I constructed the scene and edited it, it was not only a representation, but kept on being an investigation into that destruction, which in a way resulted in a cathartic release as I re-examined it time and again. The image became a scapegoat, not only a way to ‘shelve’ death by keeping it other through Egbert’s corpse and Lourens’ living body, but by engaging and identifying with Lourens’ response, after which I return to the real, safe and sound, without having committed murder. My aim for the viewers on the other hand, was not necessarily a cathartic release, but I wished them to engage with the event. I wanted to confront them through their identification with the event as well as with Lourens and his response. The scene therefore aims to raise ethical questions for the viewers and make them uncomfortable as they gaze at Lourens’ response, someone who they intimately identified with throughout the film.

As Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis writes: “...films themselves only come into being through the fictive work of their spectators” (1992: 139). This means that the violence is only activated in the viewing, and therefore happens again and again but differently and with different responses, which I as filmmaker have no ultimate power over. I, as filmmaker am no dictator, as Eisenstein would have me be, but someone who communicates a subjective mirror in order for a viewer to gaze into and respond to in his own way. I thus engage and work with and respond to film as a partial reality, a mirror of an experience, as much as this experience may be expressive or obscured, aesthetically engaging, or fragmented.

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## **Appendix A: A synopsis of the feature film Preek**

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The film opens with Egbert talking to a fellow drug dealer in a bar late at night. The drug dealer is discussing the dangerous state of affairs that Egbert finds himself in. He sets down ground rules for Egbert who owes him a lot of money and offers an ultimatum. From the conversation we are also aware that Egbert and his best friend, Stefan, are at that moment busy with a deal and that Stefan is the mule, which may put him in a lot of danger. After the conversation, we follow Egbert as he searches for Stefan and finally finds him bleeding to death in a lavatory outside the bar. After Stefan has bled out, Egbert swears revenge and then guts Stefan to see if he still has the drugs.

The scene that follows shows Lourens boxing and practising his sermon (which he will be giving in a week's time) to his friend, Marius a policeman. Lourens' sermon and conversation afterwards, reveals in him a moral and ethical flexibility: He believes that God commands a select few to operate above the law for the sake of others. There is also a hint at Lourens' desire for recognition and greatness. We are then introduced to Lourens' social relationships through yet another conversation with Marius who enquires about his family and their connection with a prostitute named Sonja.

As Lourens enters his home we are offered a particular perspective of his relationship with his step-father, from whom he craves acknowledgement. His step-father seems indifferent to his attempts to connect on a social and emotional level. We are also offered a view into Lourens' deeply private desires and ideologies. He cuts out Sonja's escort advertisement in the news-paper as he does daily, takes it to his room (he keeps these little cut-outs secretively and fetishistically in a box under his desk) and masturbates while looking at it. During this he is overcome with guilt and starts to pray for forgiveness.

Lourens and Bertus fetch Stephanie, whose car has been giving problems and left her stranded at Sonja's apartment where she is nursing her dying lover, Nic. Through a conversation between Lourens and Sonja, while he waits for his mother, we come to understand that Lourens has been cutting out Sonja's escort advertisements in order to hide her profession from his mother. When Stephanie arrives she complains about Bertus and considers the possibility that his heart problems might be acting up again.

Lourens drives with Bertus who wants him to take him somewhere before returning home. They arrive at an abandoned house which, through the course of the scene we as well as Lourens learn, was Bertus' own house and that he had a son who lived there with him.

We are taken back to Egbert's situation, and are yet again thrust into his violent world as we are immediately transported to a scene where he tortures an accomplice in to divulge information about the

drug dealer responsible for Stefan's death. After the accomplice has complied and given him the name of the dealer (Duncan) and his details, Egbert murders him.

Back at Lourens' home, Bertus confesses to Lourens and Stephanie, for the first time, that he had a wife and son before he met Stephanie. He claims that his wife left without warning and that he was not permitted to see his son.

That night Lourens goes to Sonja for physical comfort, which she at first denies him, but through the hold that he has over her (keeping the information about her profession from his mother), he manipulates her into agreeing. At the same time Egbert seems more out of control after he murdered his accomplice and attacks a man in a bar after the man made a rude comment about Stefan. Egbert runs out of the bar to drive away, but discovers that his car has been stolen and smashes his cell phone. This puts him in a difficult position because he no longer has transportation to Duncan and therefore cannot take his revenge. While Lourens goes to Marius (in the dead of night) for help in tracking down Egbert, Egbert calls his mother from a payphone and leaves a message to ask her if he can borrow her car.

The next day after an argument with his tutor about his sermon, Lourens talks to Marius, who tells him that he has tracked Egbert down. He rushes home to tell Bertus and Stephanie the news. While Bertus seems excited and anxious to see Egbert, Stephanie seems less than happy about it and exclaims that Bertus' heart cannot handle it. Lourens persists and drives off to find Egbert.

When Lourens arrives at Egbert's apartment, Egbert mistakes him for a lookout sent by drug dealers and attacks him. After a heavy confrontation, Lourens shows him a picture of Bertus and himself (Egbert). Dazed and confused, Egbert throws Lourens out of his apartment, but soon realises that he has an opportunity for transportation and strikes a deal with Lourens that he will visit Bertus if Lourens drives him to Duncan. Egbert requests their address beforehand, which Lourens gives willingly.

When they arrive at Duncan's apartment Egbert warns Lourens to stay in the car and goes off towards the house. Egbert forces his way in and shoots one of the housemates. Hearing this, Lourens gets out of the car scared, but determined to find out what is going on. He enters the house on tiptoe and walks toward the commotion. As he looks around a corner, he sees Egbert holding a gun to Duncan's head. Egbert has already killed Bret, Duncan's friend and tries to force Duncan to cut open Bret's stomach, just as he had to do to Stefan. When Duncan refuses, Egbert becomes enraged and shoots Duncan through the head. Lourens runs off in fright and drives away leaving Egbert behind.

Egbert wakes up the next morning with the same rage as the day before. When he calms down, he looks to something that may be the last hope for him, the last salvation to this path of destruction. He picks up the photo of him and Bertus and leaves his apartment. He arrives at his mother's house and borrows her car. In a confused and agitated state, Lourens tries to resume his life as normal with boxing in the early

morning with Marius. Marius divulges to him that tracking Egbert down caused some trouble because Egbert is on a list of suspects connected to drugs and murder, which not only disturbs Lourens even further, but convinces him that his ideological ideas of his sermon may be correct.

Lourens enters his house and sees that Stephanie is distressed, but she refuses to tell him why. She merely tells him: "it's your fault". First suspecting that there is something wrong with Bertus, Lourens walks to their room, but hears Egbert's voice coming from inside. Bertus offers Egbert a sum of money, which Egbert first refuses on the ground that he doesn't want money to make up for his abandonment, but when he sees that it is ninety thousand rand (most of Bertus' savings), he takes it without further ado.

When Egbert walks out, Lourens tries to stop him from taking the money (he argues that his mother and he will have barely nothing left after Bertus is dead), but Egbert attacks him and warns him to stay out of his way. Lourens completely shocked rushes to his room and falls down on his knees praying for help. When he calms down we see something malicious in his eyes. The rest of his day goes by chaotically as he assaults his tutor and walks out off his disciplinary inquiry with his professor. He seems to be brooding on one thought, one task, the task of eliminating Egbert.

The next day while searching for a weapon in a pawnshop, Lourens runs into Sonja who explains that Nic had died the day before. Lourens wants to comfort her and tells her that he will come round after his sermon the next day. When he returns home, he prepares himself with prayer.

In the evening Lourens arrives at Egbert's apartment block, walks slowly up the stairs and down the hall. He stands in front of Egbert's door for a moment, composing himself and then knocks. Egbert (completely drunk) opens and lets him in, but immediately starts to harass him. Lourens, heavily agitated, again requests that Egbert leaves the money, but he refuses with no sympathy for the state that it would leave Lourens and his mother in. He goes to the bathroom, leaving Lourens in his living room. Lourens takes out the hammer, prays and goes after Egbert. He murders him in the bathroom, but when the deed is done Lourens collapses. While he is sitting and panting, Egbert's mother knocks on the door and starts talking. She wants her car back, which Egbert borrowed to visit Bertus. The murder, along with her voice calling for Egbert, has a destructive affect on Lourens, for all his ideological ideas within his sermon are crushed through this violence.

The day of the sermon arrives, but the horror of the murder is still swimming in Lourens's mind as he steps up to address the lecturers. When he closes his eyes to give the opening prayer, he sees the images of the murder. While everyone's eyes are still closed, Lourens runs out of the church and on to the road to Sonja's apartment. He knocks on her door, but when there is no reply, he pulls the handle and the door opens. He walks in and calls her name, but the apartment seems quiet and empty. He crosses the apartment

floor to her bedroom door and pulls it open, only to find her unconscious on the bed and her face as white as snow, vomit dripping from her mouth.

Sonja wakes up in the hospital to find Lourens sitting beside her and asking her why she tried to commit suicide. She answers that after giving up everything for Nic, there just didn't seem to be anything left for her. Lourens then confesses that he was wrong about so many things and that it was over for him, but asks her to write to him.

Lourens enters his house and fetches the coat that he had on during the murder (tainted with blood). He walks out and goes to Marius to give himself up.

## Appendix B: A note on Colour

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This is a short discussion on the decision to shift to black and white, which was made after the entire film was edited and which was made after many considerations.

The main concern that led to this decision was technical. As I shot the film on a *micro-budget* (six thousand rands), there were many drawbacks in terms of quality of image and sound (especially image). The high definition video camera with which I filmed had certain shortcomings. Firstly, the lens (which was attached to the camera's body and could not be removed) had very poor depth-of-field and as I wanted quite shallow focus in some shots, I had to shoot most scenes with an f-stop of two or lower. In turn, because my low budget had a great effect on the quality of lights I could use, the low f-stop and low light forced me to lower the shutter speed of the camera as well. Therefore, the quality of colour was reduced. The camera's general interpretation of colour was also not on a high standard as it was sometimes confused about the colour scheme when I changed angles with different light patterns (even though all functions were set to manual control), which led to different colour grades during one scene. It was particularly hard to film in a room where we switched on the fluorescent lights for extra light, in that the camera consistently and persistently changed the white balance during a single shot so that the colour scheme would switch from green to orange again and again. These problems would have made it a particularly long and arduous task to correct the colours in post-production and which might have degraded the quality of image even further. It was therefore a positive decision to switch from colour to black and white.



**Figure 63 and 64: Stills from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

The change to black and white led to certain formal implications, most of which were quite positive, although it offered some minor drawbacks in return. Firstly, the signification of the red of blood was lost.

In some sense this was a disappointment, but in my opinion the dark liquid and stains it left behind are adequate replacement signifiers.



**Figure 65: Still from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

The switch also took away some of the awareness that the film was shot on digital video because colour is one of digital video's greatest shortcomings. Rather than trying to provide the viewer with aesthetically pleasing colour shots, it now focuses his or her attention on the forms of the characters and their actions while still retaining quite aesthetically pleasing images.

After the switch to black and white it was also noted that it supplied the images with certain graphic qualities, so to speak (to some extent this can be seen in figure 63 and 64 and then in 66). Stronger lines and forms were brought out, which somehow disappeared in the colour images and this, I believe, gave the images more texture and focus, because the graphic vectors became more prominent (diluted at first by the poor quality of colour the camera offered). There are a lot of colour images which I found extremely aesthetically appealing, but I am convinced that this aesthetic 'beauty' shots held little significant meaning in the story. I do understand that this also affects the reception of the viewer and that it implicates the identificatory participation, but to my experience it does not influence the magnitude of the film's communication processes to a very large extent.



**Figure 66: Still from *Preek* (2010), directed by Benjamin Marnewick**

One of the discussions before the switch, was that the narrative of the film deals with certain universal and ‘timeless’ themes, which might be supported by black and white, and which I found it did, but I also found that the switch removed some of the ‘familiarity’ of the places we used as locations and made it more neutral. This is positive because I find that viewers are more willing to suspend disbelief when they are exposed to unfamiliarity in terms of people and places, and they seem to be ‘kicked’ back to the real very easily when they recognise something with which they have a personal connection with.

The last point I would like to make regarding this switch has primarily to do with a sense of independence. Many lower budget South African (especially Afrikaans) films that are made and showed at theatres are shot on HDV (high definition video). Most of these films are crude slapstick comedies which show Afrikaans people from a point of view from which I wanted to distance myself. I also wanted to distinguish my film from the HDV films that is being made in South Africa at this point, and to establish myself as an new independent filmmaker. There seems to be an unspoken agreement among independent filmmakers that feature films, particularly directorial début’s may be produced in black and white. Christopher Nolan’s *The Following* (1998), Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995), Anton Corbijn’s *Control* (2007), some of Jim Jarmush’s films and all of Béla Tarr’s work are just some examples of this.