THE GROTESQUE

AND/IN/THROUGH

FILM

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Student Name:	AARON J. PETTEN
Student Number:	U0021290
Sponsoring Establishment:	UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

This thesis explores the grotesque and realist aesthetics of contemporary independent American filmmakers, Larry Clark and Harmony Korine from a broadly formalist perspective. The thesis is situated amongst two conversations within Film Studies. The first conversation is with those who have critically and historically engaged with the films and filmmaking practices of Clark and Korine. The second conversation contributes with those critics and historians who explored the presence and status of the grotesque in cinema.

It addresses the grotesque vision and imagination of the filmmakers, and the realist motivations and imperative, according to their own public pronouncements. It then provides a close descriptive analysis of the manifestation of the grotesque and realist aesthetics of the films themselves. It shows the ways in which both filmmakers embrace the grotesque through their expressions of the margins and underbelly of the middle-American landscape. Their approaches to realism, principally deriving from non-fictional modes of audiovisual production, illustrate the extraordinariness of the banal and mundane realities of the everyday, albeit the darker recesses of the everyday. This thesis further demonstrates how the coupling of Clark's and Korine's realist approaches enhances and even constitutes their grotesque aesthetic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To My Darlin' 'Rene...Again...

CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
CONTEMPORARY INDEPENDENT AMERICAN CINEMA, REALISM, AND THE GROTESQUE:
ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION[1]

Consider the following: an HIV positive seventeen year old boy obsessed with deflowering virgins; a drunken seventeen year old boy raping a drugged-out unconscious HIV positive girl; a teenager prostituting his mentally retarded sister; two teenagers hunting the local stray cat population to sell to a Chinese restaurant to buy glue for sniffing; a schizophrenic brother impregnating his sister; a bunch of friends savagely beating one of their own to death and then feeding his corpse to an alligator; a boy who auto-asphyxiates himself while masturbating to the point of ejaculation; a drunk father crawling into the bed of his teenage son in an attempt to show him that he loves him by molesting him; or a man dressing his daughter in her dead mother's wedding dress and mock-marrying her. Not many people would argue if I were to describe these scenes as grotesque. This is only a small sample of scenarios that have

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[1] This thesis is written using the American spelling unless quoting a source which uses the British spelling, at which point I keep the original spelling as it is in the reference being quoted.

appeared in the various contemporary American films of Larry Clark and Harmony Korine, respectively. These filmmakers and their films are part of a trend or tendency – a tradition even – in modern and contemporary American cinema since the 1960s that not only embraces the aesthetics of the grotesque, but also simultaneously embraces aesthetics of social and aesthetic realism. This tradition draws from films with such eponymous and notorious scenes as a three-hundred pound transvestite scooping still warm dog shit and eating it; a middle-aged man being anally raped by backwoods rednecks; a man being tortured by having his tooth drilled into without anaesthetic; a sixteen year old boy having a sexual affair with a seventy year old woman; a middle class couple voyeuristically fetishizing a heroin junkie shooting-up on their sofa after being caught trying to burgle them; the anal rape of woman using a smear of butter as lubricant; a male prostitute apathetically selling himself to make ends meet for his family; and a mother sexually pleasuring her son in order to assuage his heroin withdrawal pains. These are just a few exemplars of the modern grotesque in contemporary realist cinema.

This thesis principally explores and analyzes a cohort of contemporary American films by Clark – *Kids* (1995), *Bully* (2001), and *Ken Park* (2002) – and Korine – *Gummo* (1997), and *Julien Donkey-Boy* (1999) – that are simultaneously indicative of both the modern grotesque and cinematic realism. Intriguingly, these two filmmakers at one point had a working relationship. Indeed, Korine scripted *Kids* and had started to co-write *Ken Park* with Clark prior to their relationship going afoul. What sets these films apart from other films often discussed as grotesque is their realist aesthetic orientation. The grotesque regularly features in more hyperbolic genres, such as fantasy or horror films, or even slapstick or farcical comedy films. When it does tend to be attributed to more realist orientated films, the concept is often used as a critical evaluation of the politics of representation.

The independent films of Clark and Korine rival their more stoical, irony-strewn American indie film contemporaries, proliferating from the mid-1980s and seemingly stemming from Jim Jarmusch's films. Jarmusch is the director of modern indie

classics such as *Stranger than Paradise* (U.S.A./Germany, 1984) and *Down by Law* (U.S.A./Germany, 1986), which paved the way for the rash of indie films that emerged during the mid-1990s and became representative of the indie film formula. Films which are significant contributions to the edification of *the* indie film, such as those made by Hal Hartley[2], Gus Van Sant[3], Neil LaBute[4], Todd Haynes[5], Steven Soderbergh[6], and Todd Solondz[7]; to a lesser extent the retro-kitsch exploitation b-movie revivalist films of Quentin Tarantino[8] and Robert Rodriguez[9], the queer cinema of Gregg Araki[10] and Van Sant[11], as well as numerous other films by directors with less extensive or well- known oeuvres.[12] These, most notably the ones like that of Hartley and LaBute, remain the most common type of indie film today, to such an extent that the indie film has become identifiable according to certain generic traits and criteria based on those films. This has ironically resulted in the "indie film" almost being classifiable as a genre film in its own right, rather than a mode of production, and sometimes without necessarily having original content, themes, and visual style.

Clark's and Korine's films are particularly embedded in heritages of American Art and culture, which, while often influenced by European movements, are distinctive in their American reinterpretation and recasting of those influences. Rather than looking at Clark's and Korine's films in relation to other contemporary independent American films solely through film theory and criticism, I propose that in

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[2] *The Unbelievable Truth* (U.S.A., 1989), *Trust* (U.S.A./U.K., 1990), *Simple Men* (U.S.A./Italy/U.K., 1992), *Amateur* (U.S.A./U.K./France, 1994), *Flirt* (U.S.A./Germany/Japan, 1995), and *Henry Fool* (U.S.A., 1997).
[3] *Drugstore Cowboy* (U.S.A., 1989) and *Elephant* (U.S.A., 2003).
[4] *In the Company of Men* (U.S.A./Canada, 1997) and *Your Friends & Neighbors* (U.S.A., 1998).
[5] *Poison* (U.S.A., 1991) and *Safe* (U.S.A./U.K., 1995).
[6] *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (U.S.A., 1989), *Schizopolis* (U.S.A., 1996), *The Limey* (U.S.A., 1999), *Full Frontal* (U.S.A., 2002), and *Bubble* (U.S.A., 2005).
[7] *Fear, Anxiety & Depression* (U.S.A., 1989), *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (U.S.A., 1995), *Happiness* (U.S.A., 1998), *Storytelling* (U.S.A., 2001), and *Palindromes* (U.S.A., 2004).
[8] *Reservoir Dogs* (U.S.A., 1992), *Pulp Fiction* (U.S.A., 1994), *Jackie Brown* (U.S.A., 1997), and *Kill Bill* (U.S.A., 2003/2004).
[9] *El Mariachi* (Mexico/U.S.A., 1992), Roadracers (U.S.A., 1994), and *From Dusk till Dawn* (U.S.A., 1996).
[10] *The Living End* (U.S.A., 1992), *Totally F***ed Up* (U.S.A., 1993), *The Doom Generation* (U.S.A./France, 1995), *Nowhere* (U.S.A./France, 1997), and *The Mysterious Skin* (U.S.A./Netherlands, 2004).
[11] *Mala Noche* (U.S.A., 1986) and *My Own Private Idaho* (U.S.A., 1991).
[12] *Smoke* (Wang, U.S.A./Germany/Japan, 1995), *Blue in the Face* (Auster, U.S.A., 1995), *Sliding Doors* (Howitt, U.K./U.S.A., 1996), *The Opposite of Sex* (Roos, U.S.A., 1998), *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, Canada/U.S.A., 1998), *Buffalo '66* (Gallo, U.S.A. 1998), *Holy Smoke* (Campion, U.S.A./Australia, 1999) and *Brown Bunny* (Gallo, U.S.A./Japan/France, 2003) are to name only a few.

order to fully appreciate and understand their films it would be more productive to look at their films in relation to both the grotesque and realism, and the ways in which they are situated amongst other artists using a variety of mediums who embrace the grotesque and realism. In art, they share a continuum with the Vienna Actionists. In fiction, they share a lineage with American picaresque and modern gothic writers, such as Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, James Purdy, Flannery O'Connor, John Hawkes, Carson McCullers, and J.D. Salinger. In photography, they share in style heritage with artists funded through the Farm Security Administration (FSA) under the New Deal, as well as the likes of Diane Arbus, Nan Goldin, Mary Ellen Mark, and Boris Mikhailov. Clark's and Korine's films also share a heritage with forms of popular media culture and entertainment, such as Reality TV and TV talkshows, as well as non-cinematic forms of audiovisual production, such as surveillance and home movies. Cinematically, they are better situated within modern film traditions that share a fascination with and embracement of the grotesque and realism, such as trends in the European New Wave cinemas exemplified by Godard, Herzog, Fassbinder, Pasolini, and Fellini; the American Underground Cinema of Paul Morrissey, Kenneth Anger, and John Waters; the Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema of Richard Leacock, The Maysles Brothers, Frederick Wiseman, Errol Morris, and Les Blank; some of the New Hollywood films of the 1960s and 1970s; as well as paralleling trends with some of their contemporary European counterparts, namely Dogme and Savage Cinema.

My goal is to contribute to the existing debates on two fronts: *firstly, I aim to typologically compile the still rather disjunctive debates involving the grotesque in cinema*; and *secondly, I aim to typologically and critically compile the more delimited debates involving Clark's and Korine's films and filmmaking practices*. The thesis is guided by three primary questions revolving around the hypothesized grotesque and realist aesthetics of select films from the oeuvres of Clark and Korine:

> 1. *What are the motivations and intentions, influences and inspirations of Clark's and Korine's respective aesthetic visions, and how do they implicitly and explicitly relate to art of the modern grotesque as well as the art of film realism?*

> 2. *How, and in what way, are the grotesque and realist aesthetics manifest in Clark's and Korine's films?*
>
> 3. *What do Clark's and Korine's films encapsulate or express that situates them as a contemporary version of a distinctively American tradition of realist and grotesque art?*

My approach to these questions will be shaped and navigated according to the particular approaches, methods, and perspectives that I employ, which will be addressed throughout the GENERAL INTRODUCTION below.

The aim of this thesis is not to theoretically contemplate and discuss the concepts of the grotesque, independent film, and realism, but rather to address the selected oeuvre of films by filmmakers that are exemplary of the modern realist grotesque. Inevitably, theoretical assumptions shape my selection and use of the films, and, indeed, the terms 'grotesque', 'independent' and 'realism'. These terms have various points of reference and meanings, some of which are contradictory to one another and some that are compatible. Thus, I will address each of these concepts below so that the meaning and my usage of these terms is clear, and subsequently, so will the critical conception of my objects of analyses: the films and filmmakers.

ON THE GROTESQUE

Frances Connelly argues that "[o]ver the last two hundred years, other terms proliferated to describe aspects of experience that attach in one or more ways to the grotesque…Yet at the same time, the complex and contested meanings of the word "grotesque" have lost their resonance".[13] Yet, as Connelly also observes, the concept of the grotesque "remains a broader and more inclusive term" than other related concepts and modes; it maintains a facilitative capacity by incorporating or assimilating them into particular instances or permutations of the grotesque. And while Connelly is correct to suggest that there is no one name that can "bind these modalities to a fixed,

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[13] Connelly, 5. Frances S. Connelly, "Introduction" (*Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 5).

discrete meaning"[14], I contend that the concept of the grotesque is the most inclusive term that accommodates the qualities and characteristics that unify the various modalities and concepts. Indeed it is flexible enough to accommodate the nuances that differentiate those various related concepts and modes *because* of, rather than in spite of, its various contested attributes and meanings.

The "earliest record" of the actual use of the word 'grotesque' – initially grottesche in its original Italian – was not until 1502.[15] The word is derived from a combination of grotto-, which means cave, and -esque, which means like. Thus the grotesque directly and literally means cave-like. However, scholars of the grotesque argue that grotesque art predates its etymological origins and that it can be retrospectively ascribed to phenomena from ancient civilizations.[16] In fact, the inception of the word itself comes from a contract to commission an artist to recreate the very designs of the Baths of Titus and The House of Nero built during the Augustus period of the Roman Empire which was excavated during the *quattrocento*.[17] The imagery that gave rise to the word consisted of ornamental designs were influenced and inspired by the excavated painted ceilings and walls:

> In the house of Titus, the painted ceilings followed a single symmetrical principle of design. All were intricately framed geometrical arrangements of compartments – circular, square, oblong, or combinations of these. In the compartments were landscape and pastoral scenes portraying graceful or satyrical figures from the pagan world. The remainder of the ceiling surface was filled with fantastical inventions – satyrs, cupids, fruit, foliage festoons, frets, knots, and bows. An effect of space and distance was achieved by the geometrical design, and occasionally the illusion of light and air was created by ceiling 'windows' in *trompe l'œil*.[18]

The grotesque was thus characterized by a fluid and seamless intermingling between disparate domains of existence – the animal world, the plant world, the

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Frances K. Barasch. *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971. 17).

[16] See: Ibid., Wolfgang Kayser. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. New York and Toronto: Indiana University Press, 1957/1963), and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[17] Ibid., Barasch 20.

[18] Ibid., 18 (emphasis in the original).

mythological world, and the non-organic world of abstract design – so that the point of origin and the endpoint were indiscernible. Ultimately, the grotesque began as a retro-kitsch imitation of an ancient form of semi-figurative, decorative ornamental design with the original form itself retrospectively, and might I add ironically due to the originally excavated designs also being classified as cave-*like*, with being ascribed as being grotesque, or in other words, grotto-esque.

This original conception has since come to include a diverse range of art forms and works of art, which are, at least superficially, mutually exclusive and seemingly unrelated to each other. Over centuries, the grotesque separated from the ornamental designs of the grottesche, and the word became more commonly associated with caricature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this context, the term indicated a defamiliarized form of realism and the realistic in the twentieth century.[19] This usage is extended historically and genealogically to encompass content such as: "mythological figures like griffins and basilisks, to perhaps pagan residues like gargoyles, to the imagery of Bosch, Brugel, Dürer, Goya, Doré, and innumerable caricaturists, to writers such as Rabelais, Swift, Hoffman, Poe, and Kafka, to the surrealists", and innumerable creators and compositions in "contemporary mass art", especially that from audiovisual media such as film, television, and videogames.[20] What is intriguing is that these objects of the grotesque from previous eras sustain their status as 'grotesque', even in contemporary manifestations, although the contemporary classificatory scheme and criteria for what constitutes the grotesque have changed.

While it is clear that the grotesque tends to be conceived as a mode unto itself, it is also conceived of as a means, a strategy. That is to say that in some instances the grotesque is subsumed by another aesthetic mode due to the sum of its elements and strategies. The grotesque as a strategy inhabits a number of other associated aesthetic concepts and modes: the gothic; the uncanny; the fantastic; the magical;

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[19] Op. Cit., Harpham xviii-xix.

[20] Noël Carroll. 294. "The Grotesque Today: Preliminary Notes Toward a Taxonomy" (*Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 294). This is a very brief index and is far from being exhaustive.

the surreal; the carnivalesque; the absurd; the abject; the diabolical; the bizarre; the horrific; the dreadful; the macabre; the monstrous; the freakish; the sublime; farce; burlesque; and of course, various modes of comedy and humor; namely, satire, parody, irony, and caricature.[21] While various, and not always inclusive of one another, what modally distinguishes the grotesque from these other concepts, even though it may incorporate elements of any of those concepts, are certain formal characterizations of the grotesque.

Tying the grotesque together, and distinguishing it from other concepts, are prevailing tropes of irregularity and abnormality and particular formal or structural characteristics. Tropes of irregularity and abnormality are expressed through distortion, exaggeration, fusion or synthesis of contradictories, and violation of ontological categories. Structural characteristics that underpin the grotesque and typify it formally are multiple. They can involve the physically abnormal, ugly, or abject body[22]; alienation and estrangement[23]; the combination or juxtaposition of incompatible parts, such as a combination of disparate ontological domains or genres, resulting in an organizational incongruity or disjunction resulting in the problematizing of categories[24]; and excessive boundary transgression[25]. Expressions of the grotesque also tend to be tonally motivated by particular qualities that reflect certain attitudes in temperament and disposition. Irreverence or even baleful and maleficent attitudes toward the themes and subject matter represented is common. The subject matter may lack decorum, be filled with vulgarity and obscenity, be blasphemous, perverse, hedonistic and decadent, transgressing and subverting establishmentarian norms and customs, or be otherwise taboo. However, it is the cultivated attitude toward the subject matter – immoralism or amoralism,

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[21] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. III (London: Ballantyne Press, 1853/1906); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965/1984); Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. New York & Toronto: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1957/1963); Philip Thomson. *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972); Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); and "The Grotesque Today: Preliminary Notes Toward a Taxonomy" (*Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge U P, 2006).
[22] Ibid., Bakhtin and Ibid., "The Grotesque Today".
[23] Op. Cit., Kayser.
[24] Op. Cit., Connelly and Op. Cit., Barasch.
[25] Op. Cit., Thomson, Op. Cit., Harpham, and Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today".

sensationalism, or bawdiness – that identifies it as grotesque. Likewise, the intended affects of the grotesque tend to attempt to elicit: shock and awe[26]; horror, terror, and dread[27]; disgust and repulsion[28]; comic amusement and laughter[29]; unsettling discomfort or disturbance[30]; as well as cognitive and emotional ambivalence as a result of a combination of two or more of the said affects.[31]

Like many other aesthetic categories the above qualities are not impermeable. Regardless of the combination of factors contributing to the aesthetic realization of the grotesque, or whether it is being used in a celebratory or pejorative way, it is a term that indicates a contrary and antipathetic antagonism to an ideal construct. The combination and prominence of any of the said factors tends to be a matter of focus and emphasis as well as the status of certain formal conventions of a given art form at a given time – visual, literary, or otherwise – as well as the cultural conventions and norms of a particular place and time. From this the status of the grotesque and what it entails at a given point in time emerges. The meaning of the grotesque changes over time.

Consequently, that which is attributed as grotesque changes over time as well. Much of the art and artifacts of the past once referred to as grotesque would no longer be referred to as grotesque today except possibly as an example of a classical grotesquerie. Of course, as noted above, some grotesques transcend time and remain exemplars of the grotesque today in the same way that they did in the era that they were attributed as such. This, however, largely rests on the discursive context of an attributed grotesquerie. For example, a classical image of the grotesque such as an arabesque, created today may still be referred to as grotesque by an art historian but not necessarily so by a literary historian. Likewise, the grotesque may the regarded as inherent within a novel with gothic overtones by a literary historian, yet not necessarily so by an art historian. Caricature imagery, on the other hand,

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[26] Op. Cit., Ruskin.
[27] Op. Cit., Kayser.
[28] Op. Cit., Harpham and Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today".
[29] Op. Cit., Bakhtin and Ibid., "The Grotesque Today".
[30] Op. Cit., Kayser; Op. Cit., Thomson; Op. Cit., Harpham; and Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today".
[31] Op. Cit., Bakhtin; Ibid., Kayser; Ibid., Thomson; and Ibid., "The Grotesque Today".

whether visual or literary, would likely be regarded as embodying elements of the grotesque by both the art and literary historian alike. However, the colloquial usage of the grotesque today may not include any one of these three instances as grotesque. Due to these differences, there is clearly difficulty in defining the grotesque, in pinpointing what constitutes something as grotesque, and subsequently, determining what is not.

Similarly, like other forms of art, the grotesque has eventually come to straddle several genres, modes, movements, and styles of filmmaking and while it has even come to be associated with particular filmmakers and in some instances certain national traditions, the grotesque is not bound by any these contexts. Also, like other art forms, the grotesque is largely historically contingent and while certain films discussed in earlier eras may fit the bill as being grotesque, it does not mean that they will necessarily be considered grotesque in later periods. The grotesque in cinema changes over time, but equally, some films remain grotesque across time because of the affective power that they convey. Other films, however, remain classically grotesque according to their antiquity in relation to historical conceptions of the aesthetic category.

The modern grotesque does still share associations with the original objects and artifacts classified as grotesque, but such imagery is now more regularly referred to as monstrous, horrific, or fantastical. While the term also still shares associations with its eighteenth and nineteenth century antecedents in caricature, such imagery tends to be referred to in terms of its status as satire or parody. In its contemporary usage, the term grotesque tends to be reserved for subject matter and imagery that is associated with that which is excessively abject, repulsive, abhorrent, immoral, perverse, and disturbing.

For as long as the grotesque has been in conceptual existence there are surprisingly very few theoretical paradigms that are completely and uniquely distinct amongst the intellectual history of the concept that have been postulated.

This, however, does not account for the various contributions by critics, theorists, and historians who have in some way extended, elaborated upon, or revised those few limited innovative paradigms. And while some of the more derivative theorizations are quite significant, they nevertheless remain derivative and can all be traced back to only a few emergent theories.

The formal theorization of the grotesque began in the late eighteenth century with neo-classical philosophers, such as Justus Möser, Karl Friedrich Flögel, and Christoph Martin Wieland. Similar to approaches used by bio-geographers of the time, their contributions to the grotesque largely consisted of categorizing the grotesque as a genre or mode by compiling works that shared basic formal characteristics accordingly. It was not until John Ruskin's study in the mid-nineteenth century that the grotesque was systematically theorized. It was from this point that the structure and the function of the grotesque became the focus of analysis in relation to particular dimensions of its presence and manifestation, which includes motivational, cultural, historical, affective, and normative contexts. Since Ruskin, only a handful of theorists – Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Kayser, Philip Thomson, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, and Noël Carroll – have developed distinctive new paradigms.

Ruskin argues that the grotesque is a composite of two elements – the "ludicrous" and the "fearful" – which combine and subsequently correspond to one of two branches of the grotesque, the "sportive" or the "terrible."[32] Although he acknowledges that there is often an overlap between the two branches in grotesque art, one tends to prevail over the other in a given work because one of the elements is more emphatic than the other. However, Ruskin's most significant contribution to the intellectual history of the grotesque, arguably, is his attribution of the grotesque as ultimately emanating from a grotesque view of the world with grotesque art being a direct expression of an artist's temperament. Subsequently, for Ruskin, the grotesque imagination of the artist is indicative of the artist's moral compass and beliefs with regards to nature, society, as well as their spirituality. It is from this that Ruskin

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[32] Op. Cit., Ruskin 111-164.

further typologizes both of his branches of the grotesque into those exemplars that are "noble" and those that are "ignoble".[33] Intriguingly, Ruskin provides a psychological dimension to what is essentially a grotesque outlook or a grotesque state of mind, a notion that my first two chapters that explores the grotesque imagination and vision of Clark and Korine.

Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque is without a doubt the most popularly cited and applied theory of the grotesque. His celebratory, carnivalesque grotesque has several tenets that are closely tied to satire and other bawdy traditions of folk humor, but it is his focus on notion of the "grotesque body" that is central to his broader conception of the grotesque.[34] He descriptively elaborates the province nature of the grotesque body:

> …the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image…Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which [*sic.*] enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and interorientation. That is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and the end of life are closely linked and interwoven.[35]

Bakhtin's physicalizing of the grotesque into the material domain of human existence takes the grotesque from the domain of the merely fantastical and attributes it with a sense of the real, hence his corresponding notion of "grotesque realism".[36] Bakhtin argues that the grotesque was at one time in history a celebrated mode that, while

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Op. Cit., Bakhtin 303-367.
[35] Ibid., 317.
[36] Ibid., 303-367.

debasing and denigrating in its satirizing process, was regarded as a positive aesthetic; whereas, since the nineteenth century it has principally been associated as an aesthetic of humorlessness, high seriousness, and even foreboding dread and horror. Oddly enough Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body has been adapted to serve and reinforce these conceptions of the grotesque, often in connection with Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject, which is employed to critically address pejoratively or negatively inflected evaluations of bodily acts and representations of the body.

Kayser argues that the grotesque is an aesthetic category which is structurally inherent within a grotesque work of art, which reflects the estrangement of the phenomenal world by dark abysmal forces that penetrate it.[37] Kayser's theory of the grotesque reflects the darker Romanticist conception of the grotesque, which links the grotesque with the uncanny, the macabre, and the gothic. Not only is it indicative of particular content and subject matter but it also expresses a particular atmosphere and ambience. It textures the mood of a particular work of art, and this has an alienating effect that causes consternation and dissonance. While on the one hand Kayser is the only theorist to really engage with the feel of the grotesque as a mood or tone that the grotesque expresses, he tends to limit his designation of the category to works of art and literature in which the diegetic spaces are in the broadest sense fantastical or magical. Even when he does address works that are more realist than others, he acknowledges the ambivalence that grotesque art embodies but disregards the ambivalence that it elicits in favor of a seemingly rigid sense of the grotesque invoking a sense of horror or terror.

Thomson recognizes this gap and theoretically posits that the grotesque is fundamentally "the unresolved clash of incompatibles" resulting in the "ambivalently abnormal".[38] Like Kayser, his theorization of the grotesque is also structural in character, but whereas Kayser employs Structuralism as a means to adduce the constituent elements that contribute to the manifestation of a grotesquerie, Thomson

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[37] Op. Cit., Kayser.
[38] Op. Cit., Thomson 27. Emphasis from the original removed.

takes a more traditional typological approach in adducing those constituent elements of the grotesque. Moreover, while Kayser approaches the grotesque as an aesthetic category, he is more concerned with the metaphysics of the grotesque; Thomson is much more concerned with the formal properties and poetics of the grotesque. He identifies and typologizes various tropes, recurring structural qualities, and purposes and functions of the grotesque. He identifies four tropes that structurally underpin the grotesque. Those tropes include: co-presence, ambivalence, the perceptible presence of the realistic, and its physical nature.[39] He further typologizes what he ultimately identifies as a "pattern or structure fundamental to the grotesque" based on four "recurring notions", which are really qualities indicative of various permutations of the grotesque.[40] These include: disharmony, the comic and the terrifying, extravagance and exaggeration, and abnormality.[41] And although Thomson acknowledges multiple "varieties of the grotesque" that fulfill a range of purposes and functions of the aesthetic object, Thomson classifies the various functions and purposes of the grotesque through another typological index across five intersecting categories: aggressiveness and alienation, psychological effect, tension and unresolvability, playfulness, and the unintentional.[42]

Geoffrey Galt Harpham's theory of the grotesque is an aesthetic theory on the one hand, and a cultural theory on the other. Both are in a constant state of interplay, constituting each other. Harpham claims that the grotesque is cyclical and that its cyclicality is based on the cultural and aesthetic distinctions of a given place and time. He argues that "it is up to the culture to provide the conventions and assumptions that determine its particular forms".[43] He adds that: "Culture does this by establishing conditions of order and coherence, especially by specifying which categories are logically or generically incompatible with others."[44] Thus the grotesque emerges from the "margin between 'art' and something 'outside of' or 'beyond'

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[39] Ibid., 1-9.
[40] Ibid., 29.
[41] Ibid., 20-28.
[42] Ibid., 58-70.
[43] Op. Cit., Harpham xx.
[44] Ibid.

art."[45] Harpham regards the grotesque as "a single protean idea that is capable of assuming a multitude of forms. The first thing to notice about these forms is that they are not *purely* grotesque; rather the grotesque inhabits them as an "element," a species of confusion."[46] He observes that: "Whereas most ideas are coherent at the core and fuzzy around the edges, the grotesque is the reverse: it is relatively easy to recognize "in" a work of art, but quite difficult to apprehend the grotesque directly."[47] Harpham ultimately regards the grotesque as a category that elicits and invokes negative reactions when he insists that it is "preeminently the art of disgust".[48] Yet, similar to Thomson, he also argues that the grotesque attracts while it repulses. However, according to Harpham's interplay of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the grotesque, Harpham insists that the disgust experienced when encountering something in art is the exact same emotion that we experience when we encounter that thing in the phenomenal world.[49] By extension, Harpham argues that the disgust experienced when encountering a grotesque work of art subsequently equates the object of representation as itself grotesque. Ultimately, for Harpham, the fascination and disgust experienced in art and aesthetic experiences are no different to those activated and experienced in real life situations, erasing any "distinction between art and reality".[50]

Noël Carroll's conception of the grotesque is the most contemporary, and while Carroll's theoretical postulations have yet to be engaged and applied as extensively as others, it is an original contribution to the theoretical development of the grotesque. Like others who have preceded him, Carroll regards the grotesque as pervasive, yet ironically concedes that it is difficult to define. Similar to Harpham, Carroll suggests that while we are able to identify the grotesque when we encounter it, the difficulty in ascertaining what the concept exactly entails or means remains.[51] However, Carroll suggests that this is largely a consequence of the way the concept is characterized. He argues that one of the major problems with previous studies of the

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[45] Ibid., xxii.
[46] Ibid., xv. Emphasis added by me.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 181.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today" 294.

grotesque is the "attempt to identify the entire compass of the grotesque in virtue of a single function".[52] Instead Carroll argues that "a more fruitful strategy might be to define the grotesque in a way that does not rely essentially on functions", but, like Thomson, instead primarily addresses the grotesque structurally. The grotesque is able to foster such a wide range of "disparate functions" because it is structurally rooted and motivated by the "violation, transgression, or jamming of our standing concepts and categories."[53] The grotesque is an aesthetic that is flexible enough to facilitate a variety of "intense" emotions and "novelty" and it is "almost by definition…a departure from the ordinary".[54] Yet the grotesque derives from a relatively delimited stock of tropes. This is what distinguishes it from other aesthetic modes or categories.[55] Thus, while the functions and affects of grotesque imagery vary, the grotesque shares certain structural characteristics that are fundamentally based on the way "that they all mix distinct biological or ontological categories."[56] From this Carroll educes a taxonomy in which he distinguishes four tropes – fusion, formlessness, disproportion, and gigantism – in which certain functions are subsequently characterized in conjunction with the affects that particular instances of the grotesque are intended to elicit.[57] According to his taxonomic approach, the violation of our standing norms of ontological and biological domains is the equivalent of a genus that unifies all of the species of the grotesques. The various species of the grotesque subsumed under the genus are the equivalent to the functions and affects that the grotesque elicits, whether it is horror, comic amusement, awe, repulsion, or some ambivalent combination.[58]

Aside from the major theorists noted above, further intellectual reflection prior to Ruskin but after the aforementioned neo-classical philosophers include the likes of G.W.F. Hegel, Victor Hugo, Walter Scott, and Edgar Allan Poe William Hazlitt, George Santayana, Walter Bagehot, John Addington Symonds, and Thomas Wright (in the mid- late nineteenth century); and G.K. Chesterton, Thomas Mann, Arthur

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[52] Ibid., 295.
[53] Ibid., 309.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 296.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Clayborough, Michael Steig, and Peter Fingesten (in the twentieth century).[59] While Hegel's notion of the grotesque is quite original, even forming the bedrock of Bakhtin's paradigms of the grotesque, he never published it; it was instead a part of a lecture series that he gave on aesthetics. Symonds, Santayana, Wright, Chesterton, and Fingesten elaborate existing notions of the grotesque in contrast to similar but distinctive aesthetic modes or extend existing notions of the grotesque to particular works of art or literature. Scott, Hazlitt, Poe, and Steig cast existing aesthetic or theoretical notions of the grotesque in a new light whereby an existing notion of the grotesque is used in a way that was yet to be envisaged prior to their contributions; whereas, Clayborough generates a systematic theoretical paradigm of his own by extending a Jungian archetypal psychoanalytical model of mind to what seems to be Ruskin's motivationally orientated conception of the grotesque in Renaissance art and Kayser's Structuralist account of the grotesque in German art and literature. Hugo and Mann engage the grotesque in a polemical manner whereby the grotesque is incorporated into an aesthetic call to arms or as an elaboration of broader aesthetic points of contention. None of these, however, constitute pioneering theoretical conceptions of the grotesque, and in all cases what they have provided in their

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[59] G.W.F. Hegel. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1 (Trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823-1829/1998); William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London and New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1820/1845); Victor Hugo, "Preface du Cromwell" (1827) Available: http://www.bartleby.com/39/40.html (Retrieved: 11 May 2008); Walter Scott, "The Novels of E.T.A. Hoffmann" (*Foreign Review*, July 1827); and Edgar Alan Poe, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (London: Worth Press, 1840), "The Murders in the Rue Morgue: The Dupin Tales" (New York: Modern Library, 1841/2006), and The Masque of Red Death" (Charleston: BookSurge, 1842/2004). Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry" (Ed. Norman St. John-Stevas. *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot* (vol. II). Oxford: Oxford U P, 1864/1965); Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1865/1875) Available:http://ia341005.us.archive.org/0/items/historyofcaricat00wrig/historyofcaricat00wrig.pdf (Retrieved: 26 August 2010); John Addington Symonds, "Caricature, The Fantastic, The Grotesque" (*Essays Speculative and Suggestive*. London: Smith, Elder, & Co. 1890/1907) Available: http://ia341303.us.archive.org/3/items/essaysspeculativ00symoiala/essaysspeculativ00symoiala.pdf (Retrieved: 26 August 2010); George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York, Chicago, and Boston: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1896) Available: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/26842 (Retrieved: 26 August 2010); G.K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 1903/2010); Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (Stamford: Unger, 1918/1987); Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Michael Steig, "Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis" (*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29.2: Winter 1970, 253-260); and Peter Fingesten, "Delimiting the Concept of the Grotesque" (*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42.4: 1984, 419-426). There are indeed more than those named. For further enumerations or extrapolations as described see the bibliographies of Clayborough (257-262) and Thomson (71-73).

intellectual contributions to the history of the grotesque has been absorbed or included amongst one or more of the prevailing theoretical paradigms previously identified. However, whether the concept of the grotesque is employed as a critical concept or an aesthetic concept, not all but most academic discussions of the grotesque tend to draw from one or more of the aforementioned authors which constitute the major paradigms of the grotesque, whether explicitly or implicitly.[60] That being said, as it will be shown in the survey of literature chronicling the grotesque in film, some of the major conceptions are favored over others while some are even virtually omitted.

At one point or another I borrow from the conceptualizations of all the major theorists of the grotesque throughout my explorations and analysis of the grotesque in relation to Clark and Korine. That is in terms of both the expressive dispositions and motivations of the filmmakers as having grotesque imaginations as well as in terms of the aesthetic presence of the grotesque within the films themselves. However, if I were to summarily posit or assert how I am conceptually operationalizing the grotesque when I attribute its presence it would minimally be: *a violation of standing concepts and categories as a consequence of the combining of elements that are typically or seemingly incompatible. This tends to be manifest through a moral incongruity or co-presence that centers on the anomalousness of the body – whether physically, mentally, or behaviorally – or other incongruities relating to human interaction with the material world or environment. It has a jolting or shocking affect and it elicits an ambivalent*

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[60] The vast majority of contextual research on the grotesque is not only framed but explanatorily reliant on the canonical paradigms cited above. This refers not only to isolated essays and articles in journals but also prominent single author and anthologized book publications: Michael Hollington (*Dickens and the Grotesque*. London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984); Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (*The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1986); David K. Danow. (*The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Dieter Meindl. (*American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996); James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates (eds.) (*The Grotesque in Art & Literature: Theological Reflections*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997); Colin Trodd, Paul Barlow, and David Amigoni (eds.) (*Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*. Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999); Frances S. Connelly (ed.) (*Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003); E. Mark Stern and Robert B. Marchesani (eds.) (*Inhabitants of the Unconscious: The Grotesque and the Vulgar in Everyday Life*. New York, London, and Oxford: The Haworth Press, 2003); Ralf E. Remshardt (*Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

sense of unease or consternation coupled with fascination, humor, and/or horror; or a sense of astonishing dissonance.

ON REALISM

The matter of 'realism' in film is another multifaceted concept. Across the historical and critical terrain of realism within film history, there is no single fixed usage of the concept. Most film scholars agree that one of the distinctive qualities of film is its capacity to render its subject matter realistically in both space and time. Some argue that the capacity to mimetically record and reproduce images of reality is inherent to the medium without reservation.[61] Others stipulate that this capacity to create the impression of realism remains contingent on the implementation of specific formal strategies.[62] The dichotomy between the realist and formalist debates has since diminished and a more measured approach that critically redresses both has emerged.[63]

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[61] André.Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* (Trans. Hugh Gray. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957/1967) and Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960/1997).

[62] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933/2006), Bela Balázs, *Theory of Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (Trans. Edith Bone. New York: Dover, 1952/1970), Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture" (*Screen* 18.4, 1969/1977: 35-47), Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (Film Quarterly 27.2, 1970/1974-1975: 39-47), MacCabe, Colin MacCabe, "Realism and Cinema: Notes on Brechtian Theses" (*Screen* 15.2, 1974: 7-27) and "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure" (*Screen* 17.3, Autumn 1976: 7-27), Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (*Screen* 16.3, Fall 1975: 6-18), Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), and Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

[63] Noël Carroll, "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film" (*Theorizing the Moving Image*. Ed. Noël Carroll. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1983/1996. 224-52); "The Power of the Movies" (*Theorizing the Moving Image*. Ed. Noël Carroll. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1985/1996. 224-52. 78-93); *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton.: Princeton University Press, 1988); *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Gregory Currie, "Film, Reality, and Illusion" (*Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. 325-44); and Torben Grodal, (*Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and "The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation" (Ed. Anne Jerslev. *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media*. Northern Lights Film and Media Yearbook. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002.

Realism is an aesthetic concept that is contingent on various contextual factors. This is something that the Formalist theorist, Roman Jakobson, recognized in his essay "On Realism and Art" (1921). Jakobson conceptually delineates realism as "an artistic trend which aims at conveying reality as closely as possible and strives for maximum verisimilitude. We call realistic those works which we feel accurately depict life by displaying verisimilitude."[64] So for Jakobson, realism in art mimetically reflects that which is deemed true or real in the phenomenal world. Jakobson's conflation of realism with verisimilitude is a useful heuristic that I subscribe to throughout my thesis. Jakobson identifies three principal sources from which the ascription of realism emanates: 1) from the intentions of the artist 2) from the appraised experiences of spectator/critic 3) from the ways in which an artwork adheres to nineteenth century conceptions of realism, which functions as a yardstick for realist aesthetics and art.[65] Jakobson's delineations provide a useful means for exploring how Clark's and Korine's film are exemplary of realist film art. Indeed, Jakobson's correlation between realism and verisimilitude is a cornerstone upon which my own epistemological position regarding the formation of realism in the cinema.

In CHAPTERS 2 and 3, I explore Clark's and Korine's aesthetic visions and creative motivations, which includes them persistently pronouncing their realist imperatives. These imperatives echo Jakobson's first principal source from which the realist designation is secured. This chapter will primarily, but not exclusively, address Jakobson's first tenet. CHAPTERS 5 and 6, my film analysis chapters, function to corroborate the filmmakers' aesthetic visions and intentions. These chapters focus on the ways in which Clark's and Korine's films are indicative of modern instantiations of Jakobson's third tenet. This is interdependently bolstered through Jakobson's second tenet in my use of existing research on film realism and the implied activities of the spectator that their research entails.

After establishing the source from which the attribution of realism emanates

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[64] Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art" (*Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. 38).
[65] Ibid., 38-39.

there are further historical, cultural, and formal contexts to consider.[66] While Jakobson notes that the realist style stems from adaptations of particular nineteenth century literary techniques and conventions, Noël Carroll and Torben Grodal stipulate the importance of considering the historical and formal particularities of those adaptations when considering their instantiations in film. Carroll argues that "there is no single Film Realism – no transhistorical style of realism in film", and further argues that "because 'realism' is a term whose application ultimately involves historical comparisons, it should not be used unprefixed – we should speak of Soviet realism, Neorealism, Kitchen Sink and Super realism."[67] Similarly, Torben Grodal enumerates various "modes of representation", specific permutations of realism, which have since been validated as recognized modes of realism, which include: "magic realism", "extreme realism", "poetic realism", "psychological realism", and "social realism". Thus,

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[66] See: Christopher Williams' anthology *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), Julia Hallam's and Margaret Marshment's book *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), and Richard Armstrong's *Understanding Realism* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005). Each of which is a critical history outlining several categories of realism which charts the competing and disparate intellectual traditions, perspectives, paradigms, and theories within or associated with the intellectual history of film realism. They identify the rich intellectual history of the notion of realism in film; the cross-sections within other relevant areas or aspects of film history, theory, and criticism that discussions of realism are manifest, extended, or applied; and possibly most notably they identify how widely contested the notion of realism in film as a consequence of competing epistemologies across a range of issues explicitly and tangentially related to the notion of realism in film and art. Ib Bondebjerg describes three alternative types of realism in his essay on examining Scandinavian New Wave Cinema from a modal perspective in the essay "Film and Modernity: Realism and the Aesthetics of Scandinavian New Wave Cinema" (*Moving Images, Culture and the Mind*. Ed. Ib Bondebjerg. Luton: University of Luton Press, 117-132). His designations include "narrative realism" which is indicative of the compositionally motivated films of classical narration, "phenomenological realism" which is indicative of the post-war international art cinema in the broad sense, and "documentary realism" which is indicative of films employing techniques and devices commonly associated with documentary filmmaking and its mode of representation. Birger Langkjær designates what he deems "four different levels of realism" that are discernible *in* and *of* film in his essay, "Realism and Danish Cinema" (Ed. Anne Jerslev. *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media*.. Northern Lights Film and Media Yearbook. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002. 15-40). This includes: "perceptual realism", "realism of style", "narrative realism", and recognitional realism or what Langkjær calls "realism as recognition". Whereas, Gregory Currie and Torben Grodal each delineate their own respective categories of realism drawing upon the experiential – that is the psychological and affective – dimensions of realism. Currie identifies three "doctrines of cinema, all of which have been called 'realism' in his essay "Film Reality and Illusion" (*Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. 325-344). The first doctrine he invokes, the "transparency" thesis, has already been mentioned above. The other two categories are "perceptual realism" and "illusionism". Like Hallam and Marshment, Currie's thesis acknowledges the competing traditions and epistemologies that form the various precepts of realism, albeit in a far more consolidated manner that is distinctly

[67] Op. Cit., "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film" 244.

according to Carroll and Grodal, clarifying the particular sort of realism being explored is a necessary component for analyzing realism in cinema if various contexts – historical, national, personal style, period style, movement style – are not to be disregarded or omitted and consequently to prevent other permutations of realism not being addressed from being reductively dismissed through omission. Clark's and Korine's movies are part of a multifarious continuum of realist film that includes Italian Neorealism, British Free Cinema and the Kitchen Sink films, Direct Cinema and Cinéma Verité, and more recently Dogme; as well as non-cinematic modes of audiovisual production such as home movies, surveillance, gonzo pornography, and incidental footage such as news footage.

Grodal further observes that the "different 'aspectualizations' of the word 'realism' are a logical consequence of the fact that reality is a multi-faceted and open-ended concept because new knowledge adds new elements to what is understood to be real."[67] Jakobson also notes the subjective contingency of realism's status. Even those filmmaking traditions that go out of their way to subvert film's perceived inherent links to its referent (e.g. abstract avant-garde filmmaking) often do so by knowingly or self-consciously countering assumptions about the medium's inherent link to pictorial realism and the representation of reality. In so doing, even films that attempt to subvert realist aspects of representation and re-presentation often borrow from those strategies to such an extent that the links to realism remain not only implicitly relevant, but often remain intact in many of the works that attempt to subvert it. This pattern is something that Jakobson suggests regularly occurs during transitional periods in which the shape and appearance of realism shifts throughout history. New conventions of style emerge when a convention becomes outmoded or "grow stale" and with this expectations also eventually shift. This tends to be instantiated through a deformation of aesthetic norms whereby the instantiation of new norms become "conceived as an approximation of reality".[68] During the transitional periods the new instantiations will be considered a distortion or deviation from the tenets of verisimilitude, and hence realism, by the proponents of realism that champion the norms that are being contravened and replaced.[69] Nevertheless, this is the process through which the conventions and

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[68] Op. Cit., Jakobson.
[69] Ibid.

expectations of realism shift and change over time. This eventually results in new 'modes' of realism emerging within the multimodal heritage of the history of realist art.

What 'knowledge', then, is important to our understanding of what constitutes the 'real' in cinema? Our understanding of what is real depends upon schemata – expectations and knowledge – of certain audiovisual conventions of form and style, to an extent, but it is also contingent on our knowledge of the world. So, when I posit that the films of Clark and Korine are realist as well as grotesque, I am arguing from the standpoints of both subject matter and content as well as audiovisual style. In terms of subject matter and content, I would argue that Korine and Clark are part of a continuum in literature, art, and film that stems from nineteenth century conceptions of the term, which is succinctly defined by American literary critic George Parsons Lathrop when he delineates that:

> Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting… It would apprehend in all particulars the connection between the familiar and the extraordinary, and the seen and unseen of human nature. Beneath the deceptive cloak of outwardly uneventful days, it detects and endeavors to trace the outlines of the spirits that are hidden there…to watch the symptoms of moral decay or regeneration, to fathom their histories of passionate or intellectual problems. In short, realism reveals. Where we thought nothing worth of notice, it shows everything to be rife with significance.[70]

Lathrop here concisely conceptualizes the content and subject matter of 'realism' as well as implicitly highlighting the expressive intentions that motivate realist art, intentions which are also clearly articulated by both Clark and Korine. While Jakobson addresses aesthetics, he does not adequately cover the subject matter that is fundamental to Clark's and Korine's realist aesthetics and even functions to motivate their audiovisual style. However, for analytical purposes and from a formal and stylistic standpoint, Roman Jakobson's conception of verisimilitude best encapsulates what I refer to when I attribute the audiovisual aesthetics of Clark's and Korine's films as realist. Jakobson's notion of verisimilitude provides the conceptual framework for the realist devices and strategies that are particular, even inherent, to the moving image.

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[70] George Parsons Lathrop, "The Novel and Its Future" (*Atlantic Monthly* 34. September 1874:313).

Subsequent film theoretical work on verisimilitude and aesthetic conceptions of film realism seems to derive from Jakobson's analysis. However, Bazin remains indispensable when focusing on how the film medium aesthetically achieves its realist status by exploiting particular aesthetic strategies and devices. Bazin, while problematic in his more metaphysical musings regarding the nature of film and its realist motivations, remains the discursive springboard when it comes to his observations regarding the ontological density of the filmic image. The foundation of Bazin's observations, according to both Warren Buckland and Noël Carroll, stem from Monroe Beardsley's heuristic of "physical portrayal".[71] Bazin's notion of "ontological realism" validates film's capacity to reproduce the phenomenal world mimetically by virtue of the rendering apparatus itself:

> For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind. Although the final result may reflect something of his personality, this does not play the same role as is played by that of his painter…This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, 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. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to reproduction.[72]

The technical requirements to mimetically reproduce the physical world in film will be identical when filming the same object under the same circumstances – lighting, camera type, recording speed, and framing – whereas the same object or scene would in all likeliness quite differently were that object or scene painted or drawn. Of course there are techniques in painting, namely trompe l'oeil, in which imagery can be mimetically rendered to look as if it were photographed, but this technique is something that must be mastered by the artist. However, as Warren Buckland

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[71] Monroe Beardsley. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace & World, 1958). Especially see chapter 6/section 16 whereby 'physical portrayal' is conceived and discussed as one of a tripartite of representational types of portrayals which also includes 'nominal portrayal' and 'symbolic portrayal'.
[72] Op. Cit., Bazin 13-14.

summarizes, "For Bazin, this automatic registration process results in an objective and impartial image of reality, for the image is identical to the reality that caused it".[73] More than making the banal assumption that, for instance, a table on film has a like-for-like relationship to the table in reality of which it is a recording, what is significant of Bazin's conception of realism is the rationale behind claim that there is no real mediation in the re-presentation of that table. Its rendering is afforded its status because of the device that recorded it rather than because of the choices of the person behind the device. This is, arguably, a film specific extension of not only Jakobson's conception of verisimilitude in that it portrays "reality as closely as possible".[74] However, it also calls attention to the devices and technical mannerisms that qualify a film's realist status, intertextually, from in contrast to other artistic rendering processes of realism. Moreover, it combines his medium specific presuppositions and his subsequent subjective attributions as a critic and historian.

While I subscribe to Bazin's general argument regarding the privileged status that the moving image has with regards to its proximal mimetic capability to depict and portray the phenomenal world, I do not subscribe to his prescribed 'medium-specificity' argument which situates the moving image as essentially a realist medium that should be exploited for its mimetic recording capabilities. Nor do I subscribe to his belief that the realist strategies are fully inherent in the medium. On this I take a formativist view which regards the 'realism' of any film as being undeniably mediated and facilitated through constructional options at the disposal of the filmmaker – technological choices, formal strategies, devices, and techniques all contribute to this. As Carroll noted, there is no transhistorical realism; and as Jakobson points out, there are various sources from which the attribution of realism emanates of whereas Bazin only accounts for one.

Kristin Thompson, on the other hand, addresses both the constructedness and historical contingency of realism when she notes that realism is "a set of formal cues"

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[73] Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland. *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide To Movie Analysis* (London and New York: Arnold, 2002. 200).
[74] Op. Cit., Jakobson 38.

that "changes over time, as does any style" which "come and go in the same sorts of cycles that characterize the history of other cycles."[75] Thompson insists that "even the devices that go into works seeking to imitate reality as closely as possible will vary from era to era and from film to film; realism, like all viewing norms, is an historically based notion."[76] According to Thompson, even the ontological criteria of realism themselves are schematically guided by certain formal characteristics that are indicative of what appears real, and this is corroborated historically through the intertextual relationships that a particular realist style or form shares with other domains of art, media, and/or culture at a given point in time. Thompson accounts for the formal and stylistic properties, historical contingency, as well as the role of the spectator in her neoformalist account of realism, which is possibly the closest conciliation of all three of Jakobson's sources for attributing an artwork as realist.

Similarly, Torben Grodal identifies cinematic realism as being contingent on the perceptual experience of "reality" according to past experiences. Accordingly, to him cinematic realism is a "balancing act between the unique which provides the 'salience of the real', and the typical which provides the cognitive credibility and familiarity of the real."[77] Thus while Grodal provides an important psychological dimension to the aesthetic impression of realism, that which Gregory Currie calls a 'response-dependent' conception of realism[78], like Thompson's neoformalist account of realism, Grodal also accounts for the need for 'credible' aesthetic strategies to perceptually and cognitively trigger the appropriate schemata. This idea is summed up concisely by Birger Langkjær through his conception of perceptual realism, in which he posits that:

> ...the cognitive notion that perceiving film is very much like perception in everyday environments...If perceptual realism is of any importance to the question of realism as an aesthetic category, it lies in whether the specific film makes us recognize something as more or less familiar, more or less related to our (immediate and/or mediated) experience within reality.[79]

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[75] Op. Cit., Thompson 198, 199.
[76] Ibid., 35.
[77] Op. Cit., "The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation" 73.
[78] Gregory Currie, "Film, Reality, and Illusion" (*Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. 325-44)
[79] Op. Cit., Langkjær 18-19.

Indeed the notion of perceptual realism is akin to verisimilitude and is fundamental to fully appreciating the realist and imperatives of Clark's and Korine's films. Their visual style adopts a variety of techniques and devices commonly associated with non-fictional, documentary modes of filmmaking. Consequently, their style plays upon aesthetic expectations and schemata relating to audiovisual depictions of 'reality' associated with those modes of representations. These notions again acknowledge Jakobson's conception of verisimilitude as emanating from the subjective experiences of the spectator. However, as all three of the theorists note, the perceptual experience of realism and the subsequent cognition of a particular aesthetic experience as realist, is a consequence of certain expectations and responses elicited from a particular combination of aesthetic strategies. These aesthetic strategies have a resulting style and form, but also importantly, as noted by Lathrop, have resulting themes, subject matter, and content as well.

Although realism is far from being a fixed monolithic thing or concept, there are recurring trends with regards to what has been deemed realist in terms of themes and subject matter. Currie incorporates Raymond Williams' notion of 'social extendedness' to account for the ways in which a realist interpretation is dependent upon viable and credible subject matter. Thus the realist response is considered response-dependent. According to Williams, 'social extendedness' is "the relationship between representations and a physical and social 'reality'" is perceived to be potentially "true" or at least plausible, viable, or feasible in the phenomenal world.[80] This is a quality of verisimilitude that accompanies any one of Jakobson's tripartite sites from which the attribution of realism stems and is a quality that undeniably refers to subject matter and content. This quality is important to nineteenth century conceptions of literary realism from which modern realist art is situated; it is a quality that is almost inevitably corroborated and attributed by artists, critics, and spectators alike.

As Grodal points out, most "'realist representations' have often dealt with the daily routine of uneventful lives" that depicts the "everyday life" of "ordinary"

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[80] Raymond Williams. "A Lecture on Realism" (*Screen* 18.1: 1977. 61-74).

people.[81] Langkjær's concomitant notion of 'recognitional' realism complements the representations of everydayness well. His notion of "realism as recognition" broadly refers to the "social, psychological, cultural and even emotional elements" that are extended by the representational content and subject matter of a film.[82] He avers that the "[s]ocial and psychological conflicts and depictions of specific cultural and social environments have often been considered (understandably) a hallmark of realism". Langkjær hastily adds that "it is not specified by one social strata" even though it tends to focus on the struggles of the underrepresented factions of the social world.[83] Nevertheless, subject matter that tends to be the content of realism often revolves around the mundaneness and banality of 'ordinary people'.

And while realism must draw from *what is known* in order to have a realist 'salience' (to use Grodal's term), the phenomena of realism must also be rendered according to acceptable methods of visual representation. The viability and credibility of the subject matter and content to the perceptual experience of realism is also contingent on the way in which that subject matter and content is stylistically and formally rendered. Film form and style thus elicits the corresponding realist schemata and effecting the subjective attribution of a film as realist by fostering an 'impression of realism'. There have been a number of recurring stylistic strategies that have remained conventions of a realist film aesthetic since Bazin. This includes the use of amateur or non-professional actors, location shooting (or the impression thereof), a loosely or looser organized narrative structure, and natural lighting (or the impression thereof), longer takes, mobile framing and zooms in the place of more frequent cutting, and a visual approach that is reminiscent of documentary modes and styles of the time. Other stylistic strategies and audiovisual recording devices which are often found in documentary or nonfictional modes of filmmaking have since emerged, much of which is signaled by a purposefully imperfect visual style such as erratic camera movements, uneven lighting, and degraded image quality and texture.

Many of the contemporary film scholars of realism who have revived aesthetic

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[81] Op. Cit., "The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation" 74.
[82] Op. Cit., Langkjær 20.
[83] Ibid.

conceptions of realism via Jakobson's conception of verisimilitude, albeit implicitly,

agree that the visual style of realism is often aesthetically secured when the visual

texture of the audiovisual image elicits an impression of transparency or even a sense

of indirect unmediated access to the content.[84] Contrary to Bazin, Grodal explains that

certain techniques and devices that highlight the deficiencies or imperfections of the

visual image are contemporary stylistic signifiers that motivate an impression of

realism:

> A more radical or paradoxical 'compensation' for lack of perceptual
> realism consists of emphasizing its shortcomings by making imperfect
> perceptual realism into a sign of 'reality'. This implicitly links the perfect
> perceptual realism of many fiction films with something 'unreal' and
> 'staged,' thus undermining perceptual realism as an indication of
> realism...The grainy pictures, the imperfect focus and framing, the erratic
> camera movements and bad lighting all indicate that this material is shot
> under un-staged nonfiction conditions, although such images do not
> emulate the way in which the human eye would perceive such
> situations.[85]

Subsequently, Grodal identifies the technologically low-fi devices, effects of

seemingly unprofessional styles of audiovisual production, and the eyewitness

observation of the impromptu capturing of footage (whether professionally or

unprofessionally captured) as facilitating a perceptual realism, a technique that Clark

and Korine employ to varying degrees in their films. Not unlike Bazin's assumption

that particular stylistic techniques of filmmaking exploit the inherently realist qualities

of the film medium, certain visual textures emanating from newer technologies, such

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[84] Op. Cit., "The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation" 75. However, content and subject matter also have to meet schematic requirements, but films like *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, U.S.A., 1999) or prior to that *This Is Spinal Tap* (Rob Reiner, U.S.A., 1984) play on these very aspects and dimensions in varying ways and degrees. Because of the content and subject matter as well as the presumptive context of the films they ultimately collapses as realist films, at least in the totalizing way that I have been exploring and describing here. This is the case in the reverse as well. Docudramas are often dramatizations based on real life events or occurrences, but because of their often conventional classical narrative structure they tend to be observed as just that, dramatizations. A film by Larry Clark, *Bully* (U.S.A./France, 2001), is exemplary of just this phenomenon as is Gus Van Sant's film *Elephant* (U.S.A., 2003). *Bully* is based on true life events it is produced like an explicit and graphic made-for-T.V. afterschool special that follows the norms and conventionalities of classical narrative structure and style. Similarly, *Elephant* is a docudrama which is an adaptation of the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, and although it is produced in a less conventional manner than Bully it has more similarities with the conventions of classical narrative and style than it does dissimilarities.
[85] Ibid., 77.

as video and lower grades of film stock affect the way in which spectators:

> …learn to connect certain features in audiovisual representation to the circumstances of its recording, so that they learn for instance to connect a degraded picture from a satellite transmission to the real difficulties of transmitting over vast distances or they learn to connect pictures with 'live reporting'.[86]

Grodal acknowledges that the imperfections that are now associated with the stylistic conventions and practices of modes of filmmaking associated with non-fictional documentation or information transfer. Yet Grodal insists that his focus on imperfect perceptual realism opposes Bazin, since: "[a]ccording to Bazin (1967) the essence of film art is its ability to perform an objective 'mechanical recording of the world that leaves no trace of an intervening human subject. Films and photographs should represent a perfect replica of the world."[87] However, I would argue that the imperfection of the degraded images in question have the same ontological gravity and elicit the same aesthetic experience that Bazin argued film provided. Imperfect technology implies a sense of authenticity and immediacy regarding the content being recorded and the texture of the imagery captured, but this is historically contingent and the conventions and accompanying schemata indicating perceptual realism transforms over time. More people now have experience in using technologies, such as homemade video recording devices, web cams, and cell phones, and they are aware of their shortcomings. Thus the schemata relating to the degraded imagery, which is associated with both non-cinematic and non-fictional audiovisual production, now facilitate the same 'objective' impressions of direct perception that Bazin once associated with the film medium and stylistic techniques that exploited the mimetic recording capacity of film. In short, they seem more 'real' and facilitate and simulate the verisimilitude that Jakobson refers to. The technological development of audiovisual recording devices other than film has simply modified the perceptual context of what demarcates an 'authentically' recorded image of reality.

Langkjær, citing fellow Danish scholar Ib Bondebjerg, more holistically identifies

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 79.

and attributes a realist film style as not only being mutually inclusive of his notion of perceptual realism, but as facilitating it. He describes a realist style as seemingly "natural, as something that could not be otherwise" which is "equivalent to a zero degree style".[88] Although Bondebjerg does not attribute the zero degree style to any one technique or stylistic device, he does attribute strategies as having more "realistic credibility" over others, citing the fiction films that employ the various techniques and devices common to "documentary realism" as bearing the most credibility.[89] Thus a successful rendering of realist style, according to Bondebjerg, accords with Jakobson's notion of verisimilitude.

Borrowing from non-fiction film scholar Carl Plantinga[90], Grodal notes that certain non-fiction films make epistemological assertions of existence through the use of an intensified verisimilitude by advancing the idea that "non-fiction films perform pragmatic acts asserting that what is shown and told is true in the world."[91] Although he limits his discussion to the ways in which non-fiction films achieve a realist status aesthetically through form and style to reception (perception and cognition), the impression of the pragmatism or what Noel Carroll has called 'presumptive assertion'[92] is also found amongst certain raw and gritty fictional realist films such as those by Clark and Korine. Their films embrace a minimalist approach akin to the guerrilla strategies of self-designated subversive or transgressive artists or documentarians – an embrace which will be thoroughly explored in CHAPTERS 2 and 3. They use what are considered non-professional methods of audiovisual production such as Reality TV, homemade movies, or stock footage retrieved from surveillance recordings to enhance their realist aesthetics. The emphasis on the surface texture of the imagery in conjunction with the content results in their films having documentary qualities or effects, often of the low-fi variety, such as that of a home movie or footage

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[88] Ibid., 19.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Carl Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[91] Op. Cit., Grodal 83.

[92] Noël Carroll. "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion" (*Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Eds. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi. Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell, 2006. 154-171).

caught by happenstance by an onlooker with a camera, or of more professional yet equally low-fi documentary traditions that emerged in the 1960s that employ fly-on-the-wall strategies of observation, such as direct cinema and cinema verité.

This furnishes Clark's and Korine's films with what Anne Jerslev, in her piece on the realist strategies and effects of Dogme films, refers to as an "aesthetics of presence and immediacy", which captures the "in time (now) as well as in space (here)", or in other words the here-and-now.[93] Jerslev concurs with this, suggesting that the way in which these films resonate with the gritty and unpolished verité strategies of documentation and representation reinforces what seems to be "an immediate attachment to events which unfold truthfully in front of the camera."[94] Jerslev suggests that this generates an ambivalence regarding the film's indeterminate status as fiction or nonfiction and reinforces the impression of realism. It is the intermingling of two distinctive domains of representation – *physical portrayal* and *nominal portrayal* – which facilitates this effect.[95] This is often the case in films that employ documentary realism, especially in conjunction with graphic depictions of sex and violence. So when the physical actor is involved in actual acts of sex and violence, such as in Clark's and Korine's films, the result is an inextricable intermingling between two domains of representation. The intensified verisimilitude creates an effect of indeterminacy between physical and nominal portrayal, which also enhances the significance of the grotesque subject matter and content.

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[93] Anne Jerslev, "Dogma 95, Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* and the 'Idiot Project' (Ed. Anne Jerslev. *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media*. Northern Lights Film and Media Yearbook. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002. 48).

[94] Ibid., 49.

[95] Ibid., 58. *Physical portrayal* and *nominal portrayal* refers to two of three of Monroe Beardsley's tripartite distinction of the various types of pictorial representation, with the third being *depiction*. Physical portrayal refers to the "model in a live-action film. It is the concrete person/actor that is being represented" by the filmmaker. Depiction refers to the general characteristics of the person being physically portrayed. As Jerslev points out this level of representation "defers focus from presence to resemblance". It includes specific attributes that ultimately contribute to the identity of a given performer – features and attributes ranging from their size, hair color, as well as their race and ethnicity, age, and sex – but it remains the generic perceptible aspects of the person being represented, the parts of the sum. Lastly, nominal portrayal refers to the imaginary or symbolic domain of representation regarding the character being performed in the diegesis of the fictional universe. Jerslev borrows these concepts to distinguish between the "levels of representation" in cinema (Jerslev, 2002: 56-57).

What the modern instantiations of Jakobson's ideas have attempted to do is reconcile Jakobson's three domains of realist attribution as being, at least in part, mutually inclusive when it comes to the expression and manifestation of verisimilitude in cinema. Regardless of whether the emphasis is on the subjective experience of realism or the intents of the artist, it would seem that any attribution or creation derives from, even in their modified forms throughout history, nineteenth century conceptions of literary realism and the heritage that sprang hitherto according to the stylistic strategies that are regarded as the norms of the time. And it is his notion of verisimilitude that guides my use of 'realism' throughout this essay regardless of whether I am attributing it to the expressive intentions of the filmmakers; the aesthetic experience that it cues or elicits, perceptually and cognitively (along with the grotesque); its observed formal or stylistic manifestation; or its relationship to a heritage or tradition in film or any other art form.

ON INDEPENDENT FILM

Clark's and Korine's films have been classified according a number of generic labels based on their modes of production. This includes but is not necessarily limited to: 'indie flicks', 'Hollywood independents', and 'Indiewood' films,[96] to a more inventive

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[96] See: Geoff Andrew's, *Stranger Than Paradise: Maverick Film-Makers in Recent American Cinema* (New York and London: Prion Books, 1998); John Berra's, *Declarations of Independence: American Cinema and the Partiality of Independent Production* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2008); David Bordwell's, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006); Jim Hillier's, "Introduction" in the anthology in which he also edited (*American Independent Cinema*. London: BFI Publishing, 2002. ix-xviii); several of the essays in an anthology, *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Chris Holmlund's, *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2005) and the essays published in an anthology edited by Holmlund, *American Cinema of the1990s: Themes and Variations* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Geoff King's, *American Independent Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2005), *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood meets Independent Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2002), and his *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2002); a number of the essays in an anthology edited by Jon Lewis, *The End Of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001); Greg Merritt's, *Celluloid Mavericks: A History of American Independent Film* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000); John Pierson's, *Spike, Mike, Slackers, & Dykes: A Guided Tour Across a Decade of American Independent Cinema* (New York: Miramax/Hyperion Books, 1997); Jeffrey Sconce's, "Smart Cinema" (*Contemporary American Film*. Eds. Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond. Maidenhead and New York.: Open University Press, 2006. 429-31) and Linda Ruth Williams' and Michael Hammond's

classifications according to their motivations and visions as a loosely unified group of films, a quasi-movement, which includes: the 'American Neo-Underground',[97] 'Smart Cinema',[98] and 'New Punk Cinema'.[99] In the simplest terms, the films made by Clark and Korine do belong to a category of filmmaking most commonly referred to as independent, or more specifically American independent film. The films that qualify for the independent classification are quite diverse in terms of a number of their qualities – modes of representation, industrial context, genres, narrative themes, and individual styles.

Contemporary independent American cinema is a mode of filmmaking that is often seen as challenging the perceived dominance and homogeneity of mainstream Hollywood films. However, the nature and degree of this challenge is contentious. Contemporary independent American cinema often embraces many of the dominant mainstream conventions of Hollywood, and similarly Hollywood has even come to embrace certain formal and stylistic trends and themes and content of independent filmmaking. Nevertheless, the "independent sector" of American film persists as a distinctive mode of filmmaking from the so-called mainstream of American cinema.[100] As King aptly observes:

> Independent cinema exists in the overlapping territory between Hollywood and a number of alternatives: the experimental 'avant-garde', the more accessible 'art' or 'quality' cinema, the politically engaged, the low-budget exploitation film and the more generally offbeat or eccentric.[101]

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sectional "Introduction" to the part called the "1990s and Beyond" within the same anthologized collection (325-33).

[97] See: Benjamin Halligan's "What Is the Neo-Underground and What Isn't: A First Consideration of Harmony Korine" (*Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*. Eds. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002. 150-60). This was reprinted in another anthology a few years after with a slightly altered title which is more retrospective in its entailment. See: Benjamin Halligan's "What Was the Neo-Underground and What Wasn't: A First Reconsideration of Harmony Korine" (*New Punk Cinema*. Ed. Nicholas Rombes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. 180-92).

[98] See: Jeffrey Sconce's "Smart Cinema" (Contemporary American Film. Eds. Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond. Maidenhead and New York.: Open University Press, 2006. 429-31).

[99] See: the anthology edited by Nicholas Rombes' titled *New Punk Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). Especially see: Jay McRoy's "Italian Neo-realist Influences" (39-55) and Benjamin Halligan's "What Was the Neo-Underground and What Wasn't: A First Reconsideration of Harmony Korine (180-92).

[100] Op. Cit., *American Independent Cinema* 1.

[101] Ibid., 2-3.

The filmmakers and films that comprise the spine of my thesis operate somewhere between the mainstream of conventional narrative cinema and more avant-garde or underground film practices.[102] The implementation of an elevated sense of verisimilitude or realism as well as more "complex, stylized, expressive, showy or self-conscious" audiovisual strategies is a departure from formal mainstream conventions of narrative cinema. Moreover, they tend to provide "visions of society" or perspectives in society that are not regularly found in the mainstream of popular narrative cinema.[103] Since the 1990s, the 'independent' film moniker has come to transcend or bypass its status as a mode of filmmaking, in which certain films following particular formal and stylistic strategies and content are classified as 'indie films, or 'indie flicks, in genre terms.

The criteria for defining a film as 'independent' tend to rely on three distinctive, yet interrelated contexts, according to Geoff King: industrial, aesthetic, and social/cultural/political. King points out that:

> Strategies vary, at each level. Some films customarily designated as 'independent' operate at a distance from the mainstream in all three respects: they are produced in an ultra-low budget world a million miles from that of the Hollywood blockbuster; they adopt formal strategies that disrupt or abandon the smoothly flowing conventions associated with the mainstream Hollywood style; and they offer challenging perspectives on social issues…Others exist in a closer, sometimes symbiotic relationship with the Hollywood behemoth, offering a distinctive touch within more conventional frameworks, in between are many shades of difference.[104]

While the industrial context seems to be a prevailing characteristic, some films classified as independent are designated as such more so because of their aesthetics, content, or explicit political or ideological motivations. Indeed this does open up a range of problems and issues regarding what do and do not constitute an independent film. The degree to which a film adheres to the various dynamics of King's typologies of 'independence' provides a barometer that ranges from what he seems to

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[102] Ibid., 10.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 2.

be describing as an 'über-indie film' to an 'indie film lite'.

One historian deals with this discrepancy resolutely. Greg Merritt insists that a film should be considered independent based solely on one factor, and that is, if a film is financed and produced autonomous from a studio , regardless of that studio's size and wealth.[105] As King points out, films that are made by smaller studios still operated within the studio system in that they are provided assurances of distribution by more major studios, which according to Merritt do not constitute independence, but is instead what he would call the grey area of the 'semi-indie'.[106] Merritt's hardline on the industrial context of a film's production is important but such a rigid classification dismisses the way in which independent film resonates aesthetically, culturally and artistically.

Indeed, the films that are of principal focus of this thesis would qualify under Merritt's category of 'semi-indie' as all the films at the center of this thesis are produced, coproduced, or distributed by a major studio. However, like King, I use the notion 'independent' to refer to American films that are produced on the margins of the mainstream, films that operate in the grey area that has come to be referred to as 'Hollywood independents' or 'Indiewood' films.[107] These films are produced and financed independently from the big budgets of the larger studios. Some of them are made by independent studios that are subsidiaries of larger major studios, whereas others are completely independent yet rely on the influence and distributional power of the major studios in order to ensure that they receive theatrical release. Clark's and Korine's films are widely recognized as independent films within the broader cultural context of their consumption and reception. The various aesthetic strategies diverge from the majority of mainstream commercial cinema. The content is challenging; and they do provide what could be considered an alternative vision of the world, even if only based on the prevailing attitude, mood, and feeling that the films convey in contrast to the vast majority of commercial mainstream cinema.

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[105] Op. Cit., Merritt xi-xv.
[106] Ibid., xii-xiii.
[107] Op. Cit., *American Independent Cinema* 9-10.

ON METHODOLOGY: PROCEDURAL METHODS, APPROACHES, AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

My methodological approach is entrenched within the formalist paradigm, but it does not adopt one particular formalist method. Instead it is a *piecemeal* approach that borrows from a variety of formalist methods.[108] The prevailing goals and objectives of the various methods are united in that they all operate from the supposition that:

> 'Form' designates the inner logic of each art, the essential set of features that delimit and shape amorphous matter. Out of form emerges a range of options regarding how to shape matter and create a particular work of art…Making choices from the formal options is an expressive activity that creates style…The analysis of style involves examining the range of formal options available to artists, and the choices they make in constructing an individual artwork.[109]

Where the various formal methods differ are in their focus and consequentially the procedures that they employ. I, first and foremost, look upon the films as works of art in the sense that they are artifices constructed using materials and organizing principles at the disposal of audiovisual production, and the filmmakers, who as rational agents, are intentionally motivated in their aesthetic decisions and strategies regarding their employment of form and style.

In the literature review chapters – CHAPTERS 1 and 4 – I employ a critical comparative textual analysis to explore existing scholarship on Clark and Korine respectively as well as the grotesque in cinema. I educe thematically orientated typologies from the various sources of each respective literature review and organize the critical survey of those sources accordingly.

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[108] By 'piecemeal' I am borrowing from Noel Carroll's employment of the term in which he refers to piecemeal theorizing as "theorizing limited to answering, albeit by means of generalization, specific questions about this or that aspect of the moving image rather than presenting an overarching, unified theory of the moving image that answers every question" (*Engaging the Moving Image*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. xxiii). However, whereas Carroll employs his notion of piecemeal in relation to the declarative knowledge of theoretical explanation, I adapt and employ his notion in relation to the procedural knowledge of my methodological approach.

[109] Warren Buckland, "Formalist Tendencies in Film Studies" (*The Sage Handbook of Film Studies*. Eds. James Donald and Michael Renov. London: Sage, 2008. 313-314).

In analytical and generative chapters – CHAPTERS 2, 3, 5 and 6 – I approach the subject matter largely from a formal perspective which tends to focus on the film as art and filmmakers as intentionally motivated creative agents. Warren Buckland succinctly illustrates depth and breadth of what he calls the "rich and variegated paradigm" that is formalism in Film Studies.[110] He summarily inventories just some of the key contributors and variations of the paradigm:

> In Film Studies, the formalist tradition covers everything from the Russian formalists (see Eagle, 1981) to Rudolf Arnheim's pioneering *Film as Art* (1957), Christian Metz's film semiotics (1974a; 1974b; Buckland 1999); Noël Burch's study of the film's formal principles (1981); Edward Branigan's description of point of view in narrative cinema (1984); Raymond Bellour's shot-by-shot analyses of film segments (2000); Barry Salt's statistical style analysis (1974; 1992; 2004); David Bordwell's film poetics (1981; 1988a; 1989: ch. 11; 1993; 1998; 2000); Kristin Thompson's neoformalism (1981; 1988); Noël Carroll's functional analysis of film form (1998); plus the productive tradition of *mise en scène* and auteur criticism (*Cahiers du cinema* [Hillier, 1985; hillier, 1986], *Movie* magazine [Cameron, 1972; Perkins, 1972], Andrew Sarris [1968]). Some researchers use formalist theory in a purely descriptive manner, constructing meticulously precise taxonomies; others, influenced by poetics, examine how film is put together; while formalist critics use their formal descriptions to evaluate film style.[111]

In his detailed list Buckland omits a further application of formalism – that of historical research applications. Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery enumerate various formalist approaches to aesthetic film history in their text on various historical approaches to film including: the masterpiece tradition (Mast, 1976), auteurism and authorship (Sarris, 1968; Wollen, 1972; Mast, 1981; Bordwell, 1981), neoformalism (Thompson, 1981), intertextual and genre analysis (Tudor, 1973), mode of production (Bordwell and Thompson, 1979; Staiger, 1979).[112] While there is an overlap in their formalist identification of approaches, Buckland and Allen and Gomery differ in terms of their

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[110] Ibid., "Formalist Tendencies in Film Studies" 312-327.

[111] Ibid., 312. Buckland briefly goes on to enumerate further formalist approaches outside Film Studies in both Art and Literary Studies.

[112] Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (Boston and New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985).

goals and objectives.[113] However, their convergence is that both include a component of criticism, which is central to my methodological framework; although I would argue that the term 'analysis' is more fitting than 'criticism'. Criticism tends to entail an evaluative component that weighs-in on the quality of something whereas analysis attempts to be more neutral in its assessments.

I draw heuristically on a number of formalist approaches and methods to assist my exploration of the grotesque and realist aesthetics of Clark's and Korine's oeuvre. My approach largely revolves around piecemeal adaptations of what Buckland broadly refers to as formalist descriptions of film style and, to a lesser extent, poetics. I also incorporate piecemeal adaptations of certain approaches within aesthetic film history and criticism that Allen and Gomery layout, including the masterpiece tradition, authorship, style analysis and intertextual analysis. However, it is vital to highlight that they are *adaptations* rather than *adoptions* of these methods, as I borrow from certain aspects while rejecting others. Below I outline my adaptation, a multipronged, sometimes synthesized, piecemeal formalist methodological framework that I use to navigate this thesis.

In CHAPTERS 2 and 3, I borrow from David Bordwell's approach for exploring the oeuvre of Carl-Theodor Dreyer in which he adapts and incorporates the Formalist literary theory of Boris Tomashevsky's concept of the "biographical legend", which he then recasts as an authorial legend.[114] The authorial legend provides an empirical basis for theoretically undergirding what John Caughie refers to as the "constantly shifting field of imagination and creativity, raising issues of art and authorship" in cinema that supplements and complicates more objective analyses of the film object.[115] This helps garner a richer understanding of the personal styles of Clark and Korine by enriching our understanding of their aesthetic visions, intentions,

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[113] Ibid., 4-5. Buckland is exploring formalism in film theory and criticism while Allen and Gomery are exploring formalism in film history and criticism. While these are not fixed boundaries, they do account for areas of emphasis in film research and scholarship.

[114] David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

[115] John Caughie, "Authors and Auteurs: The Uses of Theory" (*The Sage Handbook of Film Studies*. Eds. James Donald and Michael Renov. London: Sage, 2008. 420).

and motivations. The authorial legend also provides theoretical reinforcement of the ways in which the "verifiable signature" of a filmmaker is inscribed onto the film which are shaped by particular aesthetic strategies and devices, such as technical mannerisms and recurring thematic motifs, all of which contribute to the personal style of the filmmaker. The authorial legend also provides a framework for situating Clark and Korine within an aesthetic historical context of film. I extend the authorial legend to include the ways in which Clark and Korine claim to intertextually or allusory draw influence and inspiration, both directly and indirectly, from other filmmakers, film movements, art forms and culture. By doing this their visions and strategies are more clearly illustrated in the film analysis – CHAPTERS 5 and 6. Furthermore, an elucidation of the heritages from which Clark and Korine emanate provides a more enriched understanding of their respective grotesque and realist aesthetics.

While I subscribe to a director-centered, 'rational-agent model of creativity', as Bordwell puts it, I also acknowledge that such a subscription has its various shortfalls.[116] Firstly, there is the issue of discerning intent. Directors may mislead, equivocate, or outright lie. Indeed, Korine was notorious for playing with his interviewers if he was bored with them, and equally, Larry Clark would at times be conspicuously insistent in his claims that he did not play with notions of exploitation in his films. Also, intent may not dictate the final product—directors may 'intend to do something, but either fail in that intention or even go beyond their intended visions and motivations. As I use directors pronouncements as currency for analytical purposes in the 'authorial legends', revealing both what a director's actual intent may be and the importance of said intent is a difficult matter to address. However, I argue that the filmmakers and films that are the subject of this thesis, the role of filmmaker as a self-conscious, decision-making and problem-solving agent is important for fully appreciating their films. As independent filmmakers Clark and Korine have more autonomy in their creative choices and the control that they have in the production of their films.

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[116] Director-centered criticism and analysis is an alternative label for what is commonly referred to as auteur criticism and analysis or authorial criticism in the world of Film Studies. While the latter to terms have become more generic in recent times, I nevertheless prefer 'director-centered' for its lack of theoretical baggage.

Although they inevitably work under various restrictions that limit them in some way or another they are not dictated by the same restraints as mainstream studio filmmakers.

While the role of the film artist While the expressive intentions, motivations, and strategies are indicative of the 'constructional options' – stylistic and formal choices – that the filmmakers make, this is not the "sole source of the film's construction and effects."[117] Caughie, a longstanding proponent of the role of the author, remarks that "agency is fertile ground for thinking through the pragmatics of contemporary authorship".[118] Tomashevsky's concept of the biographical via Bordwell's adoption and recasting as 'authorial legend' provides a useful heuristic for empirically addressing the filmmaker's agency. However, Caughie is also insistent that while "our engagement with authorship – and the attendant issues of agency, authority, intention and creativity – is greatly enriched and complicated by an empirical understanding of its historical and contemporary conditions of existence", the role of film analysis "complicates" this by functioning as an analytical counterpoint for reinforcing, contrasting, or even contradicting the pronouncements of the filmmaker.[119] The formalist school of thought from which Tomashevsky came would concur with Caughie, and similar to the auteur critics of the 1960s and the auteur orientated ciné-structuralists of the 1970s, the legend of the filmmaker requires the same detailed object-centered film analysis in order to validate or falsify the aesthetic pronouncements of a filmmaker or to corroborate their signature within their work. I employ the same substantiating practices in my analysis of Clark's and Korine's films in CHAPTERS 5 and 6.

My piecemeal formalist methodology is even more varied in CHAPTERS 5 and 6. These chapters implicitly draw on authorial notions of intent and expressivity as well as what Buckland refers to as the "formal options available to artists, and the choices they make in constructing an individual artwork".[120] The choices that the

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[117] David Bordwell, "Historical Poetics of Cinema" (*The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*. Ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS Press, 1989: 382).
[118] Op. Cit., Caughie 420.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Op. Cit., "Formalist Tendencies in Film Studies" 314.

filmmaker makes – the techniques, devices, and materials available that they use – result in the negotiated style of the filmmaker. However, the emphasis of these chapters is on the concreteness of the film objects themselves. I attempt to strike a balance between a literal and conceptual analysis of Clark's and Korine's movies as film art. In the spirit of V.F. Perkins' eponymous book on film criticism, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (1972), I am "committed to finding a balance between equally insistent pulls, one towards credibility [realism] and the other towards shape and significance [expressionism]".[121] Like my argument regarding the presence of the grotesque and realism, I maintain that the two dynamics of 'credibility' and 'significance' are inextricably linked in the films of Clark and Korine. Like Noël Carroll, I focus my analyses on perceived unities rather than disunities. As Carroll highlights:

> In this, I do not imagine that my interpretations account for every detail of the films I discuss (I am talking about *relative* unity, not totalized unity), nor do I claim that there may not be (compatible) interpretations of the works that I examine. But I do operate with a presumption that the films I examine are relatively unified, whereas symptomatic criticism, I think, presupposes that works are necessarily, essentially disunified – rent with contradictions, often ideological contradictions, that are submerged in the work, but that can be detected "against the grain."[122]

Like Carroll, I focus on those elements and aspects of Cark's and Korine's films that are unified in establishing their realist and grotesque aesthetics respectively. In doing this, I propose that a more close descriptive approach to the films themselves would be more productive than the methods of textual analyses that are motivated by the disunity – absences and omissions – of films. This entails a shift in emphasis the majority of studies of Clark's and Korine's films which tend to be more sociologistic critical analysis of the representational content of the films. These approaches are more symptomatic critical analysis of the films' perceived ideological and political ramifications as opposed to the analysis of the films as art.

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[121] V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. 120).

[122] Noel Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 10).

Procedurally, the general framing methodology for my analysis chapters, and arguably my entire thesis, closely resemble that of aesthetic film history. Aesthetic film history primarily addresses film as art by engaging with the form, style, genre, directors, and movements in cinema.[123] Paraphrasing Gerald Mast's approach, Allen and Gomery identify one approach to aesthetic film history as involving "the identification, description, and interpretation of the masterpieces of filmic art."[124] The masterpiece tradition is often allied with, if not predicated upon, the notion that the work of film art is not only an "exemplum of formal properties" but is also the authorial "embodiment of artistic vision and expressivity" in which the exploration and analysis of individual films and oeuvres are considered to "reflect the genius of the person who made them.[125] Filmmakers of the masterpiece tradition are regarded as "masters" and their films as "masterpieces".[126] Consequently, the role of the historian according to this method is to examine and evaluate films according to some criteria of "aesthetic excellence or significance".[127] My framework is not so ambitious, nor is it as encompassing as Mast's more general masterpiece approach. I narrow my focus to two filmmakers who could be considered masters of a particular type of grotesque and realist filmmaking and whose films qualify as masterpieces of both cinematic realism and the cinematic grotesque.

My actual engagement with the films, the film analyses, derives from a synthesis of methodological approaches in art history, namely *descriptive criticism*, *interpretive criticism*, and *evaluative criticism* respectively. The foundations of which all derive from the practice of *ekphrasis*, a Greek word for description, and in studies of art "it refers to a description of a work of art that is undertaken as a rhetorical exercise" that "attempts to describe what the eye sees" in order to provide an illustrative and illuminative understanding of an artwork.[128] While some may argue that this is a redundant approach that is overly synoptic, art historians Martins and Jocobus adeptly

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[123] Op. Cit., Allen and Gomery 37 and Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1994, xl).
[124] Ibid., Allen and Gomery. They are citing Gerald Mast's essay, "Film History and Film Histories" (*Quarterly Review of Film Studies*. August 1976: 297-314.
[125] Ibid., 71.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 68. They are again paraphrasing Mast's approach and position here.
[128] Drew Davidson, "Ekphrastic Academia: Images, Sounds and Motions in Academic Discourse" (Available: http://waxebb.com/writings/ekphrasis.html. Retrieved: 14 March 2012).

redress this criticism:

> At first glance this kind of criticism may seem unnecessary. After all, the form is all there, completely given — all we have to do is observe. But most of us know all too well that we can spend time attending to a work we are very much interested in and yet not perceive all there is to perceive. We miss things, often times things that are right there for us to observe…Good descriptive critics call our attention to what we otherwise might miss in an artistic form. And even more important, they help us learn how to do their work when they are not around. We can, if we carefully attend to descriptive criticism, develop and enhance our own powers of observation.[129]

Thus the descriptive act also functions analytically in order to better appreciate and "understand the work of art described and possibly expanding on its meaning(s)."[130] Ekphrasis remains central to my own formalist approach to Clark's and Korine's films. It is my belief that a detailed re-presentation of the films will best illustrate and illuminate the grotesque and realist aesthetics that shape their expressive vision and audiovisual style.

Descriptive criticism and evaluative criticism are akin to the masterpiece tradition of aesthetic film history. Descriptive criticism exhaustively describes the aesthetic construction of an artwork in order to "improve our understanding of the part-to-part and part-to-whole interrelationships"; whereas evaluative criticism is the evaluation of an artwork on its merits in relation to its status as an exemplar of a particular period, style, movement, genre, or even noteworthiness as a work of original or individual creativity.[131] Echoing Carroll's distinction between 'relative' and 'totalized' unity, the aforementioned approaches highlight the "totality of any work of art" as a "continuum of parts".[132] There are smaller parts, or 'details' and larger parts, or 'regions'. Significant relationships are formed among the respective details or regions as

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[129] F. David Martin and Lee A. Jacobus, *The Humanities Through the Arts* (New York: McGraw Hill, 6th ed., 2004: 51).

[130] Drew Davidson, "Ekphrastic Academia: Images, Sounds and Motions in Academic Discourse" (Available: http://waxebb.com/writings/ekphrasis.html. Retrieved: XX February 2012).

[131] Op. Cit., Martin and Jacobus 51, 57.

[132] Ibid., 52.

well as in relation to the 'totality' of an entire work.[133] Interpretive criticism, on the other hand, "explicates the content of a work of art. It helps us understand how form transforms subject matter into content"[134] and how the subject matter and content is made intelligible through the particularity of a work's rendering technique and style.

These approaches are not anathema to Film Studies. Indeed they are approaches adopted by some of the earliest Film Studies academics.[135] These analytical approaches have been adapted and championed by Annette Michelson and P. Adams Sitney in the 1970s to explore and examine avant-garde and experimental cinema. Sometimes referred to as phenomenological criticism in Film Studies by some scholars[136], this approach takes a close 'bracketed' look, rearticulating the formalization of the audiovisual aesthetics that shape the subject matter and content of the films.[137] While my approach closely resembles phenomenological criticism, I prefer Noël Carroll's classification of this formally oriented approach to its art historical derivations, which he refers to as 'descriptive criticism':

> Some, claiming the authority of phenomenology, opted for what was briefly called descriptive criticism. This, as I remember it, was an exercise in describing films as closely as possible – especially in terms of their visual and aural articulations – in an effort to remain as true to moment-to-moment experience of film (bracketed as phenomenology) as one could in the medium of script.[138]

Carroll's classification highlights the procedural component of the analytical method

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 54.

[135] I am referring to institutionalized academic Film Studies when the field was burgeoning as a legitimate program of study in universities.

[136] Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-garde: History and Theories" (*Movies and Methods: Volume II*. Ed. Bill Nichols. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985:287-300).

[137] *Bracketing* is a phenomenological concept derived from Edmund Husserl in which each act of consciousness is a consciousness of something, that is, intentional, or directed toward something. Consider my visual experience wherein I see a tree across the square. In phenomenological reflection, we need not concern ourselves with whether the tree exists: my experience is of a tree whether or not such a tree exists. However, we do need to concern ourselves with *how* the object is meant or intended. I see a Eucalyptus tree, not a Yucca tree; I see that object as a Eucalyptus, with a certain shape, with bark stripping off, etc. Thus, bracketing the tree itself, we turn our attention to my experience of the tree, and specifically to the content or meaning in my experience. This tree-as-perceived Husserl calls the noema or noematic sense of the experience" (Available: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/. Retrieved: 14 March 2012).

[138] Op. Cit., *Interpreting the Moving Image* 4.

without the philosophical baggage and commitments that a truly phenomenological approach would entail with regards to notions of consciousness and experience.[139] Carroll's approach is similar to the Russian Formalist analytical objective of 'defamiliarization', "[d]escriptive criticism was a formalist adventure in seeing afresh."[140] Similar to Carroll's divergence from a purely descriptive approach, my formalist analyses of the films are not isolated to the internal devices of the film alone. Carroll notes:

> A descriptive account of motion picture form is rather like the fantastic map that Borges imagines which is of the exact scale of its referent, while contacting every one of its referent's details. Such a map is useless for guiding us through the territory since it is a mirror of the territory. For, if one cannot find one's way on the ground, then a perfect replica will be of no help. Likewise, the descriptive account of cinematic form is more like a of a motion picture's form than a guide to what is significant for understanding and appreciating the movie. And the reason for this is that it is not sufficiently selective.

> The descriptive account of cinematic form is inclusive and incorporative. It regards every way in which the elements of a motion picture relate to other elements as part of the form of the work. In this matter, it privileges no relations over others; it is – or would be – purely descriptive.[141]

To avoid such difficulties, I include the aspects of both interpretive and evaluative criticism to some extent, incorporating the expressive (authorial), representational (subject matter), and the conceptual (the grotesque and realism) features that are manifest throughout the films. Similar to Carroll's interpretive approach, my observations and analysis surrounding the expressivity and presence of the grotesque and realist aesthetics in Clark's and Korine's films are "organic or functional".[142] Likewise, my analysis of Clark's and Korine's films cohere with Carroll's conceptually led formalist approach in that it:

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[139] Ibid., 3-5. Carroll acknowledges that the approach championed by Michelson has been referred to by others as phenomenological film criticism, but that she has refuted that designation. Carroll's preference for descriptive film criticism fits better with his own adaptation of her approach and his own functional film analysis.

[140] Ibid., 5.

[141] Noël Carroll, "Style" (*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Eds. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2009. 274).

[142] Op. Cit. *Interpreting the Moving Image* 10.

> …will regard fewer of the relations between elements of the motion picture as belonging to the form or style of the movie, since usually not all of the possible relations between elements contribute to the realization of its point or purpose. Of course, if all of the relations contributed to the point or purpose, then the functional account will take note of them all. But this will be the exception rather than the rule, since such cases are genuinely extraordinary. Typically, only some of the relations in the movie will function to advance the purpose of the work, and it is upon these that functional analysis concentrates. Moreover, insofar as these relations are understood in terms of the functions being discharged, this sort of analysis does not merely describe the motion picture but explains why it is the way it is, thereby, augmenting our comprehension of the work at hand.[143]

Therefore, the various formalist orientated interpretive procedures that I employ do adopt the descriptive approach, but my approach is led by conceptual hypotheses surrounding the observed presence of the grotesque and realist aesthetics. These intentionally posited aesthetic tropes, which also function as conceptual frames of reference, shape the *relative* unity of Clark's and Korine's films. Thus, unlike the *totalistic* unity of all of the contributing elements that a more generic, deductive, purely descriptive approach employs, I discriminate between those qualities – scenes, elements, techniques, aspects – which unify the grotesque and realist aesthetics of Clark's and Korine's films and disregard those that are moot.

I, like Carroll, take the position that "an interpreter is not an archivist of audience responses but a co-creator of appreciation (along with filmmakers and their intended viewers)."[144] It is my contention that my 'close descriptive analysis' will establish the balance between the two dynamics that I seek: a balance between a literal and conceptual analysis of Clark's and Korine's films. My 'close descriptive analysis' of the formal and stylistic aesthetics of the films is guided by the prevailing aesthetic concepts of the grotesque and realism, which I argue typifies Clark's and Korine's films. This, I believe, will provide a more fruitful endeavor for illuminating and appreciating Clark's and Korine's creative motivations and grotesque and realist imaginations that are explored in CHAPTERS 2 and 3. It will also provide more fruitful for

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[143] Op. Cit., "Style" 276.
[144] Op. Cit., *Interpreting the Moving Image* 10.

examining the manifestations and presence of the grotesque and realist aesthetics in CHAPTERS 5 and 6.

A BRIEF NOTE ON GUIDING PERSPECTIVES AND ASSUMPTIONS

While various 'realist' orientated films have been regarded as grotesque from an evaluative critical standpoint in which the grotesque is used as a means to symptomatically redress the representations and content of certain films, realist films have not been explored and analyzed for engendering strategies of the grotesque from an aesthetic standpoint. Although there are points in which there is crossover between the concept of the grotesque as a means of critical evaluation and the grotesque as aesthetic concept, there is distinction in the emphasis. The point of emphasis largely rests on the way in which the imagery is aesthetically engaged and addressed. Is the imagery being aesthetically engaged as a symptom that is indicative of a prevailing politics in which the critic employs the grotesque as a critical concept adjectivally or adverbially in an attempt to redress some issue revolving around the politics of representation? Or, is it being aesthetically engaged from a more art historical standpoint in which the grotesque is regarded as a distinctive aesthetic category or tradition — a style, a form, a genre, a means, a mode — that intertextually shares a lineage and a past with other works of art and culture? While there are points in which these two approaches bleed into one another, the emphasis of this thesis is firmly entrenched with the latter of the two approaches.

This thesis approaches its subject matter largely from a formal perspective which tends to focus on the film as art and filmmakers as intentionally motivated creative agents. I draw heuristically on a number of formally orientated approaches, methods and theories to assist my exploration of the grotesque and realist aesthetics of Clark's and Korine's oeuvre. The assorted approaches that I employ to assist my exploration largely revolve around the various methods outlined in the previous subsection above.

Moreover, I accept the general view that the moving image remains more capable than other art forms to "render accurate, life-like representations of places, people, and objects: visible, everyday reality."[145] I also recognize, in some cases, like Bazin argued, that the art of the moving image not only sometimes depends on the "exploitation of the close connection" between the imagery and the referent, that is, which the image represents and depicts, it also exploits the power of the moving image to capture and reflect the social, cultural, and historical fidelity and verisimilitude of its subject matter audiovisually.[146] With that being said, the moving image is still a medium, an art, which is crafted – shaped, organized, structured, and manipulated – using tools and materials by filmmakers and technicians, which is conceived through their imagination and vision before being realized through their techniques and skills. Even the most sober and gritty realist has to utilize a proverbial palette in order to manipulate the conditions in such a way that their work adheres to aesthetic, cultural, and historical expectations of that mode and form of filmmaking. A realist film, while in some ways understated in its perceptible style, is achieved formally and is as stylized as a surrealist film, a psychedelic film, or a science-fiction or fantasy film. Thus, not only do I primarily approach the films being discussed and examined from a broadly formal perspective, I also engage the films with formativist assumptions.[147]

Moreover, while in the wider context of contemporary narrative filmmaking these films are unconventional and experimental, they did not emerge from an artistic or cultural vacuum. These films and filmmakers share an artistic, industrial, as well as a cultural past, and while the focus of this thesis are the films nominated above, I do adduce a number of other films from outside the designated time period from film history – primarily, but not entirely, from the contemporary or modern era in the wider sense of the term – that have influenced, inspired, or appear to share a tradition with the films that are the centerpieces of this research project.

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[145] Op. Cit., Allen and Gomery 68.

[146] Ibid., 68, 70.

[147] Ibid., 68-69. For an explanation and detailed discussion of 'formativism' see Dudley Andrew's, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1976. 11-103).

I approach the grotesque in films quite similarly to some of the predominant approaches to Surrealism in film with regards to what constitutes a Surrealist film rather than an otherwise non-Surrealist film that has surreal moments or inflections. The presence of the grotesque in cinema tends to be manifest in moments rather than across the majority, let alone the entirety, of a whole film. That is not to say that an entire film cannot be considered grotesque but such a consideration will be the consequence of the power of those moments, or even moment, of the grotesque rather than solely through a statistical ratio of grotesque to non-grotesque moments. Similarly, many of the film critics and historians whose locus of study is Surrealist film tend to agree that there are very few films that are wholly Surrealist, but that many films incorporate surrealist elements in otherwise realist films. Linda Williams attributes Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (France, 1929) and *L'Age d'Or* (France, 1930) as the centerpiece works of the Surrealist canon, yet observes a strong presence in the films of Erich von Stroheim, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Louis Feuillade, and Georges Méliès, whom Williams acknowledges as instantiating the "Surrealist essence of cinema".[148] In addition to the films of Buñuel, Thomas Sheehan also identifies the films of Jean Cocteau and Alain Resnais as Surrealist filmmakers proper. Similarly, although Sheehan falls just short of attributing the slapstick and farcical comedy films of Chaplin, Keaton, and the Marx Brothers as being surrealist, he does acknowledge that their films were of great influence and inspiration to the Surrealist filmmakers. In addition to this, Sheehan asserts that even aspects of films such as *The African Queen* (Huston, U.K., 1951) is imbued with "moments" of "pure surrealism" in the way that the films conveys the "comical-magical absurd" earnestly and without any sense of self-reflexive irony.[149] Whereas William Earle corroborates the films of Buñuel and Cocteau as representing the "perfect" Surrealist films, he also includes the films of Alain Resnais, René Clair, and Man Ray amongst the canon.[150] And like Williams and Sheehan, Earle observes that while the films of Keaton, Chaplin, and the Marx Brothers are themselves not Surrealist films per se, they are

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[148] Linda Williams, "The Critical Grasp: Buñuelian Cinema and Its Critics" (Ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli. *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987/1996. 200).

[149] William Earle, *Surrealism in Film: Beyond the Realist Sensibility* (New Brunswick: Precedent, 1987. 9, 65-76).

[150] Op. Cit., 65-76.

filmmakers much "beloved" by the Surrealists proper.[151]

While there is relative agreement as to the filmmakers and films that belong to the canon of Surrealist filmmakers amongst historians and critics, the pantheon of filmmakers and films that faithfully or expertly incorporate surrealist elements or principles are far more varied according to the same critics and historians. The grotesque in film is quite similar, albeit there is no established canon. However, if there were, I would venture to suggest that the canon would be even more infinitesimal than that of Surrealism. There are very few films that I would ascribe as being unequivocally 'grotesque films' or films that are almost entirely grotesque. Indeed the filmmaker and handful of films that has the strongest case for being argued as qualifying as such are a number of films from Jan Švankmajer's oeuvre such as *The Last Trick* (Czechoslovakia, 1964) and *Dimensions of Dialogue* (Czechoslovakia, 1982). Švankmajer integrates a variety of artisanal mediums including puppetry, stop motion animation, as well as conventional live action filmmaking. But arguably, while many of Švankmajer's films are exemplars of grotesque films, they are not solely grotesque insofar that they also incorporate other aesthetic styles and modes such as surrealism, satire, and the uncanny, quite often in equal measure.

What many films have are grotesque elements, pregnant moments which are undeniably grotesque situated amongst content and subject matter that would not otherwise be considered grotesque. Andrew Spicer's observations regarding the widely diffused and dispersed presence of surrealism, observed particularly in British cinema, is transferable here in relation to my own observations regarding the grotesque.[152] This tends to be manifested in one of two ways: either the presence of the grotesque in cinema is far more often than not a momentary and occasional quality or feature rather than a persistent or overarching one that dominates the content of a film, such is the case in the majority of gory horror films and gross-out comedies respectively; or the grotesque is a constant aspect of a broadly realist melodramatic

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[151] Ibid., 65.

[152] Andrew Spicer, "An Occasional Eccentricity: The Strange Course of Surrealism in British Cinema" (Eds. Graeme Harper and Rob Stone. *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007. 113).

film in which a severely deformed character which is entirely sympathetic struggle in their attempts to attain some sense of 'normality'. This includes films like *The Elephant Man* (Lynch, U.S.A., 1980) and *Mask* (Bogdanovich, U.S.A., 1985).

Michael Richardson similarly points out the way in which the pervasiveness of surrealism has resulted in filmmakers regularly eliciting "surrealist effects" by employing what Richardson just stops short of referring to as canned or cliché surrealist strategies.[153] Again, this also reflects the general status of the grotesque in film and the way in which it is aesthetically employed within narrative filmmaking. Intriguingly, Richardson elaborates another point regarding surrealism that has parallels with the grotesque, which relates to the tenuous, or "amorphous 'thing'" as Richardson puts it, that surrealism has become, which has eroded its status as an accurate or adequate descriptor, let alone as a distinctive category. He points out that the term is often "attributed by critics to certain films or directors" because of the convenience it serves in facilitating a particular line of analysis in which they want to follow.[154] The grotesque is no different in this sense. Whereas the grotesque has a dynamic and multifarious aesthetic history in both literature and the visual arts, it is also a concept that has come to be drafted in by critics for evaluative purposes. Most commonly, it is a term used to pejoratively describe something that elicits an extreme sense of abnormality, disgust, or moral approbation in the symptomatic critical analysis of representation that relates to some external social reality. In these cases the use of the grotesque does not always correspond to the objective status of the thing in question inasmuch as it does the politicized subjective inclinations of the critic's own tastes, judgments, and/or world view. This is something that will be addressed in more detail in my chronicling of the grotesque in cinema, which will be CHAPTER 4.

However, while the surreal or grotesque moments of a film may not dominate a film quantitatively, as with many films that have memorable surrealist passages or a multitude of surrealist moments in a prevailingly non-Surrealist film, they can

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[153] Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006. 72).
[154] Ibid., 72.

nevertheless become the most memorable, even *the* defining aspect of a film. Again, Richardson observes that, by extension, a prevailing sense of the surreal can be texturally integrated amidst other perceptible aesthetic elements so that its:

> …surrealist elements are striking precisely because they cannot be reduced to surrealism. One cannot say of it 'this is a surrealist film' because the surrealism is layered into it and inseparable from its overall impact, but represents a surrealism extended and contagiously present within something that is at the same time *other than surrealism*.[155]

Likewise, when the grotesque moments of an otherwise non-grotesque film are plentiful or emblematic of a film in a memorable way, the film will often qualify as a grotesque film in the same way that this occurs with films being ascribed as surrealist. Many films that have a prevailing sense of the grotesque are texturally integrated amidst other perceptible aesthetic elements and textures that invoke or refer to other styles, forms, or movements. For example, Alejandro Jodorowsky's psychedelic counterculture films – *El Topo* (Mexico, 1970) and *The Holy Mountain* (Mexico/U.S.A., 1973) – have a prevailing sense of grotesque and the surreal; John Waters' low-budget melodramas – *Pink Flamingos* (U.S.A., 1972), *Female Trouble* (U.S.A., 1974), and *Desperate Living* (U.S.A., 1977) – have a prevailing sense of camp and kitsch in conjunction with the grotesque; David Cronenberg's films portraying symbiosis or synthesis between organic and non- organic life forms – *Shivers* (Canada, 1975), *Rabid* (Canada, 1977), and *Videodrome* (Canada, 1983) – have a prevailing sense of the grotesque, the horrific, and the erotic; the slapstick gore of the early films of Sam Raimi – *The Evil Dead* (U.S.A., 1981) and *Evil Dead II* (U.S.A., 1987) – and Peter Jackson – *Bad Taste* (New Zealand, 1987), *Meet the Feebles* (New Zealand, 1990), and *Dead Alive* (New Zealand, 1992) – have a prevailing sense of the grotesque, the horrific, and the comic; while the films of Clark and Korine have a prevailing sense of the grotesque that is texturally situated in conjunction with a prevailing sense of realism.

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[155] Ibid., 53. Emphasis in the original.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The thesis is organized into four parts. The first part is a survey of literature of the conversations and debates thus far regarding Clark's and Korine's films as well as their creative visions, temperaments, and approaches. The second part addresses and explores the creative intentions and motivations of these filmmakers according to their own public pronouncements and declarations. The third part is a literature review which surveys the grotesque in film and the ways in which films have been discussed as grotesque. Finally, the fourth part of the thesis is a close descriptive analysis of select films by Clark and Korine which addresses the aesthetic manifestations of both the grotesque and realism from a broadly formal, stylistic, and thematic perspective.

The first part, CHAPTER 1, is a literature review that introduces the ways in which Clark's and Korine's films have been critically and historically discussed up to this point by others in the field. This chapter explores and addresses the issues and themes surrounding the conversations currently taking place with regards to the filmmakers and their films.

Within the second part, CHAPTERS 2 and 3 address Clark's and Korine's motivations and intentions respectively. While the likes of Monroe Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt have warned of the potential dangers in over-attributing the said intentions and motivations of an artist such as that articulated through the notion of the 'intentional fallacy',[156] other aesthetic philosophers and art theorists, such as the Russian Formalists, have supplied persuasive arguments regarding the merits of particular artist's aesthetic pronouncements regarding their intents, motivations, and influences as long as it is contrasted in relation to the work itself, objectively and independently of their proclamations and assertions. This is especially the case with artists who are self-conscious and reflective of their goals and objectives, techniques, and knowledgeable of traditions from which they emerge or are even

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[156] W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954. 3-18).

forcibly undermining.   Thus, following a brief disquisition of Boris Tomashevsky's theoretical concept of the "biographical legend", the first two chapters use his notion in connection with a number of interviews of Clark and Korine respectively in relation to their aesthetic vision. To my knowledge, this is the only comprehensive treatment of their aesthetic visions. This will establish a empirically falsifiable basis for exploring and examining the grotesque and realist imperatives of their creative visions and aesthetics, which I argue they demonstrate both implicitly and explicitly throughout the majority of their respective oeuvres. In doing this not only will I establish their creative and imaginative motivations and intentions but also trace their art historical lineage to other filmmakers, artists, writers, and cultural icons that they invoke as inspiring their own oeuvre. This will be followed by a summation in which I draw comparisons with Clark's and Korine's aesthetic temperaments and visions of the grotesque and realism with that of the Aestheticist and Decadent aesthetic visions and temperaments of the nineteenth century, using Murray Smith's essay on perverse allegiance and amoralism, where I link Clark's and Korine's grotesque aesthetics, with the same aesthetics of perversion that Smith links the Aestheticists and Decadents to.

Within the third part, CHAPTER 4 is a second survey of literature that reviews the way in which the grotesque has been critically and historically chronicled in film, which, to my knowledge, has not previously been compiled. In this chapter I explore the types of films – genres, cycles, movements, periods, styles – that have been attributed as exemplars of the cinematic grotesque or in which the concept of the grotesque has been conceptually extended to critically redress or describe certain films.

Finally, within the fourth part, CHAPTERS 5 and 6 principally focus on the objective formal, stylistic, and thematic characteristics and elements of Clark's and Korine's films, addressing how they are expressions of both the modern grotesque as well as being exemplary of a form of cinematic realism. Through a close descriptive analysis of various scenes in the selected films of Clark and Korine, the fifth chapter examines the ways in which the very corporeality of the bodies of the characters –

including their mannerisms, behaviors, psychological dispositions, and attitudes, all of which are embodied – and their physical environments are key in the manifestation of the filmmakers' prevailing grotesque aesthetic. Moreover, throughout, Clark's and Korine's formal and stylistic strategies are dissected to explain how they implement their grotesque aesthetic through the medium. The sixth chapter is an extension of the fifth. It addresses the way in which Clark's and Korine's films foster a nascent, latent violence that at some point erupts to the surface but without resolution. While this also deals with the body, the focus is on the way in which the impending sense of tension that is created by latent violence contributes to a grotesque atmosphere or mood. This chapter discusses the nature of the violence when it does erupt, claiming that it jolts, even when violence is expected, yet it provides no sense of relief or catharsis. Again, a detailed look is taken into how Clark's and Korine's highly realist strategies contribute to this aspect of their respective grotesque aesthetics.

PART I

THE GROTESQUE IS AT THE HEART OF CONTEMPORARY DEBATES AND INTEGRAL TO THE ARTS OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES, BUT IT IS CONSPICUOUS BY ITS ABSENCE IN MODERN ART-HISTORICAL AND AESTHETIC SCHOLARSHIP.

(CONNELLY, 2003: 6)

CHAPTER 1
LARRY CLARK, HARMONY KORINE, AND THEIR FILMS:
THE CONVERSATIONS AND DEBATES THUS FAR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the discourse and debates in Film Studies that shape the ways in which Clark's and Korine's films have been addressed to date. The thematically organized exegesis below will provide a clearer picture as to how their films have been critically and analytically discussed. It will also situate my research within existing debates, clarifying my position within these debates and explain how my own position on realism and the grotesque contribute to the conversation.

While not pervasively discussed in Film and Media Studies, Clark's and Korine's films have garnered intellectual attention from the outset of their releases. The majority of studies to date tend to revolve around the status of their films as alternative modes of filmmaking in comparison and contrast to mainstream (Hollywood) narrative filmmaking. Moreover, like studies of film and the grotesque, some scholars have focused on the aesthetics of their films and their movies as works of film art, whether in isolation as artistic achievements in their own right, or in relation to other films, forms of art, or culture. Others have focused their attentions on the themes and content represented in the film from a critical, often symptomatic, perspective.

Those who have focused on their films as art tend to highlight the narrative structure and/or visual style of their films. However, a handful of those studies address them in more broad film historical terms by either situating them amongst past traditions, movements, fellow filmmakers, or even as contributors to the teen screen subgenre. Those who adopt a critical perspective engaging with the politics of representation tend to question two main issues: the filmmakers' motivations and the material represented in the films on moral grounds; or how the realist style of the films conceals the perceived distortions of the subject matter that they convey. Below, beginning with discussions of Clark's and Korine's films as part of the teenpic or Teen Screen subgenre, I will review these discussions.

SUBGENRE CYCLE

Teen Screen or the teenpic has long been a subgenre of popular narrative filmmaking. It has spanned several genres – drama, comedy, horror, and science-fiction – and has been coupled with additional subgenre classifications – gross-out, exploitation, slasher, and invasion films. These various instantiations of the teenpic often exist simultaneously during the same era, such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, U.S.A., 1955), which is a melodramatic teenpic and *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Fowler, U.S.A., 1957), which is a horror teenpic from the same era; or *Porky's* (Clark, Canada/U.S.A., 1982), which is a gross-out comedy teenpic and *The Slumber Party Massacre* (Jones, U.S.A., 1982), which is a slasher horror teenpic from the same year, let alone the same era; or even the *American Pie* franchise (U.S.A., 1999-2003) which are modern updates of the gross-out comedy teenpics from the same era as Clark's and Korine's films. The teenpic subgenre provides an intriguing perspective on youth and youth culture in relation to adult society and also provides insights in relation to other aspects of popular culture, such as music, fashion, style, and even language.

Susan Hayward observes how the films of Larry Clark are exemplary of a cycle of 'teensploitation' films, which share a common ancestry with the juvenile

delinquency films of the 1950s, such as all of the *I Was a Teenage…* films.[1] These in turn also inevitably influenced, even if in a roundabout way, the teen screen fad of the 1980s, such as the John Hughes' classics, *Sixteen Candles* (U.S.A., 1984) and *The Breakfast Club* (U.S.A., 1985), which, by his account, is the fad that Clark purportedly reacted against through his films. All of which, however, emanate from the social problem films of the 1930s, like those directed by Mervyn LeRoy for Warner Brothers in the early 1930s, such as *Little Caesar* (U.S.A., 1931), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (U.S.A., 1932), and *Two Seconds* (U.S.A., 1932). While explicit for their time, these films do not approach the degree of graphicness that the films of Clark and Korine portray in their movies. Likewise, Felicity Colman includes Clark's films amongst a cycle of contemporary American teen films that she calls 'becoming-adolescent' films, which are films that represent the social development of childhood to adolescence through explicit depictions of their delinquent activities and behaviors.[2]

While Hayward and Coleman identify Clark and Korine teenpic filmmakers, they are not critical of their contributions to the genre. Dirk Dunbar, Stephen Tropiano, and Keith Gandal are more critical of Clark's contribution to the teenpic subgenre. In his exploration of countercultural heroes in Hollywood cinema since the 1950s, Dirk Dunbar highlights how youth culture constitutes counterculture, and that Larry Clark's films are representative of the modern instantiation of a nihilistic vision of youth and youth culture without a future.[3] The youth in *Kids* are countercultural but without any true impetus for social change in the generative or progressive sense in the way that past generations were represented. Stephen Tropiano similarly counts Clark's three films amongst the most controversial in his book chronicling the history of the Hollywood teen films. While Tropiano notes the highly realistic graphic portrayal of the underbelly of the teenage American experience, he also criticizes Clark for employing a primarily male perspective. While he acknowledges that the misogyny is a realistic reflection of the male characters in

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[1] Susan Hayward, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006. 111).

[2] Felicity Colman, "Hit Me Harder: The Transversality of Becoming-Adolescent" (*Women: A Cultural Review* 16.3: 2005, 356-371).

[3] Dirk Dunbar, "Hollywood's Transformed Hero: A Countercultural Journey" (*Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 6: Spring 2004, 23, 42).

Clark's films, he is nevertheless critical of the imbalance in the types of males and male perspectives being represented. Conversely, Tropiano critiques Clark's aesthetic approach for subordinating the narrative in favor of lingering shots of his young protagonists and antagonists. However, this, Tropiano avers, is a consequence of Clark's fascination with the carefree decadence of his characters, which supersedes all other interests, rather than being a symptom of an exploitative and voyeuristic gaze that many other critics have attributed to Clark's aesthetic vision and expressions.[4]

Possibly the most in-depth genre analysis of Clark's and Korine's films comes from Keith Gandal in his book exploring representations of class in modern film. Gandal examines both Clark's *Kids* and Korine's *Gummo* as a variety of "classploitation" narratives, which refer to stories that come from the imagination of the middle class and serve to satisfy their fantasies by primarily aiming to "titillate, mollify or terrify".[5] He classifies *Kids* and *Gummo* as a variety of classploitation narratives that he refers to as "class trauma films".[6] Whereas *Gummo* portrays the "social pathologies" of the rural poor, *Kids* portrays the pathological tendencies of urban youth culture.[7] Class trauma films set amongst the lower-classes are inversions of dramas that show the middle and upper classes 'slumming it'. Rather than the lower-classes penetrating the world of the middle and upper-classes, class trauma films show the impoverished and the underclass detestably preying on and humiliating each other in a world that is alien to the realities of the same middle class imaginations and fantasies that produce them; they are "immoral" worlds where nobody, not even the most innocent, is "immune to irreversible psychological damage".[8] They are "zones of degradation, where everyday, regular encounters and transactions are brutal…devoid of what the middle class calls humanity."[9] Films like *Kids* and *Gummo*, which constitute class trauma films, according to Gandal, are demonstrative of this.

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[4] Stephen Tropiano, *Rebels and Chicks: A History of the Hollywood Teen Movie* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2006. 271-274).
[5] Keith Gandal, *Class Representation in Modern Fiction and Film* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 6).
[6] Ibid., 6, 7.
[7] Ibid., 111.
[8] Ibid., 7.
[9] Ibid., 7, 96.

These films are characterized by what Gandal refers to as "traumatic humiliation" in which demeaning acts of degradation are at the forefront.[10] In *Kids*, the character Telly humiliates in the way that he sexually preys on young virgin girls that occupy the same social spaces that he does, defiling them and then degrading them by discarding and rejecting them.[11] Within the film, Jenny, on the other hand, is emblematic of the humiliated. She is the main focal point of Telly's victimization of his peers. She typifies victims in trauma films through her "solitude" and "isolation" and her "shame and despair" in being used and rejected.[12] Conversely, Gandal further notes that the traumatic humiliation portrayed in *Gummo* differs from that in *Kids* in that it shows the traumas of an entire community. That is not to say that victims and victimizers are not apparent on an individual level inasmuch as it is shown to be more diffusely endemic of the entirety of the social space in *Gummo*. This is punctuated by the framing context of the tornado that ravaged Xenia, which makes all of the occupants in *Gummo* victims of degradation to some extent.[13]

The demeaning acts of degradation also expose injustice stemming from the inequalities of power and strength between predator and victim. This is primarily portrayed in *Kids* in the way that Telly predatorily seduces younger teenage girls. This is enhanced in the way that his initial charm deteriorates into disregard when it comes to their cries of pain that they experience in being deflowered.[14] In *Gummo,* this is principally portrayed in the way that Tummler and Solomon are shown not only hunting cats to sell to the local Chinese restaurant, but brutalizing them during the hunt – repeatedly shooting them, drowning them, and whipping them while they dangle from a tree.[15] Motifs of degradation are punctuated in both of these films through imagery of the mentally and physically disabled inhabitants of these worlds. In *Kids*, there is a homeless beggar without legs, who repeatedly proclaims: "I have no legs" as he passes through the carriages of the New York subway panhandling for change. Gandal notes how, in another scene, Telly mentions to Casper that his cousin

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[10] Ibid., 102, 106.
[11] Ibid., 105-106.
[12] Ibid., 103.
[13] Ibid., 104.
[14] Ibid., 109-110.
[15] Ibid.

"gets-off" on fucking handicapped girls. In *Gummo*, Tummler and Solomon both pay to have sex with a mentally retarded girl who is prostituted by her brother. And in another scene an African-American "dwarf" is shown rejecting the advances of a drunken young adult on a sofa, who happens to be Harmony Korine making a cameo in his own film.[16] Gandal likens the demeaning impetus of the traumatic humiliation of class trauma films to an inverted revenge film. That is to say that in the class trauma film the strong and the guilty brutally victimize the weak and the innocent, but unlike the conventional revenge film, the class trauma film provides "no vindication, no reestablishment of justice, no hero to root for, no deserved punishment, no healing of wounds, and an even more indiscriminant vengeance" than that carried out in a revenge film.[17]

In the concluding section of Gandal's examination of class trauma films, he asserts that:

> *Gummo* seemingly incoherent at first, is actually governed by a logic of abjection. The film is little more than a string of grotesque if sometimes comical images of rejected things and objects…most of these are images of the socially rejected rejecting something else…or at least of a superabundance of rejected objects and beings. *Gummo*, of course, is a sensationalist film, and perhaps most of all it inspires repulsion and even nausea.[18]

Situated amongst these claims, Gandal provides a string of brief descriptions of some of the scenes that corroborate his observations. This summative explication is packed rather tightly with notions that I believe deserves further elucidation and will be explored throughout this thesis. Gandal first remarks on what appears to be a lack of a unifying structure to *Gummo*, in other words, a lack of form. But he redresses this by revising his initial hypothesis, which seems to be implicitly based on a narrative model, by conceptualizing the film according to a more abstract formal organizing principle unified by its thematic logic, a logic that Gandal attributes to the abhorrent and vile physical and behavioral characteristics of the inhabitants of *Gummo*'s Xenia, and it is this recurrent barrage of such imagery that elicits a sense of

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[16] Ibid., 1178-118.
[17] Ibid., 116.
[18] Ibid., 119.

disgust. At this point, Gandal and I agree on the basic defining characteristics that aesthetically shape *Gummo*. The points in which we diverge are twofold, and they are, in my opinion, two points that vastly differentiate how the film is regarded as a work of grotesque film art, as well as how it is perceived as an exemplar of film realism. His flippant referral to *Gummo* as grotesque in the pejorative use of the term, oddly combined with the enumeration of scenes that follow seems a flagrant disregard of the grotesque aesthetic tradition in which *Gummo* is actively situated. That is to say, Gandal seems to underestimate the presence and status of the grotesque as a prevailing aesthetic motivation and category, instead using it as an evaluative concept to address the politics of representation alone. Likewise, by attributing the film as sensationalist is to similarly disregard the realist aesthetics in which his grotesque aesthetic is framed. Not only does it undermine the subject matter and content of the film, but also the realist approach that he actively employs which resembles as a home movie or photo collage that Korine uses to formally organize the film. The aesthetic motivations of the filmmakers and their films will be explored further in the chapters to follow.

Although I do not explore Clark's and Korine's films as subgenres or cycles of the teensploitation film per se, like Hayward and Colman I do explore the motifs more so than the themes of adolescence and juvenile delinquency that pervade their films. And like Dunbar, while he similarly attributes their films as a nihilistic vision of youth and youth culture, I provide a contrary view by firstly employing the refutations of the filmmakers and supporting their views that, while claims of nihilism may initially seem apt, it is oversimplified. Both filmmakers engage with nihilism, but they are not nihilistic filmmakers, and it is Clark's and Korine's films grittily realist depictions of various factions of the underbelly of different youth cultures and all that they entail that results in the filmmakers as being erroneously attributed as having nihilistic visions. They are not that judgmental of their subjects. Indeed, in the chapters to follow, I argue that is what partially contributes to their realist grotesque aesthetic. Likewise, similar to Tropiano, I have my doubts about the full spectrum of the intentions and motivations of Larry Clark. I fully concur with his observation that one of Clark's preoccupations is the

decadence of his adolescent characters, and his extended and often contemplative gaze of graphically nude and sexually engaged adolescent bodies sometimes borders on the exploitative, I find his attempts at framing his position from a position of gender conflict and patriarchy as reductive. Contrary to Keith Gandal's exploration of Clark's and Korine's films as exemplars of classploitation rather than teensploitation, I instead approach those areas that he identifies as the sources of class trauma as being the very areas in which the verisimilitude of their gritty realism intersects with the grotesque. So while I am not in disagreement with Gandal's observations and analysis, my approach is more focused on the ways in which the aesthetics that he discusses are secured and locating the art historical traditions in which the films are situated rather than symptomatically interrogating the consequences of the filmic representations from a point of conflict.

COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND ANALYSIS

Other film scholars more broadly situate Clark's and Korine's films within the continuum of various traditions, movements, and amongst auteurs throughout film history. Additionally, they situate them with or relate them to other art forms, artists, literary works, authors, and cultural practices. Broadly, this comparative approach to film history and criticism explores the ways in which Clark's and Korine's films stylistically, formally, and/or thematically differ, negotiate, or merely imitate past films, filmmakers, or other art forms that have implicitly or explicitly influenced Clark's and Korine's films.

Although much of what J.J. Murphy addresses in his broad descriptive analysis of *Gummo* mirrors what Korine has himself repeatedly said in interviews and other public pronouncements, Murphy nevertheless provides some valuable insights in his cursory exploration of the visual, thematic, formal and stylistic qualities of *Gummo*, as well as Korine's creative influences and motivations. Murphy summarily argues:

> Korine seems to relish life's stream of absurdities – its contradictions, unpredictability, and strangeness. He's fascinated by the anomaly rather

than the norm. He wants the meaning of images to remain open and fluid, rather than fixed, which is why he favors collage over traditional plot…the film explores the various forms of 'difference' as its theme. In showing lower-class poverty – the endless clutter, filth, and bugs – Korine clearly shows that this…has spawned the intolerance, hatred, racism, criminality, suicidal despair, animal cruelty, and the kind of inbreeding that would account for many of the physical disfigurements and mental problems in the film…Not since Bunuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950) and Babenco's *Pixote* (1981) has a film managed to capture the truly mindboggling incongruities of such a milieu.[19]

And while he acknowledges Korine's indebtedness to European art cinema, he situates him amongst the continuum of American avant-garde filmmaking, linking him to the lyrical-poetic filmmaking of Maya Deren and Ron Rice, the beat poet turned filmmaker Christopher Maclaine, and the plotless narratives of Jonas Mekas and David Brooks.[20]

Comparably, Robert Sklar's essay on Harmony Korine is an attempt to locate his place amongst the history of film auteurs, traditions, and movements while acknowledging his work as specific to his own historical context amongst American independent cinema of the 1990s.[21] Sklar believes that Korine's maverick auteur status is largely down to his own "publicity apparatus", which, as we will see in the authorial legends chapters, links him to the work of filmmakers ranging from Cassavetes, Fellini, and Herzog and the photography of Diane Arbus.[22] However, Sklar postulates that Korine's aesthetic differs from those whom he has been affiliated with due to his "affinities with experimental and avant-garde filmmaking", namely the way in which he deviates from the more conventional narrative filmmaking practices.[23]

Likewise, in his anthologized essay, "What Is the Neo-Underground and What

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[19] J.J. Murphy, "Harmony Korine's *Gummo*: The Compliments of Getting Stuck with a Fork" (*Film Studies* 5: Winter 2004, 104-105).

[20] Ibid., 94.

[21] Robert Sklar, "The Case of Harmony Korine" (*The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*. Ed. Jon Lewis. New York and London: New York University Press, 2001. 261-268).

[22] Ibid., 264.

[23] Ibid.

Isn't: A First Consideration of Harmony Korine"[24], and then in a revisited version, "What Was the Neo-Underground and What Wasn't: A First Reconsideration of Harmony Korine"[25], Benjamin Halligan postulates that Harmony Korine's films are at the epicenter of what he calls the Neo-Underground. It has a revivalist "impulse" resonant with the American Underground filmmaking of the 1960s and 1970s, namely the more conventionally orientated narrative films of Paul Morrissey.[26] However, Halligan contends that Korine's films are not descendants of the American Underground alone, and like many others, Halligan's starting point is the realist impulses and aesthetics of Neo-Underground films, what he refers to as the "neo-realist nuance" of Korine's films, which he locates as emerging from the Italian neorealist tradition.[27]

Italian neorealism does share similarities with the American Underground in that some of these films, especially Morrissey's films, are themselves aesthetically indebted to Italian Neorealism (as well as other subsequent movements and traditions of European Art Cinema), namely in the use of location shooting in public places, the use of non-professional actors, and the use of natural lighting and handheld camerawork. Halligan even aligns the picaresque characters wandering the dilapidated and decaying landscapes in *Gummo*, which he aptly describes as a "vision of rural squalor…a refuse-scape" of "nowhere-ness", as sharing an affinity with the street-savvy youth in the postwar devastated landscape of *Germany Year Zero* (Rossellini, Italy, 1948). Morrissey's underground films also share similarities with the type of subject matter that Italian neorealism tended to engage. Both revolve around the banal and mundane tribulations of the underclasses as they interact with their environments and endure the conditions in which they exist. However, unlike Italian neorealist films, the films of the American Underground tended to deal with the seedy underbelly of the American landscape, and it is in this sense that Halligan

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[24] Benjamin Halligan, "What Is the Neo-Underground and What Isn't: A First Consideration of Harmony Korine" (*Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*. Ed. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider. London: Wallflower Press, 2002. 150-160).

[25] Benjamin Halligan, "What Was the Neo-Underground and What Wasn't: A First Reconsideration of Harmony Korine" (*New Punk Cinema*. Ed. Nicholas Rombes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. 180-192).

[26] Ibid., 182, 188.

[27] Ibid., 187, 189, 191.

attributes Korine's films as being descended from the American Underground tradition. He suggests that the characters in Korine's films, especially those in *Gummo*, parallel the "behavioral traits" and the "grimy oppressiveness" of Morrissey's trilogy of films – *Flesh* (U.S.A., 1968), *Trash* (U.S.A., 1970), and *Heat* (U.S.A., 1972) – depicting the underbelly of New York counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[28]

While Korine employs a number of techniques and has a visual style that can be seen in Italian neorealist and American Underground films, his use of these techniques is "stylistically timeless", according to Halligan.[29] In the end, Halligan suggests that while Korine's films are undoubtedly influenced by films and filmmakers from both European art cinema and the American Underground, he insists that it is something else. He suggests that Korine's films are "beyond any familiar 'art-house' or underground category."[30] Although Korine incorporates stylistic techniques and a visual style that is at least fragmentarily reminiscent of neorealist and Morrissey's underground films, Halligan argues that the various textures of his multimedia approach and its effect on the visual style constantly resists Korine's "neo-realist/ethnographic" approach which results in a vacillation between modernist and classical filmmaking.[31]

Korine fosters his "jigsaw", or collage, approach through his incorporation of a variety of visual mediums with various textures. This is organized rhythmically into "beats", according to Halligan[32], which correspond with Korine's own pronouncements that music is a key motivation in his filmic organization. The way that Korine juxtaposes disparate imagery, often using various stocks and recording devices, accompanied with some kind of popular or underground music – be it the pop music of Madonna, the thrash metal of Slayer, the Black Metal of Burzum, or the ambient techno-noise of

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[28] Ibid., 188.
[29] Ibid., 187.
[30] Ibid., 184.
[31] Ibid., 186
[32] Ibid., 189-190.

Oval – further crystallizes this aspect of his aesthetic.[33]

This quality of rhythmic collage, especially in *Gummo*, is also addressed by Robert Sklar, who interestingly links Korine's aesthetic strategies with Kenneth Anger, another American Underground filmmaker who juxtaposes imagery, which is often disparate, sometimes ironically, with popular music or ambient sounds.[34] While this strategy contravenes the strict textural continuity of more conventional realist filmmaking traditions, Korine's films nevertheless remain part of the same realist continuum if the verité and direct cinema style is regarded as a bridge between his multimedia home- video collage approach to visual style, and the Italian neorealist and American Underground heritage that Halligan links Korine's oeuvre to. Halligan, even indirectly acknowledges this when he describes Korine's aesthetic as incorporating not only techniques and devices typically affiliated with European art cinema and abstract experimental modes of video and filmmaking, but also recognizes Korine's adoption of verité documentary aesthetics as well as low-budget televisual aesthetics.

Indeed Halligan, possibly inadvertently, attributes Korine's aesthetic to non-fictional forms of television programming, stating that *Gummo* is a reverse spinoff, a movie as a spinoff of lowbrow television, namely the tabloid talkshow, rather than the more common convention of a T.V. show being a spinoff of a movie.[35] Yet this reverse spinoff quality relates to Halligan's contention that Korine's films detract from the neorealist ethos. In addition, but unrelatedly to its visual dynamics, according to Halligan, Korine rejects the humanism of neorealist films in favor of a more nihilistic expression of the "wretched underbelly of American life" and "lionises the marginal along with the disregarded icons of the late twentieth-century culture, reinventing them into an ironic form of poetic realism (finding meaning in the meaningless), vastly at odds with his neo-realist elements."[36] Perhaps, as Halligan

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[33] Adrian Gargett also regards Korine's multimedia, collage approach as fostering a rapid rhythmic tempo that resembles the pulsation of drum 'n' bass ("The Future of Cinema: Harmony Korine". *The Film Journal* 3: 2002. Available: http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue3/harmonykorine.html. Retrieved: 13 August 2007).

[34] Op. Cit., Sklar 264.

[35] Op. Cit. "What Was the Neo-Underground and What Wasn't: A First Reconsideration of Harmony Korine" 187, 183.

[36] Ibid., 184.

notes himself, the fact that some of the characters in *Gummo* were scouted from a tabloid talkshow, a modern day freakshow, is testament to this.[37]

Noting another divergence from the American Underground, Halligan contends that the characters in Korine's films "drift" without purpose, in contrast to Morrissey's films who follow a "code of behavior" in their countercultural, hedonistic exploits.[38] Halligan holds that this divergence is sufficient to divorce Korine's films from both Italian neorealism and Morrissey's films. Yet, for him to draw the sharp distinction that he does is to disregard key qualities that Korine shares with them, such as the ways in which Morrissey's characters similarly drift from one encounter to another as well as the notion that Korine's characters are without behavioral codes. Moreover, for him to assert that Korine's films are beyond those movements and traditions with which Halligan has made comparisons is far too transcendental. While there are apparent differences that signal a modified variation, to suggest that the films progress or abandon what those traditions have ultimately contributed to Korine's aesthetic is an overstatement.

Conversely, Jay McRoy has published two essays on the films of Clark and Korine, one of which was co-authored with Guy Crucianelli, which highlight the strong influences of Italian Neo-Realists. In one, which features in an anthology exploring what the editor refers to as "New Punk Cinema", McRoy addresses the punk ethos of Clark's *Ken Park* and Korine's *Gummo*.[39] McRoy uses Italian Neorealism as the context to discuss these films and filmmakers.[40] He also acknowledges the influence of Godard and other filmmakers from the European New Wave as well as more avant-garde filmmakers of the 1960s.[41] In later years, techniques typified by a low-budget "'do-it- yourself' aesthetic" often affiliated with the punk ethos, adopted some of the aesthetic strategies innovated by Italian Neo-

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[37] Ibid., 183.
[38] Ibid., 188.
[39] *New Punk Cinema* (Ed. Nicholas Rombes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
[40] Jay McRoy, "Italian Neo-Realist Influences" (*New Punk Cinema* Ed. Nicholas Rombes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. 39-55).
[41] Ibid., 39.

Realism, such as location shooting, amateur and non-professional actors, a more accurate portrayal of how people interact, and limited, if any artificial lighting.[42] McRoy postulates that *Gummo* and *Ken Park* are both "works of new punk cinema that at once draw upon and subvert the fertile tensions between realist 'fact' and creative fiction…whose powerful visions…build upon filmic conceits that can be traced back to the Italian neo-realist movement" in order to authentically depict "the daily lives of disaffected and alienated American teenagers" and the "social conditions that continue to plague suburban youth".[43]

In her review of *Gummo*, Felicia Feaster also highlights the importance of authenticity as she decisively relates Korine's vision of Xenia as something that is reminiscent of artists in the world of photography and literature rather than cinema. She suggests that *Gummo* shares in the "nasty truthfulness" of the esoteric documentary visions of Richard Billingham, Jim Goldberg, Nan Goldin, Diane Arbus, and Larry Clark and a romantically inverted version of *Huckleberry Finn* in which the "verdant, unencumbered child's paradise…has lapsed into an un-romantic parental abandonment of children to Satanic cults and junkyards and sexual abuse", reminiscent of the child murderers of *Paradise Lost*.[44] Feaster's descriptive analysis of *Gummo* is extremely succinct and well-articulated:

> Korine uniquely envisions the ugliness and pain of a subculture of abandoned kids; skinheads, deviants, perverts, sluts, victims all, with sickening accuracy and a sympathetic delicacy…*Gummo*'s is a world de-populated of grown-ups. Their very absence is attested to in the blank generation they have spawned. Hanging out on concrete slab front porches, shooting cats full of BBs, sniffing glue, sustaining themselves with meals of corndogs and milk-shakes, *Gummo*'s monstrous, tragic children play in the shade of their diseased family trees. Having fun, get- ting high, wasting time, their rage and desperation to express or get affection comes out warped into sadism or self-abuse, their pleasures greedily horded [*sic.*] with animalistic intensity… With no standards to measure sociopathy next to – where

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[42] Ibid., 39-43. He also acknowledges that prior to the work of Clark and Korine, the even less commercially prominent work of a collection of American filmmakers who made, what they referred to as Cinema of Transgression, and included filmmakers such as Nick Zedd, Beth B, and Richard Kern implemented the aesthetic techniques innovated by Italian Neorealism.

[43] Ibid., 39-40.

[44] Felicia Feaster, "*Gummo*" (*Film Quarterly* 52.2: Winter 1998-1999, 41).

> adults are drunkards, rapists, pornographers, jailbirds, mad – these kids become, by process of elimination, the prophets and heroes…*Gummo* offers a poisoned glimpse of the Apocalypse, of a world where a decayed moral center allows incest, violence, self-abuse and neglect to flourish. The essence of this psychological deterioration is reflected in the clutter of these characters' homes and their yards where objects are horded [*sic.*] into piles of filthy debris, and children are thrown away…[45]

While she notes his commitment to experimentation, it is his commitment to verisimilitude and realism that she initially engages with when she describes *Gummo* as a "toxic swamp of such lacerating truth".[46] Feaster even refers to the psychological traumas and dispositions of the film's inhabitants as "grotesque" in passing description. However, while she does not explicitly use the term 'grotesque' to conceptually encapsulate the landscape and milieu of *Gummo*, her prose all but classifies Korine's vision of Xenia, Ohio as being representative of grotesque art. In consideration to the artists and traditions to which she compares *Gummo*, it would seem fair to suggest that *Gummo* is specifically representative of an American tradition of realist and grotesque art. She observes the various visual techniques that Korine employs, particularly the usage of found footage and documentary style, and acknowledges how his formal organization of a series of juxtaposed semi-autonomous episodic vignettes structure his multi-strand narrative. The result is what Feaster describes as "a unique strategy for conveying the disorienting, centerless amorality of the world" that Korine documents.[47] This reaffirms Korine's collage and photo-album approach and motivations that he describes in interviews, something that will be discussed in CHAPTER 3.

While Feaster interprets Korine's aesthetic as a modern expression of the picaresque narrative, Steven core thesis explores the ways in which Andrei Tarkovsky's film, *Solaris* (U.S.S.R., 1972), has provided an impetus for a great many contemporary independent American films. Dillion refers to this influence as the "Solaris Effect" (also the title of his book), which refers to the ways in which Tarkovsky's film, *Solaris*, has

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[45] Ibid., 41, 43.

[46] Ibid., 41, 42, 43.

[47] Ibid., 42.

aesthetically influenced and typified a certain tendency in contemporary independent American filmmaking in its combination of expressionism and naturalism.[48] He includes Clark's and Korine's films, and specifically identifies the ways in which their films vacillate between artifice and realism, an aesthetic strategy that Tarkovsky employed not only in *Solaris*, but a great number of his other films as well, including *The Mirror* (U.S.S.R., 1975) and *Stalker* (U.S.S.R./Germany, 1979).

Although Dillon identifies these specific traits with both filmmakers, he pays more attention to what he perceives as the greater aesthetic sophistication of Korine. According to Dillon, while *Kids* has the stylistic pretense of contravening the Hollywood mode of filmmaking based on its verité aesthetic, it ultimately, almost surreptitiously, embraces the Hollywood paradigm by adopting a classical narrative structure. Moreover, unlike other filmmakers and films influenced by Tarkovsky, from which he draws comparisons to *Kids*, such as Cassavetes' *Shadows* and Derek Jarman's *Last of England* (U.K., 1987), Dillon regards Clark's film as a cartoonish simplification of teenage youth culture which stylistically poses as transparent and 'real' while it reinforces the very artifice that Clark himself purports that it subverts.[49]

Korine, on the other hand, is a different story according to Dillon. Both *Gummo* and *julien* reflexively call attention to the artifice and process of their creation, highlighting a constant tension between impressionism and formalism, on the one hand, and documentation and realism on the other. He likens Korine to Jarman, especially for his incorporation of videotape, while also drawing similar creative comparisons to Herzog, Cassavetes, Fellini, Godard, and the Maysles. Dillon argues that while Korine's films are unmistakably 'American' in terms of their subject matter and content, unlike *Kids*, both *Gummo* and *julien* are distinctly European in their formal design.[50] Whereas, according to Dillon, Clark seems to believe that he is replacing artifice with unmediated reality, Korine realizes that the Hollywood artifice is replaced

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[48] Steve Dillon, *The Solaris Effect: Art & Artifice in Contemporary American Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

[49] Ibid., 176-179.

[50] Michael Allen also cites the European New Wave filmmakers that Korine himself has mentioned as being influential on his film career amongst his discussion of the more general influences that foreign cinemas has on contemporary American cinema since the 1960s (*Contemporary U.S. Cinema*. Harlow: Pearson, 2003. 69).

by another artifice regardless of its enhancement or divergence from verisimilitude.[51] Regardless of the artifice of style and form of all three films, the nature of the subject matter and content in conjunction with the stylistic pretenses and formal design of the films promulgates an impression of realism – *Kids* through its verité documentary style, and *Gummo* and *julien* through their composite, degraded videotape and home movie approach – all of which enhances the grotesqueness of the films' subject matter and content.

As noted above, Michael Allen also transitorily mentions the various aesthetic influences on contemporary U.S. cinema. As well as the European New Wave, he attributes the aesthetic strategies of Direct Cinema and the fly-on-the-wall techniques that it employs as influencing not only the verité, documentary visual style of both Clark's and Korine's films, but also the strange, unusual, and often ignored and disregarded facets of society that Direct Cinema tends to focus.[52] The shared formal and aesthetic strategies – the stylistic and formal poetics and thematics – of various past movements and traditions – European Art Cinema, American Underground Film, Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité – that shape Clark's and Korine's filmic compositions and expressions form the nexus of the following section.

My research parallels those in this subsection more than any other. Like the scholars in this subsection, I too draw links between Korine's aesthetic with that of other filmmakers, artists, and writers and their engagement with the social underbelly. Also, like them, I make connections between Korine's adaptive mixing of filmmaking traditions, modes, and practices such as the experimental filmmaking of the American Underground; European Art Cinema, especially Italian Neorealism; as well as various documentary modes such as Direct Cinema and Cinéma Verité, all while maintaining certain conventional narrative devices. Their work is a definite springboard from which I proceed, I extrapolate and elaborate upon their scholarship, especially their observations regarding the environment and milieu of Clark's and Korine's films, by zooming-in and focusing on how the knowledge that

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[51] Ibid., 179-181.

[52] Michael Allen, *Contemporary U.S. Cinema* (Harlow: Pearson, 2003. 164-165).

they bring to light would be even better illuminated if viewed through the aesthetic frames of the grotesque and realism.

While Halligan notes the stylistic tendencies of *Gummo* as resisting what amounts to being a realist film due to its fragmented experimental structure, I argue that this structure coheres with his collage approach and reinforces rather than contravenes his realist aesthetic. Similarly, whereas Sklar locates *Gummo*'s associational juxtaposition of sound and image with the experimental tendencies of the American Underground, which in itself I do not refute, I argue that the function differs based on Korine's inclination towards collage and using film as a photo album, with a photo album being an object of concrete documentation rather than abstraction. Likewise, Dillon discusses the ways in which their films vacillate between artifice and realism. And like Halligan and Sklar, he regards the tension between artifice and realism as mutually exclusive. Whereas, being a formativist, I regard even the most stoical and gritty realist films as being indicative of formal and stylistic strategies and devices. In other words, realism, just as the most ornate and baroque films are also a product of artifice to me. Specifically discussing the films of Korine, Dillon argues that the shift in media, such as from film to video, draws attention to the artifice of Korine's films, something with which I agree. However, unlike Dillon, I argue that this coheres with Korine's photo collage approach and reinforces his particular realist style, a style associated with cinematic and televisual modes of audiovisual production.

McRoy, on the other hand, attributes the films of Clark and Korine with a 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic, a notion that I explore throughout my thesis as well through my regular highlighting of the filmmakers' use of technologies and techniques commonly affiliated with home movies. But whereas McRoy identifies this as being indicative of the filmmakers' punk ethos, an ethos in American cinema that has become emblematized by Nick Zedd and the Cinema of Transgression, I attribute this to their realist imperative. The low-budget techniques employed by the filmmakers contribute to the realist style that enhances not just the verisimilitude, but the verisimilitude of the grotesque elements of the films; elements, like virtually all the

scholars who have engaged in research of Cark's and Korine's films, that revolves around the underbelly of American adolescence and the environments in which they occupy and inhabit.

The closest approximation of how I approach the films and filmmaking of Clark and Korine would be the close analyses of Murphy and Feaster. My general approach and for addressing the expressivity, theme, and style of both Clark's and Korine's films and the heritages from which they draw inspiration, influence, and are historically comparative to in mirrors Murphy's formalist analysis of *Gummo*, including the films and filmmakers that Murphy links Korine to. However, whereas Murphy's approach is relatively nondescript in terms of the analytical framework guiding his analysis, my analyses are guided by my argument that Clark's and Korine's films are indicative of both realist and grotesque aesthetics. Similarly, not only do my observations mirror that of Feaster's analysis of *Gummo* as well, but her analytical, which is similar to Murphy's, in its descriptive analysis of themes, motifs, and style quite closely mirror my own. Indeed she even commentates on the realist predilections of the film even referring to the characters that inhabit the diegesis as grotesque. This thesis in many ways is an extrapolation in depth and breadth of Feaster's close analysis of *Gummo* to include *julien* as well as Clark's films. I even employ a similar formalist approach for analyzing the films. However, I emphasize the centrality of realism and the grotesque and the formative roles that they play regarding the formal and stylistic logic and expressive vision than she does.

POETICS OF STYLE AND FORM: AESTHETIC STRATEGIES, TECHNIQUES, DEVICES

To some degree an extension of the above subsection, the film scholars in this subsection also sometimes draw comparatively on past film traditions, movements, and auteurs. However, while they also sometimes make analogies to other forms of art and culture, they tend to be narrow in their comparative focus and use those comparisons as a springboard for more in-depth analyses of the poetics of film art (i.e. aesthetic strategies of style, form, and the techniques, and devices employed)

rather than making broader historical connections and employing comparative critical approaches. This subsection emphasizes the ways in which the medium, or more accurately mediums, and uses thereof, facilitate particular aesthetic orientations which are associated with certain aesthetic, cognitive, and even emotional preconceptions and expectations regarding the mode of representation that their aesthetic strategies motivate (i.e. fiction, documentary, abstract, narrative, non-narrative filmmaking).

The conscious employment of various moving image media differentially highlights qualities – textures and preconceived expectations – that are more salient, or even seemingly specific to one moving image medium over others, let alone one mode of representation over others. During a metacritical exploration of Noël Carroll's *medium eliminativism*, Murray Smith posits that the idea of medium specificity is ultimately a non-sequitur.[53] Examining Carroll's anti-specificity postulation, Smith draws upon *Gummo*, amongst others, which highlight the various perceptual and aesthetic differences between moving image media. Through conscious engagement with various audiovisual media, Smith notes how *Gummo* "intercuts a whole variety of moving image media, ranging from 35mm film stock to low-grade video, playing the different media and their associations off each other, and varying its visual texture in a 'painterly' fashion."[54] Carroll takes an intentionalist rather than a conventionalist orientated approach to the formal and stylistic strategies of Korine's filmmaking tendencies, arguing that his negotiation of realism through experimentalism is not inherent to the various mediums that he uses to craft his movie, but is instead the consequence of the sum of his formal and stylistic strategies.

Adrian Gargett classifies Korine's approach to realism as verging on "social anthropology" both stylistically – his handheld documentary style and use of lower grade video and film stock – and in terms of his subject matter, which is indicative of a

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[53] Murray Smith, "My Dinner with Noël; or, Can We Forget the Medium" (*Film Studies* 8: Summer 2006, 140-148).
[54] Ibid., 144.

dark humanism. Qualities, which like several other scholars, and Korine, himself for that matter, attribute to the likes of Cassavetes and Alan Clarke as being key predecessors and influences on his expressive vision.[55] Yet Gargett also acknowledges Korine's predilection for poetic realism, something else that Korine states as being a motivating factor of his aesthetic vision and corpus of work. Tom Austin O'Connor and Benjamin Halligan have also extrapolated upon. Gargett notes that Korine's use of multiple media and juxtaposition of discordant sound destabilizes the "perceptual plane" in *Gummo*, on the one hand, while it reinforces his found footage, collage aesthetic on the other.[56] In *julien*, Gargett observes how the "discordant" episodic sequences in conjunction with his incorporation of various stylistic techniques – jump-cuts, freeze-frames, filters – lyrically conveys the schizophrenic perspective of Julien as well as well as the chaoticism that his presence affects with regards to those that he encounters and the world that he inhabits.[57]

Sklar continues the discussion of where to place Korine's aesthetic and notes that his aesthetic competency spans a palette which includes improvisation and vaudeville, surrealism, and even the grotesque (which Sklar later clarifies, albeit implicitly, as referring to the unsavory and sometimes outlandish behavior of the characters in Korine's films without actually extrapolating upon the grotesque as an aesthetic per se).[58] Sklar postulates that Korine's emergence and standout status as a creative and controversial force in American cinema is, at least partially, "a case of older aesthetics combining with new technologies."[59] Like others, Sklar describes Korine's films as being in a constant state of tension that vacillates between a "mundane realism" and a more impressionistic formalism that is infused with a "romantic mystery".[60] This, he argues, is stylistically achieved using techniques and devices, such as handheld mobile cameras and a verité shooting style (something that he also passingly associates with Larry Clark's work) interspersed with video

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[55] Adrian Gargett, "The Future of Cinema: Harmony Korine" (*The Film Journal* 3: 2002. Available: http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue3/harmonykorine.html (Retrieved: 13 August 2007).
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Op. Cit., Sklar 264-265.
[59] Ibid., 262.
[60] Ibid., 264-265.

technology effects.[61] This includes the manipulation of the texture and appearance of the recorded image such as pixilation, gradation, wipes, and filters that are built into the recording technology; the juxtaposition of polaroid imagery; and the incorporation of blown-up super-8 film stock, all of which contributes to his general formal approach inspired by collage.[62] Sklar argues that it is Korine's multimedia visual style and collage approach to form and storytelling that situates Korine amongst certain experimental and avant-garde traditions of filmmaking as much as it does the alternative narrative traditions of Cassavetes, Fellini, and Herzog. Indeed, some of the techniques and devices that Korine employs have also been employed by a filmmaker that Korine, himself, as well as other critics and scholars have likened him to, Jean-Luc Godard.

Jay McRoy posits that *Ken Park* is descendent of Italian Neo-Realism based on its episodic narrative structure and raw verité visual style, but also for its thematic impulse to convey "the lives of everyday people struggling just to get by in a collapsing economic landscape."[63] *Ken Park* takes the Neo-Realist aesthetic to another level through its hardcore depictions of un-simulated sex, but this is easily a red herring insofar that upon closer inspection, *Ken Park*, like *Kids*, is a tightly structured narrative film that, with the assistance of a stylistic sleight of hand, fosters the appearance of an uncultivated narrative structure.[64] Indeed *Ken Park*, again like *Kids*, often provides a variety of omnisciently detached visual perspectives which are not aligned with a particular character intermittently juxtaposed with attached visual perspectives and point-of-view shots, which coheres multiple spaces.[65]

McRoy's co-authored article with Guy Crucianelli assesses Gummo as being

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[61] Ibid., 262.

[62] Ibid., 262, 265, 266, 268.

[63] Op. Cit., McRoy 47-48.

[64] Ibid., 47.

[65] Ibid. As Asbjørn Grønstad aptly confers, Korine employs a more intensive mimetic visual aesthetic than other contemporary American filmmakers, but he also urges that this is a matter of both degree and historical context (*Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008. 17).

amongst a tradition in cinema that displays "marginalized filmic curiosities".[66] They assess the ways in which *Gummo*'s multimodality incorporates various film styles and modes of practice (i.e. verité documentary, conventional narrative fiction, and avant-garde/experimental filmmaking practices), as well as the fusing of multiple genres (i.e. the melodramatic and the comedic) and modes of presentation such as the grotesque, which fluctuates between sympathetic and hyperbolic portrayals of the film's characters/inhabitants, between documentary and fiction, and subsequently between representation and exploitation.[67] The authors' reference to *Gummo* as grotesque is fleeting and is done without any further conceptual elaboration.[68] In short, the authors argue that *Gummo* exemplifies the irrevocable subjectivity of even the most objectively intended cinematic depictions. They feel he does not accomplish the truly mimetic reflection of the real that Korine attempts to render and is, as a result, exploitative at times.[69]

However, the authors insist that *Gummo* shares commonalities with the realist tradition of Italian neorealism based on a number of its aesthetic techniques and style, and, like Halligan, they even wittily suggest that *Gummo* could have been called "Xenia, Ohio: Open City", which is a tribute to another of Rossellini's 'war trilogy' films, *Rome, Open City* (Italy, 1945).[70] However, while they acknowledge that *Gummo* regularly expresses "tenderness" toward its characters and their circumstances, they maintain that it ultimately concedes to a "voyeuristic compulsion to 'gawk'", thus omitting the humanist and ameliorative impulse common of Italian neorealism. Instead they claim it reverts to a sideshow impulse in which the character-inhabitants in *Gummo* are represented through their "estranging" otherness and difference, that they are grotesque caricatures which are typified by their unusual physical appearances and underclass status.[71] Their claims echo Kayser's notion that the grotesque presents subject matter that is both alienated and alienating from

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[66] Jay McRoy and Guy Crucianelli, ""I Panic the World": Benevolent Exploitation in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and Harmony Korine's *Gummo*" (*The Journal of Popular Culture* 42.2: 2009, 266).

[67] Ibid., 257, 266, 270-271.

[68] Ibid., 266.

[69] Ibid., 257-258.

[70] Ibid., 266 and Op. Cit., McRoy 44.

[71] Ibid., McRoy and Guy Crucianelli 266, 270 and McRoy, 45.

normative representations of the American landscape and the people that populate it. However, Kayser argues that the estrangement is from the phenomenal world as we know it. It is the consequence of an intervention that is fantastical, be it supernatural or paranormal. Whereas the estrangement referred to here is sociocultural. The estrangement here is a consequence of a world that is perceived as abnormal on the one hand and all too real on the other, so real that it is depicted as mundanely normal by Korine. This is largely achieved through various realist aesthetics borrowed from verité documentary, reality television, and surveillance footage, as well as the undercutting of expectations regarding the eclectic and sometimes even eccentric population of middle-America. However, McRoy and Crucianelli maintain that the overriding formalism of *Gummo* undermines the mimetic veracity of Korine's attempt at verisimilitude, explaining that the usage of mixed media may affirm authenticity, but "consistently disrupt[s] the film's diegesis."[72]

As mentioned above, it is my position that while *Gummo* does not follow a conventional narrative film structure, the presence of an alternative narrative structure that organizes the film remains. McRoy and Crucianelli also hold this position and share my understanding of this "fragmentary" approach to narrative using Peter Wollen's notion of counter-cinema. Counter-cinema is epitomized by a narrative intransitivity in which the story is comprised by a series of episodic, almost self-contained, moments that are thematically unified and/or cohered by recurring characters.[73] However, the formal organization of *Gummo* – Korine's collage approach – and the abandonment of a conventional narrative form are stylistically motivated by the photo-album, home-video look of his movie.[74] This similarly echoes David Bordwell's notion of parametric narration.[75] Geoff King holds that parametric

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[72] Ibid., McRoy and Guy Crucianelli 267 and McRoy, 45.

[73] Op. Cit., McRoy, 44-45 and Op. Cit., McRoy and Guy Crucianelli, 266-267. For further reference on Wollen's notion of the counter-cinematic mode of narrative filmmaking see: Peter Wollen, "Godard's Cinema and Counter Cinema: Vent d'est (1972)'' (*Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 120-129). For my past attribution of *Gummo* as also being indicative of Wollen's concept see my Master's thesis for the Universiteit van Amsterdam: Aaron Petten, *Visions of Riff-Raff and Perversion: Repudiation, Abjection, and the Alienation of the Grotesque in Art and Film* (2000).

[74] Ibid., McRoy 63-64.

[75] Films structured through parametric narration have its "stylistic system" organized by "patterns distinct from the demands" of a plot whereby "film style may be emphasized to a degree that makes it at least

narration is the motivation andorganizational premise to many contemporary independent American films, including that of Clark and Korine. In their attempt to explore the grey murky area between documentary and fiction, representation and depiction, revelation and exploitation, McRoy and Crucianelli reductively surmise that the diegetic world is ultimately a relativized contrivance of Korine's imagination that deceptively poses as something more real.[76] While Korine's aesthetic is indeed highly orchestrated, McRoy and Crucianelli's conclusion reduces the perceptual realism that shapes Korine's aesthetic.

In his book on contemporary independent American cinema, Geoff King explores Clark's and Korine's films from a stylistic and formal perspective. King notes that a principal motivation of these films is to foster a realism by generating an "impression of authenticity" regarding the veracity and credibility of the subject matter and content portrayed onscreen. This, he explains, is largely achieved through visual style to create an intensified sense that the camera is capturing, even documenting, "something that is 'really happening'" unpremeditated and unstaged.[77] Like several of the other film scholars, King attributes Italian neorealism as a historical antecedent to Clark and Korine's aesthetic, but he also includes the raw approach to visual style employed by Cassavetes as well as the cinema verité and direct cinema documentary movements.

King notes Clark's and Korine's regular use of non-professional actors to populate their films with dialogue that is often unscripted improvised, and the films are also shot on location amongst the general public; he also acknowledges that many of the extras in both the foreground and background of their films are 'real' people, especially in the case of *Gummo* and *julien*.[78] King observes how Korine's use of concealed digital cameras, which captures the 'real' reactions of often unwitting participants who become extras in his films, facilitates a heightened impression of

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equal in importance" to the plot (David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. 275).

[76] Op. Cit., McRoy and Crucianelli 270.

[77] Geoff King, *American Independent Film* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2005. 108, 113).

[78] Ibid., 110-111.

realism.[79] This is especially prevalent in *julien*. Indeed, the depiction of those unwitting participants, or extras, especially their reactions to preconceived but unscripted scenarios that Korine sent his actors out to perform, intensifies the authenticity of the content in which King refers to, and it further blurs the lines between the fictional and non-fictional status of the diegesis.[80] However, as King points out, the artifice of these films remain apparent, and the same formal techniques and devices can have numerous functions and effects.[81] That is to say that the same techniques and devices vacillate in terms of their status as fictional/non-fictional, experimental/conventional, narrative/non-narrative, representational/abstract, realistic/impressionist.

Similar to McRoy's assessment of the formal structure of *Ken Park*, King attests that while the visual style of *Kids* is undeniably verité in its texture and appearance, upon closer inspection, the film is, ultimately, decidedly constructed in its formal organization in the way that it follows a conventional Hollywood narrative structure, drawing attention to the artifice of fiction that Clark attempts to conceal using documentary stylistics.[82] Conversely, while King similarly attributes Korine's films as being motivated by a realist impulse, he notes that the strategies for achieving that aesthetic aim differ from that of Clark's films. King observes that *Gummo* is amongst a contingent of independent American films that defy the conventional linear narrative plot structure adhered to by the majority of popular American narrative cinema.[83] He suggests that the home-video and found footage style of *Gummo* and *julien* motivates its episodic structure, and similar to McRoy's assessment of *Gummo*, King insists that the films are thematically unified according to its subject matter and its raw and grainy low- fi visual style.[84] However, while he acknowledges that *julien* has a more "focused" narrative trajectory than *Gummo*, he erroneously underestimates the presence of conventional narrative trajectory and plot devices in *Gummo*, asserting that it is absent in the film[85], yet the three recurring narrative strands are

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[79] Ibid., 110.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 119-120.
[82] Ibid., 118-119, 147-148.
[83] Ibid., 118-119, 63-64.
[84] Ibid., 118-120, 63-65.
[85] Ibid., 118-119, 65.

themselves plot devices that anchor the narrative. The journeys and conflicts of two of the three narrative strands – the three sisters search for their cat and Tummler and Solomon's confrontation of their cat-killing competitor – provides the forward momentum that King argues is absent, even if it is of a more drifting variety like that of European art cinema.

These films are in a constant tension in which the impression of authenticity and rawness which must conceal or subordinate the formal strategies that makes the films thematically and narratively intelligible. In this sense, the formal objectives are not that different from the classical narrative structure in which style is subordinate to narrative, but the perceived absence of style of the classical narrative structure *is* the style, it is just that the style is discrete. This is reversed in the case of the films of Clark and to an even greater degree with the films of Korine. Narrative form is subordinate to the impressions of authenticity, which is principally achieved stylistically, and like with classical narrative films, but in the inverse, the narrative remains. It is just that it too is discrete, discrete in the sense that it lacks emphasis but remains integral to the overall cohering structure and intelligibility of the film. This being the case to such an extent that King, and many others for that matter, question the very presence of a narrative trajectory at all.

Much like the previous subsection, my research is a more focused extrapolation of the scholarship that falls under this subsection as well. The scholars in the previous section tended to engage the filmmaking and films of Clark and Korine from a more thematic and generalist approach to style. Whereas the scholars in this section concentrate more closely on the constructional options and choices that the filmmakers make to formalize and stylize their films and the subsequent devices that the filmmakers use to crate their audiovisual expressions. If the scholars in the previous section are principally concerned with *what* Clark's and Korine's films are about from an a largely formalist and aesthetic perspective, the scholars in this subsection are principally concerned with *how* the aesthetic dimensions of the *what* is audiovisually rendered and achieved. Of course there is a lot of crossover with both subsets of

scholars. The distinction is a matter of emphasis.

While I would not go as far as Gargett as classifying Korine's films as anthropological, I would argue that his films, as well as Clark's for that matter, elicit the *impression* of anthropological authenticity in the way that they achieve an aesthetic of verisimilitude through their documentary stylistic strategies – handheld video and film, use of lower grade video and film stock, incorporation of home movie like excerpts – and the darkly humanistic sense of anomie that he seems to 'capture'. However, like Halligan, Sklar, and Dillon in the previous subsection, Gargett argues that Korine's multimedia approach to audiovisual depiction and representation fosters a perceptual discordance and highlights the artifice of his films; whereas, again, I argue that this discordance fosters an imperfect perception that mirrors contemporary audiovisual representational techniques affiliated with documentary and non-fictional modes of representation associated with a heightened verisimilitude.

Also, like me, Sklar borrows from the public pronouncements that Korine provides regarding his purported aesthetic visions and motivations as a tool within his toolbox for discussing the constructional choices that Korine makes and the resultant effect of those choices in terms of the film object itself. Like Sklar, I address, albeit in more detail, the traditions of art and culture from which Korine borrows, and how he incorporates a variety of audiovisual techniques and devices, largely through a coordinated usage of multiple recording devices, to render his vision. It is here where Sklar and I begin to diverge. He acknowledges the realist impetus of Korine, but like so many others, he argues that his realism is in a constant state of tension with a more impressionistic audiovisual style. I argue that the perceived impressionism, in the way that Korine employs it, instead enriches not only his realist aesthetic, but his grotesque realist aesthetic, especially in relation to the subject matter and content of his films.

Like McRoy and Crucianelli, let alone many of the other scholars, I address the characters in Clark's and Korine's films as representations of factions of the marginalized inhabitants of American society. And like them, and unlike many of the

other scholars who note the realist aesthetics that shape their films, I look at the ways in which the artifice leading to their establishment of an impressions of realism is a product of formal and stylistic strategies shaped through the craft and artifice of devices and technologies typically associated with documentary modes of production and a treatment of mise-en-scene typically associated with documentary and neorealist filmmaking. However, unlike them, and like many of the others, they insist that this, in conjunction with the episodic narrative structuring, results in a tension and an overriding 'formalism' that ultimately resists verisimilitude. However, like in other cases, I maintain that this enhances or enriches the verisimilitude of their films, especially when taking into account the creative motivations that they espouse in conjunction with a corroborating analysis of their respective films.

Geoff King's observations of the realist audiovisual aesthetics of Clark and Korine, especially in terms of the way in which they achieve verisimilitude, is quite apt and is something that I explore in more detail more fully throughout my thesis. His notion of the way in which Clark's and Korine's formal and stylistic strategies foster an 'impression of authenticity' accounts for two domains of Jakobson's emanating sites of realism: the verisimilitude of the realist aesthetics of the film object as well as experience of realism that those aesthetics schematically prompt and elicit. Not only do I expand upon his notions that Clark and Korine are stylistically indebted to various documentary styles of audiovisual production, but also his observations that their films foster a sense that what is occurring on screen is unstaged and sometimes 'really happening' which intensifies the verisimilitude of the film's themselves as well as the inferential schemata of the encountering spectators. I too argue that this is as much to do with the use of certain recording technologies and the 'look' of the audiovisual aesthetic that they typify and with which they are associated as much as it does more tried-and-tested strategies regarding the staging of mise-en-scene – unscripted and improvised dialogue, location shooting, natural lighting, non-professional actors – that persists in achieving verisimilitude both objectively in the film and subjectively in the spectator. Like King, I also expand on the idea that while the episodic structure of their films may seem fragmentary that they are unified. In this way King, like me, differs from the views of

likes of Halligan and Sklar. However, I diverge from King based on differing views on the presence of a narrative. Moreover, while like King, I acknowledge that the same techniques and devices that Clark and Korine use to achieve their verisimilitude can also function to mediate effects associates with more abstract experimental filmmaking, unlike King, I do not suggest that there is a constant tension as a consequence of this. I do find aberrant moments here and there regarding some of the poetic/impressionist techniques, which I address near the end of the thesis, but I do not regard those moments as compromising the realist imperatives of the filmmakers or contradicting the verisimilitude of their films and the realist aesthetic experience that they foster.

POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION: FROM INTENT TO IMAGE

This subsection reviews the debates which are best described as either reflectionist, symptomatic, or ideological criticism. The debates in this subsection tend to take a more critical approach to the perceived consequences of the content of the filmic representations. Some of the criticisms of Clark's and Korine's films that address the politics of representation are dispassionately executed. But, while not always the case, in the main, criticisms of Clark's and Korine's films tend to be polemical in nature. And although criticisms tend to be drawn from textual analysis, the creative motivations and intentions of the filmmakers are also critiqued as the sources in the textual criticism. Indeed, Dirk Dunbar's more formally orientated classification of *Kids* above, essentially affirms what hooks and Giroux postulate quite a few years earlier in a less judgmental and fiery politicized discourse which will be imminently addressed below. Ultimately, in this subsection, both the films and creative motivations of the filmmakers more broadly come under scrutiny because, it is argued, as contributors to the culture industry, their films have a particular social currency as products of social practice.

Henry Giroux criticizes Clark's approach and attitude towards *Kids* for its irresponsible and irredeemable representation of youth culture. He critiques the representational politics of *Kids* for its corrosive portrayal of youth as a threat to

the established social order. Giroux claims that unlike representations of the past, youth are conveyed as *the* problem rather than being a symptom of wider socioeconomic ills.[86] However, it would seem that in this suggestion, Giroux omits other cinematic representations of the past which arguably also locate youth as a source of social problems. Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* is testament to this alone. Nevertheless, Giroux critiques what he describes as the "bleak depiction of urban youth" in *Kids* and how the film functions to reinforce the conservative discourse on identity politics involving matters of race, gender, and sexuality. Giroux argues that:

> Stripped of any critical capacities, youth are defined primarily by a sexuality that is viewed as unmanageable and in need of control, surveillance, legal constraint, and other forms of disciplinary power. Similarly, this reductionist rendering of sexually active youth is a short step from stereotypical portrayals of black sexuality in which sexuality becomes a metaphor for disease, promiscuity, and social decadence.[87]

Giroux argues that Clark's verité visual style and use of non-professional actors is a red herring, instead insisting that Clark's film glamorizes predatory teenage male sexuality, objectifies adolescent female sexuality and portrays females at the mercy of the predatory males. He argues that teens are represented irrationally and insatiable in their sexual appetite. He claims further, as noted above, that blackness is demonized and African-American popular culture is depicted as denoting aggression and violence amongst the youth which is demonstrated through the constant use of "nigger" by both white and black kids. The usage of the term "kid", the constant reference to girls as "bitches", and even the general cadence and speaking patterns are all problematic for Giroux. African-American popular culture is also signified through the constant references to hip-hop, whether it is the presence of graffiti art, rap music, or the fashion and style of the characters.[88] While Giroux's argument is furnished by his symptomatic evaluations of the film itself, much of his criticism is reserved for Clark, himself. Giroux admonishes Clark for voyeuristically reveling in and romanticizing the adolescent underbelly in which he portrays. Clark has a political and

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[86] Henry Giroux, *Channel Surfing: Racism, the Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998. 35-63).

[87] Ibid., 46-47, 55.

[88] Ibid., 48-56.

moral responsibility, according to Giroux, to "reflect" on the implications and ramifications of his work.[89] How they should be reflected upon and whether this should be inscribed in the film or through some ancillary outlet is never made clear.

bell hooks and Kathleen Sweeney both criticize *Kids* for its misogynistic portrayal of girls. hooks acknowledges what she refers to as the superficial transgressiveness of *Kids*, which is all the more enhanced by the verité documentary style of the film, but argues that it actually does nothing more than reinforce conservative, even reactionary, patriarchal and racist norms of misogyny, sexism, and white supremacy.[90] While some of hooks' venom is a political ideological stance, and therefore can only really be rebutted from a competing political ideological position, other aspects of hooks' assertions and criticisms with regards to certain observations that she attributes to the film are simply inaccurate; she neglects and omits crucial content within the film. Although she never uses the term itself, hooks essentially attributes *Kids* as grotesque pejoratively in the way that the characters are shown to hegemonically reinforce the monstrous norms of inequality through the politics of representation. In her essay charting the various disparate representations of teenage girls in film and television in the 1990s, Kathleen Sweeney also criticizes the ways in which the girls in *Kids* seem to have the sexual experience and prowess of older more experienced women, but without any sense of responsibility or consequences of which a more mature, sexually experienced woman would at least be aware. Like others, while she acknowledges the verité realism of Clark's visual style, like Giroux, Sweeney avers that girls remain stuck in being represented as victims of predatory male sexuality.[91]

Likewise, in their essay on the representation of the aggressive and violent behavior of adolescents, Kleeman and Rodan observe how Clark's films tend to principally revolve around male characters that are almost all portrayed as "sexually

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[89] Ibid., 61.

[90] bell hooks, *Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996. 60-68).

[91] Kathleen Sweeney, "Maiden USA: Representing Teenage Girls in the '90s" (*Afterimage* 26.4: January-February 1999, 10-13).

out of control, rampant drug users, and nihilistic".[92] In *Kids* the main characters are shown to primarily be socioeconomically disadvantaged urban white males; whereas in *Bully* the characters are primarily disenfranchised middle-class suburbanite brats, while in *Ken Park* they tend to be from a more modest lower-middle class suburb. Like hooks and Giroux, Kleeman and Rodan argue that Clark glamorizes the hedonistic, violent, and destructive behavior of youth without adequately showing the implications and consequences of their actions. For them, the assumedly detached verité perspective facilitates a voyeuristic gaze.[93] However, unlike the others, while there is a thinly veiled critique of Clark's perceived amoral and glamorized approach to juvenile delinquency, Kleeman and Rodan are ultimately guided by the ways in which these films can be said to reflect or distort the actual pervasiveness of juvenile delinquency in American society.[94] Thus, while not a direct concern, the realist status of Clark's films is an implicit factor that shapes their reflectionist approach to the films.

Sudhir Mahadevan and Justin Vicari also address the gender politics of Clark's films, but less concerned with the ways in which inter-gender politics are contended, they specifically focus on ways in which masculinity and male sexuality are portrayed. In his essay, "Perfect Childhoods: Larry Clark Puts Boys Onscreen", Sudhir Mahadevan focuses on the gender politics of representation in Larry Clark's film oeuvre up to and including *Bully*.[95] His main point of focus is how Clark's representation of prepubescent and pubescent male bodies contravenes imagery typical of the teen screen films. Mahadevan argues that, on the one hand, while Clark draws inspiration from the teen screen tradition, his movies diverge and are more closely aligned with sexploitation and pornography on the other.[96] Mahadevan postulates that Clark's films express:

> …a masculinity smelling pungently of homoeroticism side by side with a

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[92] J. Kole Kleeman and Kathryne Roden, "Developing Critical Awareness of Media, Violence, and Masculinity for Criminal Justice Educators" (*The Journal of the Institute of Justice & International Studies* vol. 9: 2009, 133).

[93] Ibid., 137.

[94] Ibid., 131-144.

[95] Sudhir Mahadevan, "Perfect Childhoods: Larry Clark Puts Boys Onscreen" (*Where the Boys are: Cinemas of Masculinity and* Youth. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. 98-113).

[96] Ibid., 98.

rigorously reiterated and taken-for-granted heteronormativity, as if there were no differences, antagonisms, disparities, or incompatibilities between the two; indeed, as if one doesn't affect the other at all.[97]

This is sharply accented, according to Mahadevan, by the visual style of Clark's films and the subsequent effect it has on his depictions of adolescent male bodies. He insists, like hooks and Giroux, that Clark's films are not windows to accurately peer into the lives of adolescent youth due, in part, because of how his representation of masculinity harnesses the homoerotic while remaining heteronormative.[98] Similarly, Justin Vicari comments on the way in which the overt bisexuality of the male characters in *Bully* existentially fosters psychosexual tensions within one of the principal characters, Bobby, who is the bully, the victimizer, but also the victim. Vicari attributes Bobby's suppression of his bisexuality as fostering a "self-loathing" which erupts sadistically through aggressive physical and sexual abuse which is directed at his very own circle of friends, who eventually conspire and brutally kill Bobby.[99]

Nicholas de Villiers shifts the focus a bit while still emphasizing the ways in which the representational politics of the film style in *Kids*, namely the way in which the documentary and verité portrayals of sex "blurs the line between fictional drama and reality", and how it consequently affects public discourse.[100] The omniscient verité gaze of *Kids*, de Villiers argues, formalizes a surveillance perspective in which the seemingly free-agents in the film become "objects of surveillance".[101] de Villiers elaborates: "*Kids* can be understood as attempting to follow these teenagers from an insider's perspective…but also points to a larger fantasy of surveillance and the ensuing mixture of power and pleasure this promises."[102] Adopting Foucault's explication of Pasolini's *Love Meetings* (Italy, 1965), de Villiers similarly suggests that *Kids* is representative of "'youth' which our societies 'have never been able to integrate, which they have feared or rejected, which they have never managed to

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[97] Ibid., 110.

[98] Ibid., 111.

[99] Justin Vicari, *Male Bisexuality in Current Cinema: Images of Growth, Rebellion and Survival* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011. 213-214).

[100] Nicholas de Villiers, "How Much Does it Cost for Cinema to Tell the Truth of Sex?: Cinéma Verité and Sexography" (*Sexualities* 10.3: 2007, 353).

[101] Ibid., 356.

[102] Ibid., 354.

subdue'."[103]

   Irving Epstein, on the other hand, while acknowledging Giroux's social critique of *Kids*, backs one of Giroux's critics who argues that Giroux's critique is over-compensated and that it too readily disregards the faction of youth who *do* think and behave in the ways that Clark realistically depicts.[104] Epstein examines the representation of children who roam the streets in *Kids* in conjunction with how the diffusive consumerist state influences the perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of the youth.[105] He explains that the characters in *Kids* come from upper-working to lower-middle class households, and that the street life that they are a part of is indicative of the postmodernist condition in which "their empty pursuit for pleasure…is made to represent a consumer society at its hedonistic extreme".[106] While I am not wholly sure what Epstein is referring to when he refers to the postmodernist condition, as he takes it as a given, and while the youth are undoubtedly ensconced in a rampant consumer society I am not so sure how their existential condition is representative of this, according to Epstein, as he does not elaborate any further, I do agree with his acknowledgement of the theme and motif of hedonism, as it is one of the unifying aspects of all of Clark's films. In Clark's films hedonism is at the core of both his realist and grotesque aesthetic.

   Cynthia Fuchs takes a view that is something in-between de Villiers and Epstein in her examination of notions of 'badness' and the representation of youth and youth culture in *Bully*.[107] Fuchs acknowledges the verité style of the film as adding a gravitas to the confrontational way in which the film addresses the sordid activities of suburban youth and youth culture. The copious use of drugs, the almost passionless sex and acts of sexual sadomasochism, and the remorseless sense of brutality and violence are all heightened due to the film's style. But Fuchs claims that the

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[103] Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume* 2. New York: The New Press, 1998. 231) in: Nicholas de Villiers, "How Much Does it Cost for Cinema to Tell the Truth of Sex?: Cinéma Verité and Sexography" (*Sexualities* 10.3: 2007, 354).

[104] Irving Epstein, "Street Children in Film" (*Curriculum Inquiry* 29.3: Autumn 1999, 379).

[105] Ibid., 375-388.

[106] Ibid., 380.

[107] Cynthia Fuchs, ""The Whole Fucking World Warped around Me": Bad Kids and Worse Contexts" (*Bad: Infamy, Darkness, Evil, and Slime Onscreen*. Ed. Murray Pomerance. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. 273-285).

contexts which facilitate these behaviors are also strikingly clear regardless of the verité style. The tangential lives that kids and their parents live while literally living together under one household while leading separate and closed-off, even secretive, lives from one another is emphasized as an important context.

Far from labeling Clark as irresponsible, Fuchs observes that: "*Bully* examines the complex contexts of youthful killers, not to label them as "bad," but to raise broader questions about social responsibility and ethical definitions. In this way, the film challenges the presumption of "bad kids," even in extreme circumstances."[108] Similar to Giroux, Fuchs contends that the graphic depictions of youth engaging in illicit acts of drug use, sexual promiscuity, and violence function as form of adult surveillance. However, Giroux, and hooks for that matter, criticize *Kids* as ultimately functioning as a fetishistic vehicle of adult voyeurism, a distortion of youth culture, and a reinforcement of misogynistic and bigoted social norms Fuchs, on the other hand, takes a more politically detached approach in observing that Clark's making of *Bully* is an artistic reflection, one that parallels wider societal responses attempting to apprehend, control, and protect youth through various forms of surveillance.[109] In her analysis, Fuchs draws upon an important idea when she recognizes the nearly complete separation between the worlds of adults and kids. The ways in which Clark and Korine thematizes and visually depict this separation of the two worlds, while keeping them in close proximity to one another, furnishes an anomie and estrangement that further *contributes* to fostering a sense of the grotesque.

Taking up a position that is somewhere in-between the politically motivated polemical criticism of hooks and Giroux and the more disimpassioned anthropological and psychosocial perspectives of Kleeman, Rodan and Fuchs, Asbjørn Grønstad interprets Larry Clark's justification for violence, such as that found in *Bully*, as functioning as a cathartic response to the saccharin representations in films that attempt to engage with similar themes of teenage angst, apathy, and anomie in

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[108] Ibid., 284.
[109] Ibid., 275.

American society.[110] In their essay on representations of adolescence in cinema, Todd Meyers and Richard Baxstrom suggest, similarly to Fuchs, that the callousness of the youth demonstrated in *Kids* that is tempered with flashes of humanity is representative of youth as the moral *other* acting and operating outside of the conventional moral domain of its opposite, adulthood.[111] Meyers and Baxstrom suggest that, unlike dramatic cinematic traditions that preceded them, the films of Larry Clark, namely *Kids* and *Bully*, provide insights i n to the "psychic life" of it characters but do without the inscription of psychoanalytic subplots.[112] Thus, the mimetic surface of the narrative is the limit of the symbolic depths. They are without subtext.

Tom Austin O'Connor takes a more psychologically orientated approach in addressing the creative vision and motivation that shapes Clark and Korine's filmic expressions. By extending a number of Deleuzian concepts, such as the "dismodern", "micropolitics", and "schizoanalysis" in conjunction with Pier Paolo Pasolini's theory of the "cinema of poetry" and Kant's notion of the "dynamic sublime", O'Connor theorizes Korine and Clark's aesthetic from both a philosophical and an artistic standpoint.[113] O'Connor argues that while a vast number of the characters in these films are portrayed as nihilistic, it would be erroneous to classify their films as expressive of such a worldview. Instead the harsh and unforgiving socioeconomic conditions portrayed in their films lead to a sense of "despair and a limited awareness of life's productive possibilities" rather than nihilism.[114] O'Connor affirms that the alienation and anomie that characters experience emanate from the environments they inhabit, which are brimming with "poverty, racism, domestic violence, animal abuse, environmental pollution, sexual assault, lack of nutrition, [and] addiction".[115] O'Conner suggests Korine and Clark use nihilism poetically as a leitmotif to confront

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[110] Asbjørn Grønstad, *Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008. 33, 196.

[111] Todd Meyers and Richard Baxstrom, "Cinema Thinking Affect: The Hustler's Soft Magic" (*Parachute*121, 1 March 2006: 104).

[112] Ibid., 110.

[113] Tom Austin O'Connor, "Genre-%!$?ing: Harmony Korine's Cinema of Poetry" (*Wide Screen* 1.1: April 2009, 1-16).

[114] Ibid., 1.

[115] Ibid.

social and environmental ills that cause anomie and alienation and to engage with subject matter that stimulates discomfort. O'Connor posits that Korine and Clark's:

> …depictions of social pathologies often disrupt our cognitive categories/classifications…because they undermine and poetically re-mediate the seductive natures of personal/cultural ideals – like the norms/illusions inherent in sensationalised mainstream and popular media forms – which illuminate…the reality that *nihilism is the disillusioning end-result of attempting to make the world conform to reactive, larger-than-life ideals*.[116]

What O'Connor implicitly points out here is the inventive graphic depictions of these elements, which, in turn, lead to extreme reactions to their films. Indeed it is the realist depictions of the perceived incongruities – abnormalities and anomalies – of the social and physical world that presents the "paradigm crisis", which as Harpham argues, fosters the culturally defined status of the grotesque and subsequently, the art that expresses it. O'Connor affirms this view in his suggestion that Korine and Clark's films are "provocative attempts to de-familiarise common societal assumptions that often repress the *actual effects* of ignorance on all segments of American culture" which attempt to contravene and lay bare the "repressive social mores in the artistic sublime".[117] This is not dissimilar to my suggestion that Korine and Clark's film art is analogous to the art of the perverse indicative of the Aesthetes and Decadents of the nineteenth century, a notion which I argue motivates their aesthetic vision and imagination in the SUMMATION of CHAPTERS 2 and 3.

The issue of how both filmmakers push boundaries of representation by including unsimulated depictions of nudity and sex is another common theme of discussion. In Jon Lewis' historically orientated essay exploring the aesthetic and industrial distinctions between pornography and general release narrative fiction films that depict graphic scenes of real sex, Lewis points to a filmmaker's motivation as a key difference. General release films show real sex as a means to mark a filmmaker's commitment to realism which tends to be stylistically rendered to enhance the realist effect; whereas, unsimulated sex in pornography is an end in-and-of-

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[116] Ibid., 3.
[117] Ibid., 10, 15.

itself.[118] *Kids* stops short in its representation of sex, but because of its adherence to a verité style, the implicit and unseen seems more explicit than it actually is. *Ken Park*, on the other hand, shows real acts of sex across multiple scenes throughout the film.[119] Nick Davis similarly addresses the actual sex scenes in *Ken Park* amongst his broader discussion of "real sex" in cinema, classifying such films as "counterpublic", meaning that they are "antinormative" based on the frankness of their depictions of graphic nudity and sex in what still remains a tightly regulated medium.[120] Davis contends that films such as *Ken Park* ultimately function to redress the limits of public morality in the process of testing it.[121]

The realist and often graphic depictions of sex is one of the key motifs at the forefront of these films and it is also key in contributing to these films as being classifiable as grotesque art. Some would appear to argue that it is grotesque on subjective critical evaluative grounds, but this does create a chicken and egg dilemma regarding the grotesque in art and culture, something which Geoffrey Galt Harpham bypasses when he contends that the same cognitive and emotional response is triggered when we encounter the grotesque in art as when we encounter the referent of that aesthetically rendered content in the real world.[122] This is intensified even more amongst aesthetically realist art, and even more so within cinema, because of its capacity for mimetically depicting its subject matter temporally *and* spatially. Thus, the more realistic the depiction, the more blurred the distinction between art and reality becomes, and the elements of the grotesque becomes more prevalent.

Similar to Davis' notion of the counterpublic, Tim Walters considers the ways in which the Dogme agenda provides a "counter-hegemonic" critique of modern culture. Walters addresses the way that Dogme contravenes both the stylistic and thematic

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[118] John Lewis, "Real Sex: Aesthetics and Economics of Art-House Porn" (*Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 51: Spring 2009). Available:
http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/LewisRealsex/text.html (Retrieved: 14 November 2010).
[119] Ibid.
[120] Nick Davis, "The View from the *Shortbus*, or All Those Fucking Movies" (*GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 14.4: 2008, 623).
[121] Ibid., 635-636.
[122] Op. Cit., Harpham 181.

norms of contemporary cinema by inextricably unifying the verité style intrinsic to Dogme and the often unsettling content.[123] Amongst his considerations, Walters briefly discusses how the theme and motif of disability seems prevalent in Dogme, also observing the centrality of this theme and its accompanying motifs in *julien*. Walters notes how the main character is a schizophrenic, and even several of the characters that he interacts that who do not have any verifiable mental conditions are also, arguably, psychologically disturbed.[124] While he does not refer to this synthesis in terms of the grotesque by name, Walters addresses some of the issues revolving around my focus on Korine's aesthetics as indicative of both realist and grotesque art. This synthesis of style and content as being contributory to securing the grotesque is something that will continue to be explored throughout this thesis.

Of the scholarship done on Clark and Korine, it is this subsection of scholars from which I diverge most. This mostly has to do with their approach. I am not so concerned with the so-called political ramifications or consequences on identity politics that so often seems to be the chief remit of what Bordwell has coined 'symptomatic criticism'. The remit of which tends to focus on the ideological conflicts which often stem from disunities and absences within the filmic representations that they engage rather than the relative unities of other, more formal or aesthetic approaches. Their discourse tends to be more polemical or politicized in its rhetoric which addresses the films as having some sort of cultural or social consequence according to their emphasis on film as social practice, thus the alternative moniker of 'ideological criticism'. In many cases this approach uses the films to serve a broader theoretical or critical agenda in which the films function as conduits for making generalized and sometimes quite grand claims about society in general. While I too regard cinema as part of the culture industry and having social currency, it is not a principal focus of my more art historical orientated inquiry. I in no way use films as currency in order advance arguments regarding broader issues of society.

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[123] Tim Walters, "Reconsidering *The Idiots:* Dogme95, Lars von Trier, and the Cinema of Subversion?" (*The Velvet Light Trap* 53: Spring 2004, 40-54).
[124] Ibid., 47, 53.

Indeed rather than taking a consequentialist approach to the film representations as a social act, I am concerned with the ways in which the same thematic representations are aesthetically manifest and expressed as film art. The scholars here take a philosophically realist position in terms of the ways in which these films distortedly reflect the social world at the expense of, one, the aesthetic act and heritage of the films as art; and, two, the philosophical realist positions that the scholars take are reductive and oversimplified in that they willfully disregard the complexity of the subject matter that the filmmakers engage as supposed social commentators in order to critically lobby for the conflict in which impassions their argument. In saying that, I too situate my explorations around similar elements of their films – adolescence and youth, hedonism and decadence, graphic nudity and sex, paraphilias, as well as the documentary stylistics that largely shape the films – however I explore how they are situated amongst past traditions in film and to a lesser extent art and literature, and how the representational and expressive subject matter and content are indicative of grotesque and realist aesthetics.

My analytical endeavors share with Grønstad's interest in violence in *Bully* and Meyers and Baxstrom's focus of the insider's world of youth and youth culture in *Kids* and *Bully,* especially in terms of the ways in which these films aesthetically engage the underbelly of American teenage life. However, while verisimilitude is central to my explorations, I do not treat these issues as reflectionist symptoms of broader social ills or to facilitate a broader theory of society. This is not because I do not think that these films are not in some ways accurate representations of reality inasmuch as my approach is less concerned with the ways in which these films are symptomatic of broader social ills according to some contrary social-ideological position. My focus is on the formal and aesthetic dimensions of the films, and while the referent remains pivotal to my explorations.

I am more sympathetic to Lewis' and Davis' methodology and endeavors than others in this subsection. Their concerns, while still situated amongst those scholars motivated by representational politics, are less motivated by polemical and politicized arguments that symptomatically critique films and tend to be more exploratory and led

by more pragmatic and even empirical theoretical hypotheses. They explore how Clark's and Korine's films graphically depict nudity and a combination of simulated and unsimulated sex. However, the focus of their analysis is possibly two of the most divergent from my own endeavors as they are more concerned with industrial classifications and reception, respectively, rather than the compositions of the films themselves. However, whereas they discuss this aspect of their films in order to assess the historical boundaries of both industrial modes of production and public taste and morality. I shift the emphasis back to the expressivity and compositionality of the films and the ways in which these qualities of Clark's and Korine's films intensify the verisimilitude of their realist aesthetic which additionally enhances their grotesque aesthetic.

I also engage with the seemingly intrinsic nihilism, the anomie that many of the characters seem to experience, and the unforgiving environments and conditions that they inhabit, endure, and even exploit in of Clark's and Korine's films that O'Connor does. Unlike O'Connor, however, I do not attempt to pose the expressive intentions or the filmic instantiations of those intents in relation to presupposed generalities about that psyche of 'society' and the tendency within it to repress acknowledgement of the sorts of subject matter and content that populate and comprise Clark's and Korine's films. Instead I look at the ways in which the filmmakers convey these themes and motifs through, what I perceive to be, an aesthetic framework that is both grotesque and realist. I similarly share with Sudhir Mahadevan and Justin Vicari's focus of the body in Clark's films, but again, whereas they focus on the politics of gender representation and what has since become viewed as the 'crisis of masculinity' in Cultural Studies, I am more inclined to address the ways in which the depiction of bodies function as vehicles of both the grotesque and realist aesthetics for Clark. Likewise, I share de Villiers interest in the ways that Clark uses verité, strategies which often blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, especially during some of his graphic scenes of actual sex. However, whereas de Villiers looks at the ways that this reinforces an ever increasing surveillance culture and the fetishization that this garners, I look at the ways in which these strategies intensify the verisimilitude of as well as contributing to the grotesque aesthetics of his films. Likewise, I extrapolate upon the adolescent hedonism,

a recurring theme across Clark's oeuvres, which is something that Epstein notes. However, unlike his post-Marxist assertion that their behavior is reflective of rampant consumerism that indicative of the ever-nebulous postmodern condition, I explore the ways in which the behaviors and interactions of the characters contribute to the presence of the grotesque as well as how they are shown doing it to highlight the realist dimensions of their depicted activities.

Giroux's and hooks' evaluation of *Kids* as ranging from conservative to reactionary seems more indicative of the personal politics of the critics, based on the way that they assess the films by importing politically charged discourses of conflict revolving around identity politics and their treatment of the film as *symptom* of the times. I, on the other hand, am more inclined to explore the aesthetic motivations, functions, and effects of the film rather than as a political act. Similarly, while Kleeman and Rodan observe the behaviors of the characters in *Kids*, they are more concerned with the cultural implications of the film's message; whereas, I am intrigued by the way that the film is aesthetically constructed using the grotesque and realism and how it achieves those effects. Less confrontational or combative in her rhetoric than Giroux and hooks, Fuchs similarly 'uses' *Bully* as a litmus test of sorts to contemplate and reflect upon how 'we' consign and ascribe kids as 'bad'. While far more tempered than Giroux and Hooks, Fuchs nevertheless looks upon the film as a symptom of the social construction of 'bad youth', albeit from a liberalist position, which she links to her extended argument that the film reflects 'society's' attempt to surveillance and control youth to protect them from themselves as well as to protect 'us' from them. Nevertheless, Fuchs approach to the politics of representation subordinates the film to the broader domain of culture and uses the film to prop-up a wider, more politicized argument about society. Walters, similar to Fuchs, is less combative and confrontational than Giroux and hooks but he too uses the film to redress broader arguments about society in general. Unlike the others he opines that Dogme films, and *julien* in particular, is an antidote to certain symptomatic perceptions and ideals within society. Even through the positive deployment of Clark's and Korine's films in which they are the inoculators of the symptoms of society's ills, such an approach strikes me as overstretched without adequate focus, context, and grounding in historically bound

social scientific facts. And at the expense of sounding polemical myself, approaches such as these past few diminishes the study of a film – whether as art, as culture, or even as a product of social practice – and subordinates it to a form of intellectualized moral entrepreneurship.

SUMMATION

While many of the more ideology driven critics have touched upon many of the key issues and themes that seem to make Clark's and Korine's films worthy of intellectual discussion, they often tend to displace, whether intentionally or inadvertently, the critical or political theory ahead of the films whereby the films become subsumed by the theoretical endeavoring of the critics often personalized and politicized moral crusade. This, ultimately, then, becomes an exercise in metacritical analysis rather than film analysis. On the other hand, the more descriptive and exploratory approaches are enriching for their elucidations of the film imagery. Historical comparisons and definitions of particular film movements are useful to discern the stylistic mechanisms and signifiers that are antecedents of Clark's and Korine's realist aesthetics. However, they often lack a discerning conceptual explanation or elaboration. Finally, while a great deal of the authors discuss issues that skirt around the concept of the grotesque, with some even employing the concept, none engage in a dissection or discussion of the filmmakers or the films in question as aesthetic expressions or instantiations of the grotesque.

My aim is to strike a balance between a literal and conceptual analysis of Clark's and Korine's movies as film art. I suggest that a more close descriptive approach to the films themselves. This entails a shift in emphasis from a more sociologistic critical analysis of the representational content of the films and its ideological and political ramifications to a more descriptive formal and stylistic analysis of the aesthetics and poetics of the films using the prevailing aesthetic concepts that I argue typify Clark's and Korine's films, realism and the grotesque. I believe this will prove a more fruitful endeavor in fully appreciating their creative imaginations and motivations, which I will

demonstrate CHAPTERS 2 and 3 and how those visions are aesthetically realized and manifest, which I will corroborate through a close descriptive analysis of the films in CHAPTERS 5 and 6.

PART II

The grotesque is that which is excessively true and excessively real, not that which is arbitrary false, irreal, and absurd.

(Thomas Mann, 1918: 158)

INTRODUCTION

The following two chapters aim to accomplish two things. Firstly, they will provide a descriptive synopsis of the core films to be discussed throughout the thesis. Secondly, they will provide an analytical engagement with the creative context of these films as espoused by the artists themselves. Special attention will be paid to what their personal visions and intentions are/were for the films they made. This will be achieved by engaging in dialogue, as it were, with a number of interviews or Q&A sessions with the filmmakers whereby they discuss their work, which includes their influences, their inspirations, their aims, their intentions, and how they perceive the realization of their aesthetic imaginations and visions.

The various public pronouncements made by the Larry Clark and Harmony Korine – interviews, Q&A sessions, and public statements – have been sourced from an unofficial Harmony Korine website.[1] The website has information on the various films, artwork, and publications of not only Harmony Korine but also Larry Clark and others

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[1] http://www.harmony-korine.com/news/. The website first came online in 2003 and the proprietors clearly state that "Harmony-Korine.com is not endorsed by nor affiliated with Harmony Korine. We do not have any contact with Korine, nor do we have any advice on how you might contact him" (see: http://www.harmony-korine.com/text/about/). Moreover, several of the originating interviews, especially those from newspapers, were syndicated to regional, and in some cases even other national and international news based publications whether in part or whole, some of which have also been incorporated into more extensive film reviews. This rebuffs pertinent questions of bias or 'preferentiality' towards Clark and Korine. It does give preference to the originating source but it does not seem to have preference nor does it censure less flattering views regarding the content of any of the interviews. What this archive does not include are film reviews of the filmmakers' films.

involved with them such as actors and technical crew; links to various other related and unrelated websites of not only Korine and Clark but also other cast and crew, as well as some other artists and filmmakers; an internet message board forum; and a deeply robust archive of interviews and Q&A sessions with Korine and Clark from a variety of international newspapers, trade journals, magazines, and websites. The vast majority of those interviews and Q&A sessions are also available through the Nexis database.[2]

My selection process includes initially parsing all interviews, Q&A sessions, public statements, and articles that include quotations from the filmmakers from the archive from sources that span from 1995, the year *Kids* was released, up to 2008, which is the cutoff point of the research process and the beginning of the writing process.[3] The next step in my parsing process was to categorize the pronouncements of each respective filmmaker according to the particular film that they were discussing, and if their declarations were not specific to a particular film I classified it according to further categories that I typologically educed from the filmmakers' statements and assertions. Therefore, each filmmaker's legend is either specifically organized according to their statements and assertions in relation to one of their films, or they are organized according to the prevailing themes of the filmmakers' respective pronouncements concerning their aesthetic visions, strategies, interventions within cinema, and even correctives that some interviewers and critics assume them to be doing, on purpose or otherwise that they dispel, or links with other artists or filmmakers in which they reject.

The purpose and significance in organizing and approaching the material in this manner are manifold. The first aim is a pragmatic one. It is one of intelligibility. All of the discussions of the films explored draw from particular scenes, characters, themes and motifs, or textural qualities of a given film's form or style which will inevitably include a certain amount of descriptive synopsis. However, doing this without any context with regards to what the general premise of the films' stories and main characters are poses

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[2] The Nexis database is an electronic database that houses "20,000 news sources, 600 business intelligence sources, 2,500 public records sources and 600 biographical sources" worldwide (see: http://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/products/nexis.page).

[3] There have been a few more interviews added since in which Korine discusses his most recent work titled *Trash Humpers* (U.S.A., 2009).

potential communicational problems. Moreover, it makes the most sense to me to situate the synopsis of the films amongst the filmmakers' own pronouncements regarding their creative intentions and expressions.

The second aim provides a useful point of entry for exploring and examining the central tenets of this thesis regarding the ways in which these filmmakers employ particular aesthetic strategies indicative of both the grotesque and realism. In so doing, the filmmakers themselves remain as one of the central producers of intended meaning and affect, with that meaning and affect being shaped by both aesthetics of the grotesque as well as realism, independently and interdependently. This is also salient insofar as while the grotesque is perceptibly manifest in the aesthetic expressions of the grotesque art, according to John Ruskin (one of the first critics to theoretically address the grotesque), the art of the grotesque is a measure of the imagination and attitude of the individual who creates grotesque art. Ruskin argues that grotesque art ultimately emanates from a grotesque temperament or "conditions of mind"[4], positing that:

> ...wherever the human mind is healthy and vigorous in all its propositions, great in imagination and emotion no less than intellect, and not overborne by an undue or hardened pre-eminence of the mere reasoning faculties, there the grotesque will exist in full energy. And, accordingly, I believe that there is no test of greatness in periods, nations, or men more sure than the development among or in them, of a noble grotesque; and no test of comparative smallness or limitation, of one kind or another, more sure than the absence of grotesque invention, or incapability of understanding it.[5]

So, for Ruskin, while the grotesque is ultimately observed in the material aesthetic expressions of the art objects themselves, the source of the grotesque ultimately emanates from the mentality, that is, the temperament, attitude, and disposition of the artist. Indeed the grotesque is more than just an aesthetic style; it is an aesthetic expression that is indicative of a particular disposition and even worldview of the artist.

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[4] Ibid. Ruskin delineates both the playful and fearful conditions of mind by breaking them down into further typologies. He differentiates the playful condition of mind by breaking it down into four mentalities: "those who play wisely", "those who play necessarily", "those who play inordinately", and "those who do not play at all" (ibid., 127-135). Similarly, he differentiates the fearful condition of mind by breaking it down into three mentalities: "predetermined or involuntary apathy", unmitigated "mockery" or "satire", and "diseased and ungoverned imaginativeness" (ibid.).
[5] Ibid.

Whereas conventional auteur theory tends to conceptualize the author as "a verifiable signature on the text…and some common traits of theme, form, and/or style", I borrow from David Bordwell's approach in exploring the oeuvre of Carl-Theodor Dreyer in which he adapts and incorporates the Formalist literary theory of Boris Tomashevsky's concept of the "biographical legend", which he then recasts as an authorial legend.[6] Tomashevsky declares that:

> Indeed, in the works themselves the juxtaposition of the texts and author's biography plays a structural role. The literary work plays on the potential reality of the author's subjective outpourings and confessions. Thus the biography that is useful to the literary historian is not the author's curriculum vitae or the investigator's account of his life. What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a *literary fact*.[7]

Tomashevsky distinguishes between "authors with biographies" and "authors without biographies".[8] Authors without biographies refer to films whose directors are generally unknown to the majority of their audiences. Film historians, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, suggest that the anonymity of authors without biographies is such that, "[t]heir names signify nothing beyond the credit line at the beginning of their films; they have no persona outside of their films. Knowledge of the directors of this category has no consequence in the "decoding" of their work.[9] On the other hand, Allen and Gomery suggest that authors with biographies refer to filmmakers who are recognized beyond their name in the credit line. Their work is contextualized through public pronouncements made about themselves and their artistic practices – philosophies, methods and techniques for working, and motivations – according to interviews, publicists, testimony of others, and personal memoirs.[10]

Tomashevsky's concept provides an empirical, agent-grounded framework to theoretically address authorship that extends beyond the purely textual and textural qualities of the films, one that includes other "historical forces" involving the

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[6] David Bordwell, The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer (Berkeley an Los Angeles: U of California P, 1981. 4, 9-24).

[7] Boris Tomashevsky, "Literature and Biography" (Eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. *Readings in Russian Poetics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1923/1971. 55). Emphasis in original.

[8] Ibid., 47-55.

[9] Allen and Gomery, 88.

[10] Op. Cit., Tomashevsky 47-55.

intentional acts of the film artist.[11] The "memoir literature" produced by the artist or as a consequence of discussions with the artist that provides any insights into contexts of their creative processes[12] and whether their "production practices" or their "aesthetic pronouncements" can provide useful insights into the constructional properties of their film art.[13] While Bordwell is equally interested in Dreyer's social and economic conditions and restrictions throughout his career as well as his aesthetic pronouncements and vision, I am almost entirely concerned with the aesthetic vision in relation to the films of Clark and Korine, particularly their respective aesthetics of the grotesque and realism. Notions of conventional industry standards and practices implicitly shape my explorations of these filmmakers and their films, but they remain peripheral and secondary to what is ultimately an aesthetic focus.

As Bordwell explicates, what is significant to art history or an aesthetic history of the artist, similar to more conventional accounts of auteur theory, is not the life histories of the artists themselves, but the distinguishing aesthetic signatures that come to be associated or identified with the artists.[14] So what is important is not Ford but the Fordian, not Hitchcock but the Hitchcockian, not Dreyer but the Dreyerian; and in the case of my study, the Clarkian and the Korinian. Bordwell and Allen and Gomery observe how the various articulations and disclosures of a filmmaker with a biographical legend are "inscribed in their films" through "stylistic flourishes" and thematic motifs. Moreover, Bordwell expands:

> The biographical legend may justify production decisions and even create a spontaneous theory of the artist's practice. More important, the biographical legend is a way in which authorship significantly shapes our perception of the work. Created by the filmmaker and other forces (the press, cinephiles), the biographical legend can determine how we "should" read the films and the career.[15]

Bordwell further explains that a filmmaker's authorial legend can influence how a

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[11] Op. Cit., Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* 4.
[12] Op. Cit., Tomashevsky 55.
[13] Op. Cit., Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer*.
[14] Allen and Gomery, 89.
[15] Ibid., 9.

spectator engages with a film even before the films are encountered.[16] The authorial legend provides an "important historical background" for viewing their films and how their films should be perceived and interpreted. In other words, the *biographical legend* can "condition" the *horizon of expectations* regarding the reception of a film and how it should be comprehended.[17] Such an approach also supplements future analysis which both implicitly and explicitly advances more classical approaches to authorship where the filmmakers' personal visions and styles are seen to be inscribed into the films themselves.

Furthermore, by combining the analysis output of a *biographical legend* with the analysis output of the *horizon of expectations* opens up another dimension of art historical enquiry, one that traces the dynamic historical relationship of a "tradition". Bordwell adopts the insights of another Formalist literary theorist, Yuri Tynianov, who contends that:

> When people talk about "literary tradition" or "succession"…they usually imagine a kind of straight line joining a younger representative of a given branch with an older one. As it happens, though, things are much more complex than that. It is not a matter of continuing on a straight line, but rather one of setting out and pushing off from a given point – a struggle…Each instance of literary succession is first and foremost a struggle involving a destruction of the old unity and a new construction out of the old elements.[18]

Bordwell elaborates that the authorial legend "seeks to clear a space for itself, and in so doing it must dislodge, rearrange, and contest certain dominant models."[19] Following this logic, Tomashevsky's concept of biographical legend provides a theoretical framework for historically and genealogically situating the films of Clark and Korine amongst various past aesthetic traditions and movements of the grotesque and realism in art, literature, as well as other domains of aestheticized popular culture, but primarily film.

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Allen and Gomery, 89.
[18] Tynianov quoted from: Op. Cit. Bordwell, The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer 9.
[19] Ibid.

At the very least, the biographical legend is a heuristic device that provides a tester of sorts that redresses the balance between the extremes of art as being creative realization deriving from the imagination of a cognitive and cognizant agent and the intentional fallacy whereby the intended expressions of an artist are not always realized within their work; consequently, this is not always a trustworthy measure of meaning or significance which is why they require corroboration through a supplementary film analysis. The biographical or authorial legends of these filmmakers reinforce the empirical foundations of my conceptually led explorations and analysis of Clark's and Korine's films as being shaped by realist and grotesque by demonstrating that analytical and critical contexts that motivate this study are not merely conjured by my own subjective fancies as a critic, but are notions that are circulating around these films according to the filmmakers own pronouncements and admissions. They are also qualities that are persistently attributed or enquired about by other critics or interviewers, even if they are sometimes implicitly posed in indirect ways.

CHAPTER 2
ON LARRY CLARK
ON
HIS GROTESQUE OEUVRE

<u>**ON LARRY CLARK**</u>

Prior to his first release, Larry Clark had already established himself in the photography world. His first published work, a book entitled *Tulsa* (1971), was a series of photographs shot in his hometown of the same name between 1963 and 1971. The photographs are gritty documentations of the seedy Tulsa underbelly of drug taking and addiction, prostitution, gunplay, and teenage pregnancy. He followed this with *Teenage Lust* (1983), a series of photographs that show adolescents and young adults in sexual scenarios. It too is shot in a gritty documentary style. His photographs sustain a photographic tradition popularized by Diane Arbus regarding the documentation of "deviant and marginal people…whose normality seems ugly or surreal."[1] Clark remains an influential figure in the world of photography, inspiring the works of photographers such as Nan Goldin and Corinne Day.[2] Curiously, because of his work in photography, Clark's influence on American cinema long predates his first film. *Tulsa* has been credited by Martin Scorsese for inspiring his chronicle of the seedy underbelly of New York City through the eyes of an unstable and megalomaniacal

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[1] Sass, Louis A. "'Hyped on Clarity': Diane Arbus and the Postmodern Condition" (*Raritan* 25.1. Summer 2005. 1-37).

[2] "The Man Who Gives Parents Nightmares" (David Eimer. *The Evening Standard*. 28 February 2002) and "The Kid Stays in the Picture" (Sean O'Hagen. *The Observer*. 17 February 2008).

Vietnam vet in *Taxi Driver* (U.S.A., 1976), and also by Francis Ford Coppola for inspiring his film about a young gang leader in a decaying industrial town who strives to fill the boots of his dead older brother in *Rumble Fish* (U.S.A., 1983). Clark, himself, attributes his influences to multiple sources. Cinematically, he mentions the films of John Cassavetes, especially *Shadows* (U.S.A., 1959), and the British filmmaker Alan Clarke, who made several social realist films rendering some of the darker corridors of British society in films such as *Scum* (U.K., 1977), *Made in Britain* (U.K., 1982), and *The Firm* (U.K., 1989). In photography, documentary photographer Robert Frank, who is most noted for his series *The America*ns taken throughout the 1950s and published in 1959, which explores and surveys the disenfranchised, the disillusioned, the underrepresented, and the oppressed, and the downtrodden in American society; those whom The American Dream have evaded. He also credits the stand-up comic and social satirist Lenny Bruce in terms of his aesthetic attitude, that is to say his willingness to use his art to "cut through the bullshit" and hypocrisies of society in order to show the "truth".[3]

Clark was himself an intravenous amphetamine addict for three years in his hometown of Tulsa. However, he managed to escape the mire of Tulsa after attending art school in Wisconsin before moving to New York. Shortly thereafter he was drafted into the army and was deployed to Vietnam. Upon his return from overseas, Clark returned to his hometown and revived what he started prior to his departure, which would be the documentation of his friends and acquaintances who never escaped the dark underbelly of Tulsa, a period during which Clark also plunged back into his own drug addiction. When asked whether his photography is exploitative and voyeuristic, Clark consistently insists that he was a participant amongst friends in the activities that he was documenting.[4] This is evidenced by Clark's own criminal record. In 1976 Clark was convicted of assault and battery and imprisoned for nineteen months after he shot another man in the arm over a card game while high on amphetamines. Clark describes the event in a postscript to his second photography

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[3] "Larry Clark Interview" (*6degrees*. July 1999) and "Larry Clark Interview" (Raphaël Cuir. *Art Press*. August 2007).
[4] "Lust and Liberty" (Tulsa Kinney. *L.A. Weekly*. 30 November 2001) and Op. Cit., O'Hagen.

book, *Teenage Lust* (1983), in which he was asked whether he likes to fight by the other man involved in the altercation, in which he claims to have responded, "I don't mind", at which point his girlfriend handed him a .22 Ruger pistol. Clark recalls how:

> …she gave me the pistol. I held it on them, and then I pistol whipped the main guy. I pistol whipped him across the house and he fell into the bathroom and fell on the shitter. And I shot him. In the arm. I just went…I could have just as well gone through his head. So the other guys split.[5]

Another time, Clark stabbed another man who he said "was talking when he should have been listening", just missing his liver.[6] Clark reminisces about this period in his life: "It was just far-out stuff, crazy stuff. I had a girlfriend who was a prostitute. We had a racket together. We'd go around Oklahoma to doctors. Crooked doctors. She'd go in and give them a blow job and they'd write us some prescriptions."[7] This very scenario is reflected, almost verbatim, in Clark's second feature, *Another Day in Paradise* (U.S.A., 1998). The film is adapted from the novel by Eddie Little with the same title published a year prior than the film. However, the film also contains scenes that are loose autobiographical accounts of Clark's life during this period. Intriguingly, the film is Clark's most conventional and commercial production to date and includes James Woods and Melanie Griffith amongst its cast. The life experiences disclosed by Clark are more vividly expressed in his more graphic and verité inflected productions – *Kids*, *Ken Park*, and to a much lesser extent, *Bully*.

KIDS

Twelve years after Clark published *Teenage Lust,* Clark made his directorial debut with *Kids*. It is the first of two collaborations (perhaps more accurately, one and a half collaborations) with Harmony Korine, who was approached by Clark to write the script in 1993, who was only 18 years old at the time. The film was made on a budget of approximately $1.5 million and was shot entirely on location in New York

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[5] "Hide Your Children" (Stephen Lemons. salon.com. 20 July 2001) and "The Kids Are All Wrong" (Joanna Pitman. *The Times*. 29 November 2005).
[6] "Larry's Kids" (David Reeves & Shari Roman. *The Face*. October 2002).
[7] Op. Cit., O'Hagen.

City over a six week period during the summer of 1994. The film was produced by Shining Excalibur Pictures, a subsidiary of Miramax, which was purposely formed in order to produce and distribute *Kids* after the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) gave the film an NC-17 rating. Miramax, itself a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company, prohibits the release of any films assigned an NC-17 rating. Subsequently, the then heads of Miramax, Bob and Harvey Weinstein, formed the independent distribution company, Shining Excalibur Pictures, solely for this one-off film to circumvent the self-imposed public relations based embargo of The Walt Disney Company. The film was premiered at Cannes Film Festival in 1995 and obtained general theatrical release two months later in July.[8]

Kids is a verité-direct cinema-reportage style film structured by a multiform narrative which is anchored by two narrative plotlines of characters who share the same circle of friends and acquaintances that eventually converge at the end. The film is an exposé of New York adolescent teens and their activities during a single day and night. The first main narrative strand follows the exploits of two friends, Casper (Justin Pearce) and Telly (Leo Fitzpatrick). Casper is a 'skate rat' who seems to be interested in consuming any mind altering substance that he can, while Telly is sexually obsessed with deflowering virgin girls around his age and younger. The second anchoring narrative strand follows Jennie (Chloë Sevigny) who had unprotected sex with Telly, her only sexual partner. Upon getting tested for STDs at a clinic with her sexually promiscuous friend, Ruby (Rosario Dawson), Jennie finds out that she has tested positive for HIV, while Ruby tests negative for all STDs. From this point, Jennie sets out in search of Telly across New York checking all of their mutually common haunts to give him the news. Throughout both narrative strands, we are regularly introduced to a variety of other adolescent teens and kids while they do various drugs, drink, hang about on a stoop, raiding a local indoor pool after hours, skateboard, rap, fight, have sex, demonstrate how to roll a blunt, snog while high on MDMA at a rave, or just explicitly talk about these activities in graphic and sometimes vulgar detail.

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[8] *Kids* was nominated for the 'Golden Palm' at Cannes. It also won an 'Independent Spirit Award' for best debut performance and was nominated for three others (See: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0113540/awards).

However, all of the encounters are motivated by Caspar and Telly's meandering wandering and leisurely search for drugs and sex, and Jennie's more purposeful search for Telly.

Clark explains *Kids* is his attempt to make the great American teenage movie that was never made, but has regularly been promised. His intention was to make a teenage film made by someone who knows what is going on in the scene and one that actually showed teenagers and kids rather than adults dressed down as teenagers,[9] one that is motivated by uncompromising "realism" and "truth".[10] The initial inspiration, the catalyst that lit the fuse, for Clark to make *Kids* came from people calling him up and telling him about Gus Van Sant's film, *Drugstore Cowboy* (U.S.A., 1989), a film that follows Bob (Matt Dillon), a young drug addict who robs drugstores in Oregon in order to feed his drug habit. He recalls how indignant he was towards the film and the enmity he felt for, what he believed to be, an encroachment of his territory in terms of content and subject matter.[11] Clark's earlier work in photography inspired the interior settings of the houses in *Drugstore Cowboy*, according to Van Sant, who somewhat ironically ended up being the executive producer of *Kids*.[12] However, it would be another three to six years before Clark's indignation and enmity would lead to a creative response in the form of *Kids*.

> When I would go to the park, they would be giving out these condoms and all the kids had them and they were always talking about safe sex and condoms…I find out no one is using condoms…Back in '92, when they were having the rave scene, these 14- and 15-year-old girls were coming from uptown, they were from richer families, and they'd go to these raves and take acid and mushrooms and stay out all weekend. And they'd plan these cover stories so their parents would think they were at a slumber party.[13]

However, the majority of the kids were not using condoms them even though

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[9] "Babes in the Hood" (Paul Schrader. *ArtForum*. May 1995), "The Truth about *Kids*" (Jack Mathews. *Newsday*. 18 July 1995), "Think You Had a Bad Adolescence?" (Trip Gabriel. *The New York Times.* 26 July 1995), "Larry Clark Interview" (Michael Cohen. *Art Commotion*. 1996).

[10] Ibid., Schrader and "Larry Clark, Shockmaker" (Gus Van Sant. *Interview*. July 1995).

[11] Ibid., "Larry Clark, Shockmaker"; Op. Cit., Gabriel; and Op. Cit., Cuir.

[12] Ibid., "Larry Clark, Shockmaker".

[13] "Skating the Edge with *Kids*" (Amy Taubin. *Village Voice*. 1995).

they would tell adults that they did. Clark recalls how one boy told him, "I practice safe sex, I only fuck virgins," telling how he witnessed this kid scheme and "deflower a couple of virgins" through a concerted charm offensive.[14] This provided Clark with the plot hook for *Kids* in which a girl contracts AIDS after only one sexual encounter, but that encounter was with an incautious and sexually promiscuous partner.[15]

These anecdotes and stories form the locus of the plot of teenage skater culture in New York City. Clark affirms that while the film has very little skating in it that it is a "skateboard film".[16] Clark seems to classify it as a skater film because the behavior depicted throughout is demonstrative of New York skaters from this period in the 1990s. When asked if he would describe *Kids* as a "rites of passage" movie, he responded, "Yes. And a very heavy one at that."[17] Reiterating his realist motivations, he explains that all of the scenarios in the film were true because he witnessed them and that he just wanted to show the lives and lifestyles of those involved.[18]

BULLY

After the relative success of *Kids*, Clark was approached to adapt the Edward Little novel, *Another Day in Paradise*. This would be one of two of Clark's more formally conventional films to date, the remake of *Teenage Caveman* being the other. However, it is his third film, *Bully*, that belongs to his oeuvre of films that are imagined and shaped through an artistic vision that combines both realist and grotesque aesthetic strategies. *Bully* is another adaptation of a book, a true crime book titled, *Bully: A True Story of High School Revenge* (1998) by Jim Schutze, which is itself a dramatization of the Bobby Kent murder, a true real life event. A group of hedonistic suburban teenagers, including Kent's best friend, Martin Puccio, Jr., conspire and

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[14] Op. Cit., Raphaël Cuir.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Op. Cit., *6degrees*.
[18] Op. Cit., Raphaël Cuir.

carry out the murder of Kent because of his manipulative bullying tactics.[19] The film was made on a budget of approximately \$2.25 million which is just under a million more than *Kids* and less than half of what *Another Day in Paradise* cost to make, a relatively cheap independent production in itself! *Bully* was shot on location throughout Broward County Florida, a large suburban part of South Florida, over a twenty-three day period. The film is a co-production, primarily financed by Lions Gate, what is now the largest independent film production company, and Studio Canal, a French based film production company. The film was also coproduced in conjunction

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[19] "For a running narrative of the actual events via news reports of the court case of the events that inspired both the book and the film see: 'Friends' Planned Killing" (*The Miami Herald*. 20 July 1993: Tuesday, 2); "6 Killed a Friend, Florida Cops Say; Motive Eludes Investigators" (*Chicago Sun-Times*. 21 July 21 1993: Section S, 27); "6 Friends' Talk of Revenge May Have Led To Brutal Death" (*The Miami Herald*. July 1993: Section A, 1); "Witness Fled Group Murder Scene" (*The Miami Herald*. 22 July 1993, Section B, 2); "Cops: Report Filed Before Fatal Beating" (*The Miami Herald*. 23 July 1993: 2); "Children of Suburbia, Death of a Pal: What Went Wrong?" (*The Miami Herald*. 25 July 1993: Section N, 1); "Dark Portrayal Emerges of Pair in Rockpit Slaying" (*The Miami Herald*. 29 July 1993: Section A, 1); "Murder Leads Into Youths' Subterranean Suburbia" (*The Associated Press*, 31 July 1993); "Details Make Slaying More Horrifying" (*The Miami Herald*. 1 August 1993: Section N, 1); "Seven Youths Arraigned in Rock-Pit Slaying" (*The Associated Press*. 6 August 1993); "7 Pals Indicted in Execution at Rock Pit Witness Becomes Defendant after Refusing To Testify" (*The Miami Herald*. 6 August 1993: Section A, 1); "Contrite Kent Begged Attackers To Spare His Life" (*The Miami Herald*. 25 August 1993, 1); "Violence Cited as Defense in Murder" (*The Miami Herald*. 1 September 1993: 1); "Suburban Horror" (*The Miami Herald*. 24 October 1993: Section A, 1); "Two More Youths Are Implicated in Kent Murder Case" (*The Miami Herald*. 8 December 1993, 2); "2 Plea Deals Are Offered in Kent Case Penalties too Harsh, Defense Attorneys Say" (*The Miami Herald*. 10 December 1993, 1); "Murder Suspect To Make Deal, Testify Against Co-Defendants" (*The Miami Herald*. 8 February 1994, 1); "Kent Murder Plea Deal Leaves Youth Whistling" (*The Miami Herald*. 9 February 1994: 1); "2nd Plea Deal Made in Kent Slaying" (*The Miami Herald*. 10 February 1994: 1); "2 Charged in Slaying of Friend Make Deals" (*Palm Beach Post*. 10 February 10, 1994: Section A); "2nd Plea Bargain Made in Murder" (The Miami Herald. 11 February 1994: Section B, 1.2); "Trial of Five Accused of Killing Bobby Kent Set To Begin Sept. 8" (*The Miami Herald*. 30 August 1994: 8); Joe Newman, "Slaughter Among Friends? 5 Youths Set To Stand Trial" *(Palm Beach Post*. 6 September 1994: Section A); Amy Driscoll, "Prosecutors Depict Kent's Pal as Ringleader of Murder Plot" (*The Miami Herald*. 8 September 1994: Section B, 2); Amy Driscoll, "Kent Murder Trial: A Tale of Friendship, Loathing" (*The Miami Herald*. 8 September 1994: Section N, 1); Amy Driscoll, "Suspect Charged in Pal's Murder To Testify at Trial" (*The Miami Herald*. 13 September1994: 2); Joe Newman, "Murder Trial Focuses on Action of Victim's Longtime Friend" (*Palm Beach Post*. 13 September 1994: Section A); Amy Driscoll, "Key Witnesses Testify in Kent Murder Case" (*The Miami Herald*. 14 September 1994: 1); Fred Grimm, "Chilling Talk of Death Plot Sends Shivers" (*Miami Herald*, 20 September 1994: 1); Amy Driscoll, "Kent Murder Defendant: I Feared Victim" (*The Miami Herald*. 21 September 1994: 1); Joe Newman, "Man Denies Killing Boyhood Pal" (*Palm Beach Post*. 21 September 1994: Section A); Amy Driscoll, "Pal Guilty of Killing Bobby Kent" (*The Miami Herald*. 22 September 1994: Section A, 1); Amy Driscoll, "Friend Guilty of Slaying Young Man in Weston Rock Pit" (*The Miami Herald*. 22 September 1994: Section B, 2); Joe Newman, "Victim's 'Best Friend' Convicted in Slaying" (*Palm Beach Post*. 22 September 1994: Section A); Ronnie Greene, "Puccio Faces Electric Chair" (*The Miami Herald*. 30 September 1994: Section N, 1); Joe Newman, "Jury Urges Death in Broward Quarry Slaying" (*Palm Beach Post*. 30 September 1994); "Attorney: Gang Leader Lured into Killing Kent" (*The Miami Herald*. 9 November 1994: 2); "Confession Tape Heard at Murder Trial" (*The Miami Herald*. 15 November 1994: 2); "Kaufman Guilty in Kent Murder" (*The Miami Herald*. 17 November 1994: Section N, 1); "Swiftly, Jurors Recommend Life for Kent Killer" (*The Miami Herald*. 2 December 1994).

with a couple of other smaller independent production companies including Muse Productions, Gravity Entertainment, and Blacklist Films. The film premiered at Method Fest in June of 2001[20] and it made its general theatrical release just under a month later while it continued to be exhibited on the festival circuit as well.[21]

Bully has a more conventional, or classical, narrative structure than *Kids*, yet it has more characters that are central to the plot of the film than *Kids* does. And while the film has a more polished and refined look than *Kids*, it retains a verité feel to it, albeit to a lesser degree. It is shot primarily using a mix of steadicam and handheld shots but the majority of the shots are in medium, medium-close-ups, and close-ups that are centrally framed. The film is a lurid and graphic portrayal of the dark underbelly of the Florida suburbs in which a group of hedonistic suburban teens plot and brutally murder one of the people within their circle of friends. Bobby (Nick Stahl) is an adolescent teen bordering on young adult, whose aggressive and deviant behavior borders on the psychotic. He physically brutalizes his supposed best friend, Marty (Brad Renfro), on a regular basis; he has raped a number of the girls within his supposed circle of friends on numerous occasions, including Marty's girlfriend, Lisa (Rachel Miner), and her best friend, Ali (Bijou Phillips).

Bobby's verbal, physical, and sexual abuse entails an extensive list of humiliation, mistreatment, and torture which ranges from barging in on Marty and Lisa having sex only to knock his best friend Marty unconscious and then proceed to rape either Marty or Lisa, or both. It remains ambiguously unclear. Moreover, while Bobby espouses highly charged homophobic rants, he forces Marty to partake in lurid homosexual activities including homoerotic phone sex, marathon viewings of gay hardcore porn. Bobby even makes his own gay hardcore porn recordings while he forces Marty to engage in homosexual acts with him. Bobby's reign of terror is finally

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[20] Method Fest is an independent film festival held in Calabasas, California.

[21] *Bully* was nominated for the 'Golden Lion' at the Venice Film Festival in 2001, but it won the 'Prism Certificate of Merit' at the Prism Awards in 2002 and the 'Bronze Horse' at the Stockholm Film Festival in 2001. One of the members of the cast, Rachel Miner, also won accolades for 'Best Actress' at the Stockholm Film Festival for her portrayal of Lisa Connelly (See: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0242193/awards).

ended after Lisa organizes his murder among her circle of friends. The sloppy and disorganized plan is laid, which ultimately results in an extremely violent and brutal murder. Bobby is repeatedly stabbed, has his throat slit, his head beaten-in with a baseball bat, and his corpse thrown into a canal in which the majority of his remains were eaten by a swarm of crabs. Throughout the film, amidst the plotting and conspiring and eventual execution of the murder, the teens and young adults are graphically shown partaking in illicit acts of sadomasochistic sex and drug taking as they aimlessly drift, sensation-seeking through the urban suburbs.

The film has garnered comparisons to a modern day suburban rendition of William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies* (U.K., 1954). This comparison seems quite apt in terms of the way that it shows the self-serving megalomania of youth when left to their own devices without any form of control or policing. Clark affirms that he is exploring the group-think "mob mentality" of youth culture. Clark elaborates:

> None of these kids would have done this alone. Because each of the kids at one point in time says, "We're not going to do this, we're not actually going to do this, are we?" And then someone in the group would say, "Yes we are," and that would reinforce it in the group.[22]

Clark continues to explain how some of the kids on the fringes of the group did not even know Bobby, yet they nevertheless partook in conspiring and participating in his brutal murder.[23] This provides the impetus for a number of the themes and motifs that recur throughout the film, which includes the youths' loss of innocence, the role of the family and the absence of parental control, and the moral and actual consequences of behavior and action.

The loss of innocence that youth undergo between childhood and adolescence is portrayed through variety of leitmotifs throughout the film, which principally revolve around the sexual, drug addled, and violent activities of the kids involved. When asked by one interviewer about the kids' sexual sophistication – they are shown

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[22] "The Kids Aren't All Right" (Matthew Hays. *The Mirror*. 2001) and "Larry Clark, Moralist in the Florida Suburbs" (Jamie Malanowski. *The New York Times*. 8 July 2001).
[23] Ibid., Hays and "Scary Movie" (Sidney Moody. *Austin Chronicle*. 27 July 2001).

making their own porn movies, using sex toys and nipple clamps, engaging in sadomasochism, having group sex, and even making money through sex – Clark responds by insisting that:

> It's a sign of the times…They're raised with porn, and they have access to it at a very young age. When it's that available, it's not sophisticated because sophistication would mean that only a few kids, the sophisticated ones would know about it. But all these kids grew up with Madonna. Everything is sexualized nowadays.[24]

While some critics would argue that the girls in *Kids* are too sexually precocious to be realistic, Clark believes that *Bully* adheres to his realist mission even more than *Kids* and contends that the story "deals so much with sex and drugs that to make it realistic, I thought that there had to be quite a bit of nudity…If that's what the film is about, you have to show some of it."[25] Clark's attitude towards the kids' copious use of drugs is similar. He refutes the accusation by moral crusaders and critics that he endorses youth drug use, responding by insisting that it is a fact of life, "it's just there…All these kids and drugs. It's just so available in America."[26] So once again, he is adamant that this is merely his attempt to capture the reality of youth behavior without sanitizing it through a gritty realism. He insists that he is in no way "romanticizing" what the kids involved were doing, that he was merely reflecting the reality of the events that transpired shortly before, during, and after the murder of Bobby.[27] The violence is also intricately tied to sex, according to Clark, which is demonstrated across scenes in which violence is either physically realized or being discussed. Clark refers to one scene that captures the link between violence and sex very well. After the murder Lisa and Marty are shown in close-up talking about the murder and whether they will get away with it. Throughout the conversation, the camera slowly pulls back to reveal the two completely naked in an upright position with Lisa riding Marty, having this conversation while almost disinterestedly and lethargically fucking.[28]

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[24] Op. Cit., Kinney.
[25] "Larry Clark's *Bully* Brings Brutal Florida Killing To the Screen" (Rene Rodriguez. *Knight Ridder*. 18 July 2001).
[26] Op. Cit., Kinney.
[27] Op. Cit., Moody.
[28] Op. Cit., Rodriguez.

One of the other key narrative leitmotifs of *Bully* that differs from *Kids* is the way in which the parents are either clueless or deluded regarding what their kids are getting up to rather than being absent. Clark explains that the misguided view of parents that their kids are content and staying out of trouble and harm's way is something that is symptomatic and endemic to the American middle class family. Clark elaborates:

> There's that thing in this country where we just want our kids to be happy, and there's the tendency to avoid confrontation. These kids are in their rooms; the parents are in the den watching T.V. the kids will get up, go make a sandwich, grunt and go back to their rooms, at least the parents know where the kids are. Maybe they don't want to know what's going on in there.[29]

What Clark graphically shows as going on "in there" are illicit sexual acts and copious amounts of drug taking, scenes which he expertly juxtaposes with banal scenes of parents and younger siblings with their eyes hypnotically glued to the television. This head in the sand mentality in which the parents pacify their kids is manifest through a liberal mentality with respect for the kids' privacy reemerges throughout the film. As one interviewer points out, whereas in *Kids* "the parents are almost entirely absent", in *Bully* they are presence throughout but they are completely ineffectual.[30] There is a total disconnect and a lack of communication, intimate involvement, and ultimately, parenting.

Clark argues, like he did with *Kids*, that he is a moral filmmaker and that he believes that *Bully* demonstrates this as well. He reiterates how all actions have consequences. He attempts to capture the dynamics of the tension that the actions and consequences produce; the decision to do something, the enacting of that action, and the fallout and consequences that that decision and act ultimately has. However, Clark is quick to dispel the idea that the parents are entirely to blame; he claims that he did not intend to portray this in his film. Clark insists that it would be "a real oversimplification", but in the same breath he does affirm that "bad parenting

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[29] Op. Cit., Lemons.

[30] Ibid.; "Larry Clark's still not Kidding" (Clarke Speicher. *The Review: University of Delaware*. 7 September 2001); "Larry Clark's Loss of Sexual Innocence" (Travis Crawford. *MovieMaker*. Fall 2001); Op. Cit., Malanowski; and Op. Cit., Rodriguez.

has a lot to do with many problems". Rather than the fault of individual parents, he identifies this as a societal problem that is endemic to the U.S. and the middle class American value system in which kids' happiness is appraised over the instilment of other values.[31] It results in egomaniacal, spoiled, self-centered, amoral, and apathetic kids who are slackers and bore easily. This is what Clark attempts to express and represent in *Bully*, and it also contributes to his consistent aesthetic vision that combines a sense of realism with that of the grotesque.

The visual style of *Bully* differs from *Kids,* as Bully maintains a crisper image than *Kids,* while nevertheless maintaining a distinct realism. Rather than the verité realism of Kids, it is more reminiscent of the British social realist films that Clark cited as an influence above. He even cites Ken Loach's film, *Sweet Sixteen* (U.K./Germany/Spain, 2002) as an inspiration to him for *Bully*.[32] It also maintains a relatively conventional, or classical, narrative structure. And while there is a fairly large number of characters, which have their own subplot trajectories, *Bully* is less a multiform narrative than *Kids* insofar as there is one prevailing and overarching narrative plotline throughout the film that is primarily motivated by Marty and Lisa. The visual impetus for *Bully*, according to Clark, is what he refers to as the "unexpected image".[33] The scene revealing Marty and Lisa having sex while they discuss the murder is indicative of Clark's notion of the unexpected image. Clark insists:

> Look at *Bully* visually. When I started filming those scenes, I said, "You just don't see movies like this." Watch a Hollywood movie and then watch *Bully* – you're not going to find any movie even close to being as visually exciting as *Bully*, and that's the truth of that…It is visually startling. It startled everybody.[34]

This, consequently, Clark explains, caused great difficulty in the making of *Bully* and it caused problems with funding and resistance from the studio that was initially committed to producing it. This was due to a combination of factors which included Clark's own commitment to graphic realism in representing the depraved,

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[31] Ibid., Crawford.
[32] "The Nerve Interview: Larry Clark" (Michael Martin. *Nerve*. 6 September 2006).
[33] "Larry Clark: Genius or Dirty Old Man?" (Stuart Jeffries. *The Guardian*. 4 August 2002) and Ibid.
[34] Ibid., Martin.

illicit, and perverse and the studio's hesitance to broach the subject of unrepentant middle class suburban teen killers after the Columbine massacre that occurred only a few years earlier. *Bully*, according to Clark, is a poignant reflection of the time:

> …it relates to the subject of bullies. *Bully* was supposed to be made a couple years ago, but everyone backed away from it because of Columbine - everyone was afraid of the story. It was very difficult for me to finance this film, because it seemed like nobody wanted me to make it. And now, since we have made the movie, there have been more school shootings and the kids who did the shooting claim it was because they were bullied. Everything in the papers is about bullies. So I think the film addresses a very topical issue, though that's not why I made the movie. It's funny that when you are making work that is issue-oriented, people want to go the other way, when I think it would be interesting to explore these subjects that are impacting the way we're seeing kids in society today.[35]

Yet just a few years after the release of *Bully*, Gus Van Sant released a dramatic adaptation of the events at Columbine with his film, *Elephant* (U.S.A., 2003), and although it was met with a mixture of responses, it did not seem to garner the same moral outrage that *Bully* did.[36] What was especially problematic for the initial financers was the way in which Clark rendered these kids – without an explicit moral barometer that judged them within the film – whose universe revolve around a detached ennui of drug consumption and sex and whose apathy is fuelled by their privilege. So, the financers dropped their interest because of fear of the moral crusades from a government who were already making noises about the violent effects of media and their influence on youth regardless of the fact that the film was based on an actual murder case. So Clark had to seek finance elsewhere, which he did with the assistance of his producer, Don Murphy, the person who was responsible for producing *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, U.S.A., 1994), another film that deal with the violent deviance of disenfranchised sociopaths.[37] But as Clark has consistently and defiantly rebutted, the film is not only topical but also realistic, and ironically, these are the very points that have resulted in his film as being perceived as contentious. Ultimately it is what affirms his aesthetic as one that is typified by both realism and

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[35] Op. Cit., Crawford.
[36] *Elephant* even won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2003.
[37] Op. Cit., Lemons; Op. Cit., Speicher; and Ibid.

the grotesque.

With that being said, it is probably no surprise that *Bully* faced similar problems with the MPAA that *Kids* did. However, rather than accepting what Clark was led to believe would be an NC-17 rating, he instead submitted the film for distribution and exhibition unrated. When he asked what it would take to get an R rating he was told that there is no way he would get it. Similarly, as was the case with *Kids*, Clark again accuses the censors for being hypocritical because it is his realist rendering with which the MPAA have problems. Schutze, the author of the book, even commented on how faithful the film was to his book, asserting that:

> There's a real problem with making movies on true stories…Everything in fiction makes sense and has a reason. Unfortunately in real life, it's not that way…it does exactly what everyone else refused to do, which is to nail the story morally, without preaching."[38]

Moreover, not only did the majority of the scenarios and dialogue of the film come verbatim directly from the book,[39] the book itself is based on news reports, courtroom, interview transcripts, actual statements and testimony of those involved in the case.[40] Clark iterates that while the film exhibits a host of scenes that graphically portray the kids having sex and getting high, all this content is derived from the book, as well as the actual events that led to both the book and the film, and this, according to Clark, is intricately connected to the violence in the film.[41] Nevertheless, in spite of the censors, according to Clark, *Bully* "broke new ground" because the film still played theater chains throughout the U.S., something that an unrated movie had never achieved up to that point.[42]

KEN PARK

Ken Park was written prior to the shooting of *Kids* but was temporarily

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[38] Op. Cit., Rodriguez.
[39] "Aggressive Behavior" (Chuck Stephens. *Filmmaker Magazine*. Summer 2001).
[40] See FOOTNOTE 19.
[41] Op. Cit., Crawford.
[42] Op. Cit., Stephens; Op. Cit., Malanowski; and Ibid.

shelved for a variety reasons, ranging from funding issues to the fallout between Clark and Korine. Like *Bully*, the making of *Ken Park* was met with great resistance. In fact, Clark says that *Ken Park* was supposed to be the first film he made.[43] However, *Ken Park* ended up being his fifth film, which he made in the same year as his teensploitation horror-sci-fi remake of exploitation pioneer Roger Corman's, *Teenage Caveman* (U.S.A., 1958). Clark's remake of *Teenage Caveman* (U.S.A., 2002), a made-for-T.V. movie produced for HBO, is made with the same observable qualities of verisimilitude with which his more realist films are made – explosive moments of latent ultraviolence, graphic nudity, and scenes of sex involving teenagers – but unlike his other more gritty realist films, whose subject matter and content are bound by the limitations of the phenomenal world, *Teenage Caveman* lacks the social extendedness of his other films because of the fantastical subject matter as well as its horror-sci-fi fantasy genre status.

Ken Park marks the reunion and subsequent falling-out between Clark and Korine. Once again, Clark directed the film after drafting in Korine to be the writer of the script. However, the two fell out after Clark made some alterations to the end of the script which Korine opposed. Clark also reportedly had a falling out with co-director and cinematographer Edward Lachman during the making of the film. The film was made over a 40 day period on a budget of $1.3 million which was shot on location in the small inland city of Visalia, California. *Ken Park* faced unrelenting difficulties in getting general theatrical distribution. It premiered at the Telluride Film Festival in the tail end of August 2001. It continued to show solely on the festival circuit for a further six months prior to obtaining its first general theatrical release on the last day of January 2003 in Austria. It was not granted a general theatrical release in the U.S.A. until September 2004, a full two years after the completion of the film.[44] It has yet to even be released at all in the U.K. Even in comparison to *Kids* and *Bully* respectively, the commercial distribution and exhibition of *Ken Park* was low, and it remains his least circulated narrative film. Likewise, it faced similar difficulties finding a distributor

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[43] "Sex on Film: Larry Clark" (Karl Rozemeyer. *Premiere*. April 2008).

[44] Unlike the other films discussed above, *Ken Park* has only been nominated for one award, rather than a multiplicity of awards, which was at the Valladolid International Film Festival (See: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0209077/awards).

for its post-theatrical DVD release, failing to gain an official distributor for release in both the U.S.A. and the U.K. while remaining completely banned in Australia.[45] The majority of copies come from imports shipped from locations such as Hong Kong, Russia, Germany, and the Netherlands.

The film is more visually reminiscent of Clark's and Korine's first collaboration, *Kids*, insofar that it adopts a verité-direct cinema-reportage style and is structured by a multiform narrative that is anchored by four, rather than two, narrative plotlines. The film is named after another adolescent from the area. Ken Park committed suicide after discovering that he had impregnated his girlfriend. Unlike *Kids* where adults are almost entirely absent, much of *Ken Park* focuses on the interpersonal relationships that each of the main characters has with their respective families as well as with each other.

The first narrative strand involves Claude (Stephen Jasso) who is constantly at odds with his father (Wade Andrew Williams) who sees him as a layabout, an underachiever, and suspects that he may be gay. However, in order to keep the peace for the sake of his mollycoddling pregnant mother (Amanda Plummer), Claude tries to remain under the radar and avoid his father at all costs. His father gets more and more confrontational and judgmental throughout until it is finally revealed that he is frustrated by his inability to be close to, let alone understand his son. Eventually, one night, upon coming home from a long night of drinking, he attempts to have sex with his son only to be fought off by a surprised and terrified Claude. The second narrative strand involves Peaches (Tiffany Limos) who lives with her evangelical Christian ex-military widower father. Peaches portrays herself as a good wholesome daughter until she is caught by her father in the midst of sex with her boyfriend when her father returns home early from visiting his dead wife's grave. Her boyfriend succumbs to a vicious beating at the hands of her father. Peaches' punishment is more unusual. She endures a mock wedding to her father, he in a tuxedo and she being forced to wear her dead mother's wedding dress. The third narrative strand involves Shawn (James Bullard). Shawn lives the closest semblance of a conventional suburban

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[45] A screening of the film was even raided by police in New South Wales in Australia in 2003.

life with his single mother (Eddie Daniels) and younger brother (Seth Gray). This is quickly undermined when it becomes clear that Shawn is involved in a sexual relationship with Rhonda (Maeve Quinlan), who is both a married friend of Shawn's mother's, and his own girlfriend's mother. Finally, the fourth narrative strand involves Tate (James Ransone) who lives with his grandpa (Harrison Young) and grandma (Patricia Place). Tate has anger-management issues which teeter into psychotic episodes that eventually get the better of him when he brutally murders his grandparents whom he holds in contempt throughout the film. The plotlines of the individual characters run in parallel showing their existential tribulations, confusion, and angst. The characters eventually converge in a scene at the end which shows the friends enjoying the sanctuary of their friendships as a refuge from their daily worries.

While the script was co-written, at least in part, by Korine, according to Clark, many of the ideas for the various plots of the film were stories written and derived from his diary.[46] That diary was made into a series of photos and published in book form before it was adapted for the screen. Much in the way that *Kids* was adapted from his series *Skaters*, *Ken Park* was adapted from his book of photos, *A Perfect Childhood* (1993), which is a series of images that chronicle the ways in which media and popular culture shapes images and perceptions of youth by drawing from a number of sources ranging from modeling campaigns and advertising to talk shows exploring the dysfunctional and sometimes criminal facets of the teen experience.[47] From this, Clark explores the reciprocal ways in which youth are sexualized and sexualize themselves according to various channels and sites of media representation and the perceptions that they foster. However, a year prior to the shooting of *Ken Park*, wanting to up the ante with his commitment to realism and showing the realities of actual events from the memoirs that he accumulated in his diary, Clark insisted that the approach or attitude of *Ken Park* would reflect the imagery of *Teenage Lust*, in that he decided that he "wasn't going to turn the camera away or shut the door, or shoot

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[46] Op. Cit., Martin.
[47] Op. Cit., Stephens.

from the waist up" when it came to sexual encounters in his films.[48]

While not officially part of a series, *Ken Park* is something of a triangulation of the interactions within his films between kids and adults. *Ken Park* brings together the almost total absence of adults in *Kids* and the ineffectual and deluded parents in *Bully. Ken Park* incorporates the interpersonal relationships that teenagers and adults share, especially within a family dynamic. While *Ken Park* is still primarily orientated from the privileged perspectives of the kids, it does occasionally provide a more nuanced view of the adults which is independent of the kids. Clark elaborates how the film is the unification of things that he has been interested and intrigued by for years, much of which came from either his own experiences as a youth and adolescent or that of his friends and acquaintances. Clark explains that *Ken Park* is not only "filled with things I've been interested in for years", but things and people that are inspired from real life friends and acquaintances of his growing-up.[49] For example, Clark cites the narrative strand involving Claude, which revolves around a "kid who's abused by his father while his mother just plays it off like there's nothing going on" as being inspired by experiences of a friend of his. Within that strand is a scene that shows Claude being molested by his drunken father, something Clark also maintains as happening to a friend of his when he was growing- up.[50] Similarly, the narrative strand involving Peaches, the teenage girl whose widowed father is a religious fanatic, rebels by "fucking all the boys in the neighborhood" is based on a non-rebellious girl Clark knew whose "father was afraid that she was going to go out and sin…and she wasn't even doing nothing, but he would lock her in the closet and beat her with the Bible."[51]

The four narrative strands of the main characters are thematically unified around the emotional alienation that these teens regularly encounter within their nuclear families. Clark remains interested in how kids relate to their peers, but the context of *Ken Park* shifts the attention to the ways in which kids "survive" their home

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Icon: Larry Clark" (Caroline Ryder. *Swindle*. 2006).
[51] Op. Cit., Stephens.

life and their parents through the support of their secondary family, their peers and friends.[52] He explains that the kids in *Ken Park* "aren't being fulfilled by their families – the parents are just using the kids to fulfill their own needs and the kids are getting nothing. But the kids have their friends and that keeps them from committing suicide".[53] The films demonstrate that without that strong support structure, a support structure that Ken Park lacked, suicide is a viable consequence.

The stylistic impetus for *Ken Park* remains that which Clark referred to in his aesthetic proclamations about *Bully*: the unexpected image. He defiantly asserts that, "If you're going to show naked kids fucking, well let's see 'em! I'm a visual fucking artist. I'm always looking for the unexpected action, unexpected comment, the unexpected image. There are unexpected images in those scenes in *Ken Park*."[54] Clark also said that he wanted the film to look like a film that Conrad Hall might have shot in terms of its visual style and texture. Hall was the cinematographer of New Hollywood films such as *Cool Hand Luke* (Rosenberg, U.S.A., 1967), *In Cold Blood* (Brooks, U.S.A., 1967), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, U.S.A., 1969), *Electra Glide in Blue* (Guercio, U.S.A., 1973), and *Marathon Man* (Schlesinger, U.S.A., 1975). All of which incorporate the visual aesthetics of the European New Wave, which itself often takes on the appearance in glimpses of the verité aesthetic that Clark adapted from Wiseman, the Maysles, and Pennebaker in Kids, yet Hall's these films are packaged in a neatly organized classical Hollywood narrative structure. Prior to his death in 2003, Hall was also the cinematographer for more contemporary films, one of which includes *American Beauty* (Mendes, U.S.A., 1999), a film that deals with some of the themes that Clark does, albeit in a far more diluted and subdued fashion. The film is about a middle class married man, Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), who is going through a midlife crisis and in the process develops sexual feelings towards one of his daughter's (Thora Birch) high school friends (Mena Suvari).

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[52] Op. Cit., Schrader and Op. Cit., "Larry Clark, Shockmaker".

[53] "*Time Out New York* with Larry Clark" (Stephen Garrett. *Time Out New York*. 15-21 June 2006) and Op. Cit., Martin.

[54] Ibid., Martin.

<u>**ART AND PORN**</u>

Due to the graphic and explicit imagery of Clark's films, one of the more regular issues that arise from critics and interviewers alike is the assumption that he is some sort of libertine supporter of pornography. However, he insists that he is not that fond of it on an erotic or an aesthetic level. He criticizes it shortcomings:

> …it's so over lit. If I was gonna make a porn I'd at least light the goddamn thing. … Aesthetically I don't like it. I'm not a big fan of porn just because you just see too much. Especially now, you see all the pimples and the reds spots, the razor burns where they've shaved themselves. It's just so unerotic for me, but I guess if you grow up with it, it becomes erotic for these kids.[55]

When asked whether his response is indicative of porn today or porn in general, Clark acknowledges that certain porn films of the seventies, such as Gerard Damiano's *Deep Throat* (U.S.A., 1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (U.S.A., 1973), groundbreaking in their own right, were "more interesting aesthetically" than the pornography of today, which he criticizes further for its excess of extreme close-ups of genitalia at the expense of any other imagery.[56]

Sometimes, Clark is denounced as nothing more than a pornographer, rather than an artist.[57] Indeed *Kids* and *Bully* have also both been inspected by Scotland

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[55] Op. Cit., Rozemeyer.

[56] Ibid.

[57] For critics and reviewers calling Clark a pornographer and his films porn, see: Greg Evans and Todd McCarthy, "Will *Kids* Be Too Hot for Harvey?" (*Variety* 6 February 1995: 1); William Arnold, "Exploitation, Not Art, Is What's Behind *Kids*" (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 28 July 1995: 26); Howie Movshovitz, "Grim, Powerful *Kids* Draws Portrait of Society in Decline" *The Denver Post* 28 July 1995: 07); Michael Janusonis, "These *Kids* Are Not All Right Aids Plays a Leading Role in the Story of Teenagers, Sex and Drugs" (*Providence Journal-Bulletin* 4 August 1995, sec. E: 1); Allan Hall, "Crude, Violent and Not for the Kids; Release of Controversial Film *Kids*." *Daily Mirror* 7 March 1996: 11); "A Touch of British Class" (*Tampa Tribune* 4 May 1996: 14); William Russell, ("New Releases" *The Herald* 16 May 1996: 15); Gary Thompson, "*Paradise* Is More Like a Day in Hell" (*Philadelphia Daily News* 5 February 1999: 61); Peter Howell, "Kids Are Not Alright" (*Toronto Star* 17 August 2001, sec. E: 07); Liam Lacey, "Exploiting the Naked and the Dead" (*The Globe Review* 17 August 2001, sec. R: 3); Marke Andrews "A Disturbing Portrait of Youth" (*The Vancouver Sun* 25 August 2001, sec. E: 10); Jeff Vice, "You Should Run Away from *Bully*" (*Desert News* 21 September 2001, sec. W: 03) and "Movies" (*Desert News* 28 December 2001, sec. W: 01); Hannah Mcgill, "Nothing to Crowe About" (*The Herald* 28 February 2002: 14); Andy Dougan, "Movies in Town" (*Evening Times* 8 March 2002: 28); Leigh Paatsch, "Simply Naked Ambition" (*Herald Sun* 25 July 2002: 107); Liz Jobey, "An Unreliable Messenger?" (*The Evening Standard* 20 September 2002, sec. T: 16; Casey Seiler, "Bright Spots at Placid Forum" (*The Times Union* 20 June 2003, sec. D: 1); David Spaner, "Aisle Seat" (*The Vancouver Province* 29 July 2003, sec. B: 11); Giovanni Fazio, "Kill 'Em All!

Yard's pedophile and pornography unit before gaining release in the U.K. after allegations of kiddie porn. What is more interesting and appropriate to understanding Clark's legend is the way in which he sees his own work broach the boundary distinctions between art and pornography as well as the way in which he distinguishes himself as an artist from a pornographer. Citing the *appropriationist* photography of Richard Prince as evidence, Clark argues that art is in the *intent* and that an artist can take something that is porn and turns it into art.[58] Prince appropriates porn imagery from the 1980s and recontextualizes it through collage or re-photographing existing photographs by modifying the content in some slight way, but the resultant outcome produces drastic results. Referring to his own work, specifically his series of photographs and his first and third film, *Kids* and *Bully*, Clark defiantly contends that his work is not porn because of its reality status:

> …it's not porn because it's documentary. It's real things happening; it's not set up. I mean why can't you photograph everything real about life? Why can't you photograph intimate moments? People say, 'Oh no, I can't take a picture of that.' Why can't you? People photograph your first communion, why can't you photograph your first blowjob? It's part of life. That's why it's not porn.[59]

Clark's self-attributed realist impulse is conferred upon his work by me and others.[60] Clark regards himself as a social commentator. He ardently points out:

> When I did Tulsa, people thought that drugs couldn't be happening with crew-cut kids in Oklahoma, Look now! Meth is the scourge of the Southwest! And when *Kids* came out, they said it was all about Larry, that it was the fantasies of an old man. Then suddenly the news was filled with school shootings, sex, AIDS – all the headlines were what you saw in the movie.[61]

Well, at Least the Filmmakers" (*The Japan Times* 8 October 2003); Barry Ronge, "Festive Fare" (*Sunday Times* 21 December 2003: 18); and Liz Nichols, "Dreary Sex, Pointless Promiscuity - Ho-Hum: Amoral Generation in a World of Its Own" (*The Edmonton Journal* 25 June 2004, sec. E: 2).

[58] Op. Cit., Rozemeyer.
[59] Op. Cit., Kinney.
[60] See: Jay McRoy, "Italian Neo-Realist Influences" (*New Punk Cinema* Ed. Nicholas Rombes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. 39-55); Geoff King, *American Independent Film* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2005); and to a lesser extent, Kathleen Sweeney, "Maiden USA: Representing Teenage Girls in the '90s" (*Afterimage* 26.4: January-February 1999, 10-13).
[61] "The Cheerful Transgressive" (David Amsden. *New York Magazine*. 30 March 2005).

Clark seems to stop just short of attributing himself as a visionary who is merely acting as a conduit of what already exists in the world but is ignored, disregarded, or swept under the carpet. What is more, Clark regards himself as a moralist, something that he admits even gets a chuckle from his friends, but he insists that his work conveys the consequences of the actions of his characters and subjects. Clark is adamant that:

> ...there's a moral center to all the films. I think: consequences, you know? Since the *Tulsa* book, I've been called many, many names, "pornographer," "child pornographer," "garbage," "trash," "he's romanticizing drugs," and on and on and on... But there is a moral center to all the work and the moral center is consequences. Consequences for everything that we do, and that's just a fact.[62]

While he freely acknowledges that some of the content of his subject matter may titillate, he insists, "that's not the point. The point is the consequences."[63] He adds: "If it's titillating? Well, sometimes I'm dealing with good-looking people having sex, sure, but that's not the point. It's the consequences".[64] Indeed it is the perceived consequences of his content and the rendering of his subject matter that contributes to Clark's aesthetic as both realist and grotesque. The grotesque in Clark's work emerges at the intersection of the taboo and the forbidden demonstrated through a graphic portrayal of that subject matter, subject matter, which as a whole, still tends to be restricted or restrained in its representation in most renderings when shown in popular narrative cinema.

OBSESSION WITH YOUTH

The debate surrounding art and porn and art and exploitation with Clark's work is based on his explicit and often seedy depictions of adolescence, but Clark insists that his oeuvre, photographic and filmic, are expressions of innocence lost.[65] He extrapolates by explaining how our teenage years are that time in our lives in which

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[62] Op. Cit., Cuir.

[63] Op. Cit., Amsden.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Op. Cit., *6degrees* and "Larry Clark Interview" (James Mottram. *BBC*. 18 February 2002).

we are in the process of maturing en route to adulthood but ultimately we are still kids, yet this period in our lives is fundamental to the rest of our lives.[66] Clark expands on how his fascination with youth derives from his own childhood, growing-up in Tulsa. Clark reminisces with a story that has stuck with him which gives an indication of how the experiences and dynamics of youth have contributed to his aesthetic vision:

> When I was in junior high school, I knew this girl who had five brothers, and they were all fucking her, so probably her father was too. It was never talked about, but everybody knew about it. Parents were drug addicts, alcoholics. Kids would come to school with blinded eyes because the parents beat them up. This wasn't unusual in the '50s and was kind of out in the open. I remember one father used to beat up his kid in the front yard in public. The kid actually later became a cop, so look out for this kid, he's got some issues. So I was photographing things that you couldn't see any place else. And I felt back then, I said, "If I could see these images, I wouldn't have to make them." Back then in the '50s, to get laid, there would be a few girls that would fuck everybody and there would be gangbangs, and so on and so forth.[67]

While Clark acknowledges that his films are "filtered" through his past experiences and age, he suggests that the world growing-up when he did in the 1950s and the world growing-up now is not that different at its core in terms of the sex and violence. What is different, he suggests, is the complexity of knowledge and understanding that the kids have nowadays in comparison to the past. Clark suggests that, "From a very early age, these kids know and see everything, and it's interesting to me to see how they process that."[68] Clark extrapolates further about his fascination with generational differences of the youth experience. He explains: "I find it fascinating how we all grow up in these different environments and how we survive. I grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and even though I was a child of the 1950s, I was taking drugs back then. It was such a secret world".[69] He further articulates the importance of youth and how youth shapes his art:

> …I think [youth's] a real important time of our life when things that

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[66] Op. Cit., Garrett.
[67] Op. Cit., Martin.
[68] Op. Cit., Lemons; Op. Cit.; and Op. Cit., Speicher.
[69] "Larry Clark's New Kids" (Thomas Logoreci. *GreenCine*. 7 July 2006).

happen to us dictate who we're going to be like as adults. It is this time where I find that kids can be so open and honest, y'know? I'm trying to show the reality of being that age and I'm making a social comment. It's as simple as that. I find it amazing that so many people who make films or do work about kids discount what's really going on...I try to show that.[70]

When posed to him that his oeuvre, both photographic and filmic, seems to have a unifying theme and vision which involves teenagers embarking on some sort of journey, Clark responds by affirming that he is intrigued by "a small, isolated group of people that you don't see otherwise."[71] This is also a source of the grotesque in Clark's work. It is grotesque in the way that Clark provides such graphic portrayals of adolescence, especially his visual focus on their bodies, engaging in acts that are typically associated with adult behavior fosters what Philip Thomson would call a combination of seemingly incompatible or incongruent elements. Both of Clark's acclaimed series of photographs – *Tulsa* and *Teenage Lust* – as well as his films, even those on the periphery or omitted from this study – *Kids*, *Another Day in Paradise*, *Bully*, *Teenage Caveman* (U.S.A., 2002) , *Ken Park*, *Wassup Rockers* (U.S.A., 2005), and *Destricted* (U.S.A../U.K., 2006) – revolve around adolescent and teenage youth and the illicit, perverse, exploitative, sordid, and sometimes sinister, activities that are the focus or object of their obsessions. Clark resolutely asserts that, "Some people seem to think I'm some kind of pervert because I film and photograph kids...but just look at the work. It's real situations. It's about real life. Teenagers have sex, they smoke weed."[72] Nevertheless, such imagery is grotesque not only because it violates standing categories and expectations of youth as well as representations of youth, it also fosters a sense of ambivalence or in some cases dissonance because of the moral incongruity and perceived anomalousness that the imagery elicits.

Clark repeatedly asserts that the contents of his photographs and films portraying youth are "everyday stuff", but "you never see it, it's forbidden to talk about it...Why can't you show everything? Why can't you show this? Why can't you

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[70] Ibid.

[71] "The Tulsa Kid" (Paul McCarthy. *Flash Art*. March-April 2008).

[72] Op. Cit., O'Hagen.

show that?"[73] This sheds some light on Clark's own aesthetic motivations and contributes in establishing what his artistic vision is. Clark states that the content of his work is representative of 'everyday' subject matter. In this Clark reaffirms his affinity with realism. However, he also acknowledges that the content of his work deals with everyday subject matter that is "forbidden". But forbidden by whom? Suffice it to say, the 'whom' are the arbiters of taste and decorum in polite society, the establishment and the moral folkways, mores, and sanctions that they proffer and represent both formally and informally. Although Clark has regularly reiterated that his imagery is not primarily, let alone solely, intended to shock, he does acknowledge that he wants to "mess with people" through his art in that he aims to challenge the comfort zones of his audience.[74] This has been a characteristic of the grotesque throughout its history in art and literature. It jolts its readers and spectators due to a break with conventionalized expectations and patterns of engagement due to content, subject matter, form, and/or style and elicits a strong visceral response that not always, but often, entails a sense of ambivalence. This sense of the taboo and the forbidden is exactly what links Clark's work to the grotesque. As we shall see in sections to follow, this is a shared characteristic between Clark and Korine.

ON CONFRONTING THE AUDIENCE

While Clark dismisses critiques of perversity waged towards him and condemnation for showing gratuitous depictions of youth sex, nudity, and violence, he acknowledges that his work aims to confront and even agitate the comfort zones of the status quo. This is an affective quality that is indicative of grotesque art. Clark confirms, "I don't believe in letting the audience off the hook…You relate to the human experience."[75] Key to Clark's unsettling and confrontational aesthetic (something that is also key to Korine's) is the way in which he sustains ambiguity and generates ambivalence through characters that are not entirely sympathetic or unsympathetic,

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[73] "Larry Clark Interview" (Michael Guillén. twitchfilm.net. 27 June 2006).

[74] "*Kids* Director Larry Clark Lived the Life He Depicts on Screen" (Chris Hewitt. *Knight Ridder*. 31 July 1995).

[75] Op. Cit., Ryder.

which in turn elicits an ambivalent emotional response within the spectator. Clark posits that he conceptualizes his characters to be "like real people" and that in order to humanize them they cannot be one-dimensional. That is, by definition they must retain some ambiguity, they cannot be entirely bad or entirely good.[76] Another confrontational characteristic is the way in which he uses very bleak, tongue-in-cheek, gallows humor in otherwise serious scenarios. This complements his endeavor to represent real life. According to Clark, injecting black humor is a way to keep fidelity to the real ironies of life.[77]

While the contentious issue of sex and nudity amongst his representations of youth culture is pervasive throughout Clark's public pronouncements, what tends to appear less frequently is his artistic viewpoint on violence. Clark's films, while not pervasively violent, have a nascent and volatile violence that is always brewing beneath the surface, exploding only once or twice in most of his films. When asked by one interviewer whether he is in danger of legitimizing violence when he aestheticizes it in such a visually appealing way, Clark responds by saying that:

> I think that regarding the violence that is shown in my films and in the photographs there is always a price to pay for looking at the work. I mean, I'm going to make the audience pay a price for this. I try to get the reality so they pay the price. You see so many films, there's violence everywhere in film, but there is no price to pay. Hundreds of people get killed, thousands of people get killed and it means nothing.[78]

Clark deliberately opposes an approach to violence by volume, portraying it without any real affective resonance. The consequences that Clark speaks of are generally for the viewers of the violence he portrays, not his characters.

Clark cites Sam Peckinpah as being influential to the way he depicts violence.[79] Yet while he may admire Peckinpah, Clark's aesthetic philosophy of confrontation is strongly reminiscent of Eisenstein's montage of collision, which is also a

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[76] Op. Cit., Crawford.
[77] Op. Cit., Hays.
[78] Op. Cit., Cuir.
[79] "Larry Clark Interview" (*indieWire*. 23 June 2006).

confrontational approach to agitating the spectator. Eisenstein's theory and practice, however, is largely construed via the subject matter of his content and the editing techniques that he employs. The confrontation is rhythmically construed by juxtaposing imagery that furnishes the equivalent of a visual polemic. Clark's confrontational approach is largely construed via the texturing of his visual image and the subject matter of his content. Clark offers the viewer no escape, using long takes and sudden revelations of unsettling images made even more unsettling due to his verité realist aesthetic.

ON STYLE AND MODE OF FILMMAKING

Clark's treatment of characters is another dimension of his films that solidifies the presence of the grotesque and realism in his work. As one interviewer points out, he has the knack of "retaining a fondness" for characters that are, on the whole, rather "unsympathetic", if not deplorable.[80] Clark affirms that his characters are "all like real people; they're like us. You have to find a way to make them, human, not all bad or all good."[81] Imbuing his characters with ambivalently conflicting qualities is a characteristic that is indicative throughout Clark's oeuvre (and also Korine's as we will see in the following chapter), and it is one of the major strategies in establishing an aesthetic of the grotesque.

The subject matter is clearly a central component to his philosophy of confrontation, but Clark's films are also distinguished by the way in which he renders the subject matter as content – the devices, techniques, and attitude that he employs to visualize the content. The graphic depiction of the activities, behaviors, and attitudes of his adolescent characters and the world that they inhabit is a detail that is expressed through a dispassionate neutrality, a visual aesthetic of objectivity that attempts to mimic the documentary traditions of direct cinema and cinema verité. As a photographer, Clark regards himself as a documentarian. However, as a

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[80] Op. Cit., Crawford.
[81] Ibid.

filmmaker, he does not; yet he does consider himself a visual anthropologist.[82] Comparing *Tulsa* with *Kids*, Clark explains how *Tulsa* is pure documentary with a somewhat "fictive quality" about it. *Kids* ,on the other hand, is a scripted film that has a documentary feel and texture to it, so much so that "people came out of the film really pissed off thinking it *was* a documentary."[83] He elaborates:

> When I made *Kids*, I turned it around. It was fiction but had a documentary quality to it. In *Tulsa*, I was making friends into movie stars. I was photographing that instant when they were doing what they were doing but the lighting was good. I was making a movie with real people living real lives. I recognized the drama that light and shadow cause and did something with it, when most photographers would have thought it was ugly. A documentary photographer would have made everyone ugly, focusing more on the action than on the people. I was more interested in the people than in the action. My friends could be murdering somebody but I was making sure they looked good doing it.[84]

His claim to be a visual anthropologist would be appropriate if we were to consider his verité style of filmmaking and the gritty depictions of his content as being truly non-fictional documentaries; however, it is incompatible since his films remain synthetically scripted fictions, regardless of the fact that he relies heavily on non-actors and impromptu acting, and real stories. No matter how 'true', poignant, and revealing they may be of the everydayness of various adolescent and youth cultures in contemporary America, his films remain fiction. Nevertheless, the gritty and graphic portrayal of the sinister adolescent underbelly of urban New York paired with his documentary style filmmaking techniques that are reminiscent of direct cinema and cinema verité, elicit a sense of the grotesque and realism simultaneously. The graphic depiction of adolescent youth engaged in various transgressive acts of sex, violence, and degradation is, to adapt and extend Carroll's notion of the grotesque, a violation of the standing concepts and categories of the social and cultural establishment, and the moral incongruity that this proffers elicits an ambivalent sense of unease or consternation coupled with fascination, or in some cases results in an unequivocal sense of astonishment and dissonance. This is intensified through Clark's stylistic

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[82] Op. Cit., Guillén.
[83] Op. Cit., McCarthy. My emphasis
[84] Ibid.

approach, which borrows from various documentary modes which results in a verisimilitude and impression of authenticity that garners the gritty realism which is inextricably convergent with his grotesque content.[85]

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[85] Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today". This is a thread of discussion that remains throughout CHAPTERS 5 and 6, which focuses more on the objective compositional qualities of the films – content, narrative themes, form, and visual style.

CHAPTER 3
ON HARMONY KORINE
ON
HIS GROTESQUE OEUVRE

ON HARMONY KORINE

Of the two filmmakers being discussed, Harmony Korine has the most voracious appetite for consuming high and low culture as well as fine and mass art. In colloquial terms, he is by far the bigger 'culture vulture', at least according to his public pronouncements and interviews. And while he demonstrates an appreciation for a variety of mediums of art and culture, cinema remains his most cherished. Korine discloses:

> For me, cinema was always – and it still is – the greatest art form. It has the potential to do things that no other art form can do. It can go deeper, because it's everything combined – sight, sound, text, anything you want it to be. Just the act of going to movies is a kind of [pauses]... deeply personal act. I've figured out more about myself sitting in theaters than anywhere else.[1]

However, Korine is also an unreliable filmmaker to interview. Earlier in his career, he was known to embellish and answer questions in sometimes quite surreal and ridiculous ways.[2] In other instances, he is downright evasive when it comes to certain questions

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[1] "Imperfect Harmony" (Rob Nelson. *City Pages*. 12 January 2000. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int.html).

[2] "The Quixotic" (Dimitri Ehrlich. *Interview*. 1 February 1997. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/quixotic.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2007); "Highway to Hell" (Laetitia Benat &

regarding the lineage of his aesthetic style and vision. The inconsistency that Korine has publicly demonstrated in interviews is hardly surprising when considering the fact that he was only eighteen when he penned the script for *Kids* and only twenty-four when he made his directorial debut with *Gummo*. His authorial legend charts his own development into adulthood as much as it does his aesthetic vision as a filmmaker. The inconsistencies lessened as Korine got older although some of the evasiveness did not. However, as it turns out, this is partially down to an unshakable shyness, even embarrassment, that Korine seems to have as much as it is down to his irreverently playful idiosyncrasies that he demonstrates when he speaks publicly or is interviewed about his work. Yet even during the more inconsistent years, at his most surreal and outlandish, there were consistently recurring ideas, themes, and influential forces that shared his aesthetic vision. His recent, more straightforward interviews also corroborate those consistencies.

Korine actively resists classification. Even those who positively laud his films, but who compare him and his work with other contemporary American filmmakers are often contested by Korine. Korine espouses a fervent sense of disconnect with the rest of the film world, both industrially, from a practical or technical perspective, as well as artistically, from a perspective of creativity. In relation to *Gummo*, he expounds on this view:

> I have no bond or any kind of relationship to any other filmmakers working, not just in America, but anywhere. I personally don't feel a part of any movement. I don't feel a part of anything. I feel totally removed. In fact, I almost feel that what I'm doing is completely separate. If what I go to the movies for now are movies, I almost feel like *Gummo* is not a movie.[3]

While some of his protestations may come across as the superciliousness of a

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Camille Vivier. *Visionaire*. Summer 1997. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/hell.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2007); "Pure Vision" (Jefferson Hack. *Dazed & Confused*. May 1999. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/vision.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2007); "*Gummo* DVD Interview" (Reid Martin. *Gummo*. 15 November 2000. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/dvdinterview.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2007); and "Digital Babylon Interview" (Shari Roman. *Digital Babylon*. September 2007. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/babylon.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2007).
[3] "Harmony Korine Interview" (Dantek Walczak. *Index Magazine*. 1997).

young artist attempting to distinguish himself *from* rather than *amongst* some of the memorable film artists, it also provides a primer for Korine's creative vision, and as a consequence, some of the general expectations that a spectator can bring to the film.

Intriguingly, if not unexpectedly, Korine regards himself as a mainstream filmmaker, a status that he openly celebrates and aspires to maintain. While it is safe to assume that virtually all critics and reviewers would situate *Gummo* within the broad and eclectic tradition that is Independent American film, Korine rejects this attribution as something of an inaccuracy or a misnomer. He fervently contends: "I don't think there's such a thing. Independent movies – when I hear that term I think all an independent film is a mainstream movie that looks ugly. I don't even know what it is. I think it's all fallacy…I'm totally not independent at all."[4] Korine refuses to be associated or aligned with any sense of film practices or movements that are distinguished wholesale for their alternativeness. Korine Excitedly explains to one interviewer how being an experimental and commercial filmmaker is not mutually exclusive:

> The most subversive thing you can do with this kind of work, the most radical kind of work, is to place it in the most commercial venue…When Godard did *Breathless*, the reason it became influential and changed the cinematic vernacular is that it came out in a commercial context. I only think things change when they're put out to the masses, regardless if somebody dislikes them. The Velvet Underground put out their first album, and almost nobody bought it, but everyone who did started a band that sounded just like them. For me to put it out to as many people as I can get it to is much more subversive than if you're giving it to the same three theatres with the same crowd that always goes to see this kind of film.[5]

Indeed Korine acknowledges and recognizes his own status as an industry-backed filmmaker, even if it is a smaller studio that is a subsidiary of a larger one.[6] Korine further elaborates his disdain for the "indie" – as well as the "art film" and

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[4]   Ibid.; "Complete Harmony" (Daniel Kraus. *Gadfly*. January-February 2000. Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/complete.html); and "The Anti-Dreamer" (Kuriko Sato. *Project A*. 15 January 2001. Retrieved: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/dreamer.html).

[5] "Disharmony" (Ray Pride. *Toronto International Film Festival Webcast*. 1997). Also see: Op. Cit., Hack.

[6] Op. Cit., Walczak.

"alternative" – moniker when he confirms that these labels are now just as formulaic as so-called conventional Hollywood movies when he asserts that: "The idea of independent cinema is like, to me, there's no such thing….What is it alternative to? I mean, I'm not an "independent" director; I make my movies through a studio system. It's just that I'm independent minded, maybe."[7] Korine unreservedly admits that he is financed by a studio, but at the same time he does not collaborate with others – writers or directors – unless he chooses to do so himself, and it is in this sense that he is independent.[8]

After the release of *Gummo* and *julien donkey-boy* respectively, Korine garnered praise from two of cinema's great masters – Werner Herzog and Bernardo Bertolucci – both of whom Korine cites as influential and inspirational in his own cinematic endeavors. He particularly credits Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (Germany, 1970), a film that shows the inmates of a prison asylum, comprised entirely of dwarves, overthrowing their jailers. Their newfound liberty quickly deteriorates into a chaotic anarchy. He also credits Bertolucci's *Luna* (Italy/U.S.A., 1979), a film that shows an American opera singer, Caterina (Jill Clayburgh), taking her teenage son, Joe (Matthew Barry), on tour with her throughout Italy where she discovers that he is a heroin addict. Amidst her desperate attempt to help him get clean, an incestuous relationship ensues. Shortly after the release of *Gummo*, Korine and Herzog fostered a friendship, which has even resulted in Herzog interviewing Korine and taking acting roles in two of Korine's subsequent films.[9]

Across numerous interviews, Harmony Korine has disclosed the fact that he was on Ritalin as a child. One of the side effects was a chemically induced insomnia, resulting in Korine reportedly only getting an hour of sleep at a time each night. Unable

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[7] Op. Cit., "Complete Harmony" and Op. Cit., Sato.

[8] Ibid., Sato.

[9] "Chaos Controlled" (Paul Zimmerman. *Independent Film*. 22 August 1999); "Staying Hungry" (Adam Heimlich. *New York Press*. 29 September 1999); "*Gummo*'s Whammo" (Werner Herzog. *Interview*. November 1999); "Harmony Korine's Guilty Pleasures" (Harmony Korine. *Film Comment*. September 2000); "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95" (Richard Kelley. *The Name of this Book is Dogme 95*. April 2000); "Harmony Korine, Man of Danger" (Tricia Kiley. *IFilm*. 2001); "Sweet Harmony" (Bay Garnett. *Cheap Date*. Spring-Summer 2004); and "Capone with *Mister Lonely* Writer/Director Harmony Korine" (Steve "Capone" Prokopy. *Ain't it Cool News*. 28 May 2008).

to sleep, his parents rented enough videos for him to watch throughout his sleepless nights.[10] He describes his appetite for cinema as "voracious" and "consumptive" and explains how he would watch the entire oeuvre of one filmmaker, and then buy a book on that filmmaker to find out about their influences and motivations, which would then prompt him to watch the films and read books about the people that influenced them.[11] Similarly, he recalls how his father regularly took him to a local cinema which specialized in classics and art cinema around Vanderbilt University in an area of Nashville where Korine grew-up. In this cinema, he was exposed to a veritable cornucopia of cinema and filmmakers that he cites as influences and points of reference in his own work.[12] Korine cites a number of filmmakers as a source of inspiration: Werner Herzog, Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Sam Peckinpah, Clint Eastwood, Lars von Trier, Leos Carax, Claire Denis, Chantal Ackerman, John Cassavetes and Alan Clarke. Furthermore, films that he regularly notes as being of particular influence include: *Los Olvidados* (Buñuel, Mexico, 1950), *The Night of the Hunter* (Laughton, U.S.A., 1955), *Pixote* (Babenco, Brazil, 1981), *The King of Comedy* (Scorsese, U.S.A., 1982), *O.C. and Stiggs* (Altman, U.S.A., 1985), *Christine* (Clarke, U.K., 1987), and *Portrait of a Young Girl* (Akerman, France, 1994).

However, he is quick to dispel the idea that his only influences are derived from cinema and popular culture, distinguishing himself from one of his contemporaries in particular, Quentin Tarantino:

> I'm not a video brat. I don't derive all my inspiration through movies. I get it from a lot of other places too. Quentin Tarantino seems to be too concerned with other films. I mean, about appropriating other movies, like in a blender…there's a void there. Some of the references are flat; just pop culture.[13]

Similarly, he is also quick to criticize sycophancy, derivativeness, pop cannibalism,

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[10] "Skating the Edge with Kids" (Amy Taubin. *Village Voice*. 1995). Available: http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/skating.html. Retrieved: 11 November 2010) and "Without the Work I'd Kill Myself" (Danny Leigh. *The Guardian*. 5 November 1999).

[11] Ibid., Leigh.

[12] Op. Cit., Nelson.

[13] "Harmony Korine Interview" (Roger Ebert. *rogerebert.com*. 4 June 1995).

and the hero-worshipping of canons and canonical figures, asserting that, "[y]ou can be inspired by other movies but not be derivative."[14] He blisteringly, yet insightfully, asserts that:

> …there's a certain group of people - the Sixties-era, auteurist critics - who have a very narrow definition of what cinema is and what it can be. They've been declaring the end of cinema, saying that we've reached a point where we can't do anything else. And I think that's ridiculous…It definitely works both ways: There's a lack of directors making innovative films, but there's also a lack of critics and audiences trying to seek out such films. You know, the Sixties' New Wave came from something: It came from dissatisfaction, an unwillingness to accept the traditional narrative film. The New Wave was almost like an uproar, a kind of revolution in cinema. And now we have a culture dominated by these careerist "independent" filmmakers who aren't any different from studio filmmakers.[15]

Korine alleges, rather hyperbolically, that the arbiters of taste who reinforce the dogmas of what constitutes cinema art have resulted in the situation where "[f]ilm is like a dead art because of people not taking chances".[16] Although this fosters a tension within the aesthetic pronouncements of Korine's authorial legend – he criticizes those here who he endorses elsewhere – what he ultimately urges against is the reductive over- simplification of his aesthetic vision.

On the one hand, Korine cannot bear the exclusiveness and elitism of the institutionally reinforced dogmas of the art world. For example, Korine, contrary to many filmmakers who regard themselves as cinema artistes, believes that entertaining remains a crucial aspect of a film. Korine posits that:

> Entertaining, to me, is what it's all about. We can talk about aesthetics and influence but in the end when I go to see anything all I want is to be entertained in a different way. It could be informative or shocking but I want to be entertained. I don't want to be bored by the bland and generic.[17]

For Korine, intellectual and creative dimensions of a film should not supersede

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Op. Cit., Nelson.
[16] Op. Cit., Pride.
[17] Ibid.

the entertainment factor of the film, creative innovation and entertainment go hand-in- hand. Though entertainment is important, Korine also emphasizes the formal dimensions of filmmaking, and places great importance on authenticity, and the functions and objectives of cinema art. Korine stridently declares that:

> **…**I'm not making movies for the same reasons that most people make films…My life is always 50 percent watching movies and 50 percent living life. Living life is always more interesting than films. I find life is more exciting, because it's limitless. Films can only imitate life. They can only go to a certain point and then life begins. Watching films, I started to realise that they are all starting to seem the same. That they all have the same kind of humor, the same kind of actors, the same kind of characteristics, why is that? And I started to realise that everybody is going to these film schools and these are all people, who, 15 years ago would have gone to doctor's school and now they want to make movies. None of them have any kind of stories to tell. All of their films are about this kind of process, about this generic kind of storytelling. More than anything, the great films are about life…films once had the essence of life to them.[18]

Following his beliefs that instilling films with a sense of humanism is important, Korine regularly cites domains of art and culture outside of film as influences or points of reference, including authors and books such as *Tristram Shandy* (Laurence Sterne, 1759), James Thurber, S.J. Pearlman, and Flannery O'Connor; like Larry Clark, photographers Diane Arbus and Boris Mikhailov; fashion designer, Agnes B; sculptor, Isamu Noguchi; and interior designers, Ray and Charles Eames. He also draws upon some more antiquated modes of entertainment, such as vaudeville and stand-up acts, circus and carnival showmen such as P.T. Barnum, and even tap dancing.

Korine has persistently proclaimed that his artistic oeuvre – that is his paintings, drawings, street performances, writings, as well as his films – are all components of a unified aesthetic vision. He has regularly invoked the same artists as inspiration and points of reference in relation to himself and his own work. Like Isamu Noguchi and Charles and Ray Eames, Korine insists that regardless of the medium he is working with,

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[18] Op. Cit., Hack.

his output is all part of the same aesthetic vision.[19] Korine eruditely and somewhat wittily describes the unified aesthetic vision of the Eames and analogizes it to his own art:

> Charles Eames was most notably an architectural engineer, a furniture designer, a man of scientific theory, but most impressive to me were his films - films about toys, spinning tops, toy towns, toy soldiers, toy trains (most famous of the films were his two short masterpieces *Power of Ten* and *National Aquarium Presentation*). He will be remembered first and foremost as a creator of chairs. He did not give philosophical credence to his own separate and varied modes of creation: in essence, his chairs and his films were one and the same. The content was king, thus creating a 'unified aesthetic' that brought the house down, and allowed him to work free of any self-imposed constraints that most artists suffer. Personally, I have published books of fiction, books of photos, displayed my art in many galleries and in many forms, made recordings of banjo music, written and directed films, composed a symphony using only the same three black keys on the right-hand side of the piano, and, most importantly, I am now trying to revive the tap dance scene by developing an entirely new repertoire of semi-improvised, extremely technical, avant-garde dance structures…And when I am dead, perhaps I, too, will be best remembered for a chair I once built.[20]

For Korine, his aesthetic vision is shaped by the stock that he places in what he calls a poetic truth, a combination of poetic realism and gritty aesthetic realism, and his self-titled notion of "Mistakism", a term he attributes to the expressions of "randomness" and "chaos" that, he feels, creates and educes from the medium that he is working with at the time, all of which are part of the same aesthetic vision.[21]

Similarly, Korine paraphrases Rainer Werner Fassbinder's analogy of his film oeuvre to a house, with his films being equated to components of that house. Korine recalls:

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[19] Op. Cit., Herzog; Ibid., Hack; and "Controversial Filmmaker Comes Home To Nashville" (Bill Friskics-Warren. *The Tennessean*. 15 May 2008).

[20] "Projections: Harmony Korine" (Tod Lippy. *Projections 11: New York Filmmakers on Filmmaking*. 2000).

[21] Op. Cit., Friskics-Warren. Like the Eames' legacy being emblematically reduced to their furniture designs, Korine almost sarcastically forecasts that he too will inevitably be reductively remembered for a single fragment or component of his life's work, referring to his films at the omitted expense of his poetry, video art, and drawings. Of course the irony of this is that Korine was only twenty-seven when making this statement.

> Fassbinder used to say that making movies was like building a house and that some of his movies here like the floorboards, some were like the walls, some were like the chimney, some were like the kitchen and bedroom. The idea was that at the end of his life, he created some [*sic.*] this house that he could live in and that all the films were made for different reasons and at different points in his life. That's something that I always understood and felt would be a good thing.[22]

In short, his oeuvre is the interdependent sum of its parts. While all of Korine's artistic output intricately and holistically contributes to the complete picture that is his oeuvre, each piece of work has an autonomous value in-and-of-itself that is indicative of the time and place that it was produced form a personal expressive standpoint. What stands out again though is his belief in a unifying vision that cohere his entire oeuvre of work.

KIDS REVISITED

Korine penned the script for *Kids* at the tender age of eighteen after encountering Larry Clark in Washington Square Park during Clark's shooting of *Skaters*. While fictional, Korine derived the characters from actual kids and kids' scenarios that he knew. While he does not assume that the kids in his script are representative of all of teenage culture at large, Korine declares that the sort of behavior shown in the film is pervasive across American society – urban, rural, and suburban.[23] In one of his interviews, Korine discloses how he used other films that depicted the seedy underbelly of youth and youth culture from the youths' perspective, which also used proper young people to cast the films – films such as Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* and Babenco's *Pixote* – as influencing his script for *Kids*, which would also influence *Gummo*, his debut film as a director.[24] *Los Olvidados* is a social realist film with surrealist elements that follows the exploits and hardships of a band of poor adolescent boys in an impoverished Mexico City barrio. Korine even adapts one

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[22] "Cosign Interview: Harmony Korine at *Mister Lonely* Screening" (Justin Staple. *cosign.wordpress.com*. 14 July 2008). This idea was originally but not quite as comprehensively articulated by Korine in: Op. Cit., *Hack.*

[23] Op. Cit., Ebert.

[24] "Kodak Lecture Series: Harmony Korine" (Bruce LaBruce. Ryerson University, Canada. 1 April 2005).

scene from *Los Olvidados* where the boys encounter a legless beggar whom they degradingly assault and mug. However, the legless man encountered in *Kids* is treated more sympathetically with the boys giving the legless beggar some change when others on the subway ignore the man. Similarly, *Pixote* is a graphic, gritty, documentary style social realist film that chronicles the illicit activities of pre-adolescent and adolescent street kids in Brazil, which includes petty crimes such as theft, mugging, and the couriering and transportation of drugs to physical abuse and battery and rape to glue-sniffing.

However, the way that the narrative is fueled by what seems to be chance encounters of the key characters is a Cassevetian strategy. Korine acknowledges using Cassavetes as a stylistic point of reference for writing *Kids*; a point of reference that Clark has also cited as being influential in shaping the look of *Kids* (as well as some of his other films). Korine develops this through his main characters who happen upon more peripheral characters as they drift and journey throughout the film. The peripheral characters play a crucial role in developing the overall milieu – the atmosphere, feel, and even mood – of the film. Their marginality as characters are heightened in the way that they function as an extension of the environment and setting. Additionally, the interpersonal exchanges resulting from the various chance encounters is a strategy used for developing character psychologies by demonstrating the way in which the characters interact with their environment and its inhabitants. Korine specifically cites the beginning of Cassavetes' dramedy film, *Minnie and Moskowitz* (U.S.A., 1971), in which an earthy parking garage attendant, Seymour Moskowitz (Seymour Cassel), attempts to woo the romantically disillusioned museum curator, Minnie Moore (Gena Rowlands). The scene that Korine cites shows Moskowitz having what seems to be a bizarre random encounter and conversation with a manic guy who introduces himself as Morgan Morgan (Tim Carey) in a late night café cum bar.[25]

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[25] Carey, himself, is a peripheral and supporting character who has regularly appeared in films such as Kubrick's, *The Killing* (U.S.A., 1956) and *Paths of Glory* (U.S.A., 1957) and even a subsequent Cassavetes film, one cited by Clark as an influence on his visual style, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (U.S.A., 1976), amongst a plethora of other films made between 1950 and 1986.

The above sort of scene is epitomized in *Kids* when Jennie hails a cab after leaving a clinic where she has just been told she has HIV. The cabbie is a wooly cigar-chewing immigrant who chats with Jennie about banal life stories which are coincidentally and unwittingly quite astute bestowals of wisdom. In another exchange, Jennie encounters a colorful character (played by Harmony Korine) in a club that she goes to in search for Telly. This kid, wearing a tee- shirt of the speed metal band Nuclear Assault and bottle cap spectacles that magnify his eyes, speaks as if he is tweaked out on speed. He also has a backpack full of gear, from which he gives Jenny some pills that, unbeknownst to him, enables her to be raped without waking from her drug-ridden stupor. These sorts of random encounters occur periodically throughout *Kids*, but it is something that is developed and proliferates more fully throughout his directorial debut film, *Gummo*. Indeed, as it will be illustrated in subsection to follow, it is the organizing logic of the storyboarding for his directorial debut.

Korine's omnivorous knowledge of a vast array of art and culture is punctuated within the script of *Kids*, which reveals his admiration for other artists in spite of his many contrary declarations towards being associated with them, let alone those whom he is critical of from a consumptive standpoint. The dialogue interchanges that take place during the random Cassavetian encounters demonstrate his extensive knowledge of art and culture. For example, during a Q&A session with Korine moderated by Bruce LaBruce,[26] LaBruce pinpoints a line that Korine himself delivered during his brief cameo appearance in *Kids* as the tweaked out metalhead geek at a rave described above, who, upon greeting Jennie and giving her a potent tranquilizer pill says, "You'll be kissing Leo Gorcey on the chops in heaven" to emphasize the effect and strength that the pill.[27] His reference to Gorcey is apt both in reference and delivery. Referentially, Gorcey was a stage and screen actor known for his portrayal of the urban juvenile delinquent, a portrayal which became the archetypal representation in popular culture after his appearance as one of the "Dead End Kids" in the Broadway stage play *Dead End* (Kingsley, 1935). Once the film was subsequently

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[26] LaBruce is an accomplished independent filmmaker in his own right who was at the forefront of Queer Cinema in the 1980s and still continues to makes films today.
[27] Op. Cit., LaBruce.

adapted to film in 1937 by MGM (directed by William Wyler), Gorcey played Spit, the emblematic leader of the young street punks, a role that he reprised in sequels in which the names of the characters changed but the role remained the same. The role even developed as he got older. Ultimately, he played an adolescent street thug in over twenty films as one of the "East Side Kids" between 1940 and 1945, and again in over forty appearances as an adult street thug as one of the "Bowery Boys" between 1946 and 1956. Korine's delivery of his line is reminiscent of Gorcey's histrionic 1930s stage and screen line delivery, emphatic and hyperbolic. Korine acknowledges *Kids* as an updating of the "Dead End Kids" particularly as they are represented in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Curtiz, U.S.A., 1938).[28] Korine's zingy one-liner could easily be missed by even a fervent spectator. As it will be elucidated in the section to follow, Korine's own art and appreciation of culture is something else that is even more diffusely ensconced and developed in *Gummo*.

From the onset of his involvement with the film industry, Korine explains that shocking audiences or providing some kind of moralistic judgment on the subject matter were never part of his objectives.[29] Korine's stance, which corresponds with Clark's pseudo-verité approach, is to create a scenario that appears to objectively chronicle these kids without the implication of judgment. Early on Korine insisted that one of the problems with modern cinema is that "there's no margin of the undefined", there is nothing left ambiguous, nothing missing that prompts curiosity or elicits any sense of wonderment.[30] Korine does not deny that there is a message to be taken away from the film, he contends that: "if you have any kind of sense you'll take away some kind of message, but if you can't see past the shock, you're not going to get anything."[31]

GUMMO

Two years after the release of *Kids*, Korine made his directorial debut with

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Op. Cit., Ebert.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Gummo, a film which he also wrote. [32] The film was made on a budget of approximately $1.3 million and was shot on location in Nashville, Tennessee over a twenty day period. The film is an Indiewood production that was both produced and distributed by New Line Cinema. At the time, New Line was a subsidiary of Time Warner although it has since been acquired by Warner Brothers. The film made the rounds on the festival circuit before gaining general distribution in October of 1997. [33]

The critical reception of *Gummo* was made up of a plethora of diametrically opposed reviews; some regarded it as a modern masterpiece, some regarded it as incoherent nonsense, whereas others regarded it as degrading and exploitative. [34] *Gummo* vacillates between a conventionally scripted and loosely structured narrative and a documentary film by incorporating methods and materials associated with the documentary mode. The film is about 75% scripted and 25% improvised according to Korine. [35] He explains how the script anchored the film and how the scripted portion of the film was shot in isolation from the rest of the film – the assembled mixed

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[32] *Gummo* won a number of awards and received a number of accolades at various film festivals and was nominated for even more (See: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0119237/awards).

[33] It premiered at the Telluride Film Festival in the late summer of 1997 followed by the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto Film Festival that following autumn amongst others thereafter.

[34] "*Gummo*" (Emanuel Levy. Daily Variety. 4 September 1997), "Bittersweet tales of youth Festival's filmmakers explore young lives of hope, exploitation and vulnerability" (Judy Gerstel. *The Toronto Star*. 7 September 1997. Sec. E, 1), "Where the kids aren't alright" (Simona Chiose. *The Globe and Mail*. 11September 1997. Sec. C, 5), "Director sends twister through children's lives" (Judy Gerstel. *The Toronto Star*. 17 October 1997. Sec. D, 13), "Cats, Grandma and Other Disposables" (Janet Maslin. *The New York Times*. 17 October 1997. Sec. E, 12), "Painful, Inflamed *Gummo*" (Jami Bernard. *Daily News*. 17 October 1997. 52), "Disgust at animal torture film" (Tony Allen-Mills and John Harlow. *The Sunday Times*. 19 October 1997), "OK, so they kill a few cats, shoot an old dear and sniff glue...but hey, that's life" (Jefferson Hack. *The Guardian*. 24 October 1997. 12), "Taking the Children" (Will Joyner. *The New York Times*. 26 October 1997. Sec 2, 30), "Boogie frights" (Chris Darke. *The Independent*. 14 November 1997. 1), "Oh, that Gallic cheek; Why is Les Cahiers Du Cinema not a good substitute for Andrex?" (Jonathan Romney and Richard Willliams. *The Guardian*. 17 November 1997. 12), "Freaky Characters, Moody Scenes Make *Gummo* Oddly Fascinating Cinema Verité" (Rene Rodriguez. Miami Herald. 23 January 1998. Sec. G, 5), "Are these the signs of ill-used youth?" (James Mottram. *The Times*. 15 April 1998), "Slumming among the ugly poor" (Liese Spencer. *The Independent*. 17 April 1998. 8), "New film *Gummo*: No story, no stars, depraved, hideous. Clearly, a work of genius (Geoff Dyer. *The Observer*. 19 April 1998. 8), "Dirty Woody, ego-crazed Harry" (Matthew Sweet. *The* Independent. 19 April 1998. 6), "Reel life turns spotlight on natural born killers" (Des Partridge. *Courier Mail*. 27 July 1998. 19)."*Gummo* a tough, tasty chew" (Jim Schembri. *The Age*. 28 August 1998. 7). "Postcards from the septic" (Jim Schembri. *The Age*. 4 September 1998.14). "A graphical piece of 'Art'" (W. Blake Gray. *The Daily Yomiuri*. 22 October 1998. 8). "Plumbing the bottom of the septic tank" (Giovanni Fazio. *The Japan Times*. 24 October 1998).

[35] "Welcome To My White-Trash Nightmare" (Matthew Hays. *Montreal Mirror*. 12 March 1998) and Op. Cit., Hack.

media footage that he gathered – which was subsequently all organized and arranged during the editing process.[36] Korine explains how the film goes from being highly formal in almost a classical narrative way, referring to the three anchoring narratives strands, to shots that capture incidents that are almost documented by mistake.

Gummo is a multimedia film that is assembled through an integration of verité-style filmmaking coordinated with found footage and still photography which provides a dynamic aesthetic impression of a Reality T.V. show, a home movie, and an experimental art film with moments of a classically structured popular narrative film. Like *Kids*, it is also anchored by a multiform narrative structure but it contains three rather than two narrative plotlines.

The film is set in the post-tornado struck town of Xenia, Ohio in the Midwest of the United States, a town largely populated by Appalachian migrants from the rural bordering towns of southern Ohio and West Virginia. The film revolves around the eccentricities of the mundane and banal daily activities and occurrences of its residents.

The first of the plotlines follows Tummler (Nick Sutton) and Solomon (Jacob Reynolds) two scrappy glam-metal-dressed teens who spend their day sipping milkshakes, huffing glue, and visiting a young prostitute with Down's Syndrome who is pimped out by her brother. This is all done on their downtime when they're not searching for stray cats to brutally kill and sell to the local Chinese restaurant and breaking into the house of their local competitor. The second plotline follows three sisters: Dot (Chloë Sevigny), Helen (Carissa Glucksman), and Darby (Darby Doughtery). The two older sisters, who are similar ages to Solomon and Tummler, are peroxide blondes with shaved eyebrows who spend much of their time gawking at local boys, gossiping about neighbors, trying folk methods for plumping their nipples in the mirror, and searching for their cat with their younger sister. The third plotline follows a character called Bunny Boy (Jacob Sewell), a character without a single speaking part in the film. Bunny Boy wanders the Xenia landscape smoking cigarettes, pissing over a

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[36] "Mike Kelley Interviews Harmony Korine" (Mike Kelley. *FilmMaker*. Fall 1997).

highway overpass, rudimentarily playing an accordion in a toilet stall in a public space, and encountering some dirty little kids partially dressed in cowboy costumes in a junkyard who are screaming creative vulgarities at each other until they focus their obscenities upon Bunny Boy. All the while Bunny Boy is shown wearing nothing but swimming-trunks, dirty white synthetic leather sneakers, and a pair of bunny ears that looks as if it is a detached hood from a coat.

As the film vacillates between these three parallel plotlines, other Xenia residents are juxtaposed via inserts of still photography accompanied by voiceover narration or footage from lower-grade video technology. The verité-style of the anchoring narratives and home movie style of the juxtaposed segments function like exposés of the inhabitants of Xenia. The sequences familiarize us with the main characters' environment and sometimes provide overt links with the main characters' plotlines. The sequences range from a local coke dealer who throws sex parties, an adolescent transvestite who is also Tummler and Solomon's competitor in the cat-hunting business, two twin brothers who are shown bathing each other in a bathtub, and a pre-pubescent girl who is molested by her father. There is even one such sequence of this sort describing Tummler through a number of still photos which is narrated by his cohort Solomon.

Much of this sort of imagery in *Gummo* is an assemblage of photos, film, and video collected by Korine by traversing the neighborhoods of Nashville. Korine says that the mixture of various mediums is intended to have a rationale. It is not his intention for this stylization to be done for style's sake alone, at the expense of the content. The style is motivated by a sense of the incidental and the random in which there was a feeling that a particular shot – whether a polaroid, hi-8, or super-8, or 35mm – was used because that happened to be the best or only available recording device at the disposal of the documenter at the time. From this cornucopia of image formats, Korine wanted to assemble his film to be experienced as a "succession of scenes, images, and sounds" similar to a photo collage indicative of a family photo album.[37] Korine explains how he

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[37] Ibid.

regards "collage as being the mode of the century" and that cinema is the most "conducive" art form to facilitate the "tapestry" of textures that collage proffers.[38]

Korine analogizes his storytelling and storyboarding process to that of a family photo album, which goes hand-in-hand with his visual style and the overall texture of the film. Korine recalls and elucidates:

> I wanted to give everyone around me cameras: super-8 cameras, polaroid cameras, video... 35mm, obviously. Basically I saw it like a book of photos or something, like when you go to someone's house and they show you photographs, like family photos, and there's a picture of like your mom on the toilet or your father (laughing) visiting a statue somewhere or like your dog that's dead, but they're kind of random. So I was thinking there's like a narrative that develops through this, a cohesion, that was the idea of the movie. I just wanted to set things up, just document it, and make sense of it later.[39]

In addition to the stills described above, we are confronted with a continuous set of peripheral characters and stories. Short vignettes include: two meathead jock brothers who spend their time lifting weights and beat each other until bloody, just for laughs; an evening of arm wrestling with rednecks and a black 'dwarf' which ends in the destruction of a kitchen table and chairs in a rage after one redneck loses a match to the 'dwarf'; and three older teens on a porch discussing their time in a juvenile detention facility while emphasizing their bigoted views of blacks.

The film is conceptually, thematically, and scenically orientated around the tornado devastated physical and social space that is Xenia, Ohio, both real and imagined.[40] Furthermore, it is anchored by three narrative strands. Although they drift with loosely defined objectives similar to European art cinema these recurring trajectories nevertheless serve to frame the film, adding to the coherence of the overall

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[38] "*Kids* Writer Still Gritty in Latest Project" (Scott Foundas. *Film Editor*. October 1997).

[39] Op. Cit., LaBruce. Also see Op. Cit., Walczak.

[40] The tornado that ravaged Xenia was part of The Super Outbreak of tornados that occurred throughout thirteen states over a two day period in April 1974. The tornado that hit Xenia was the deadliest and its devastation and trauma is/was long felt. For further information, images, and video of the actual event see: "April 3, 1974: Xenia Tornado" (*The Ohio Historical Society*. Available: http://www.ohiohistory.org/etcetera/exhibits/swio/pages/content/1974_tornado.htm. Retrieved: 08 August 2011).

narrative. While a coherent film, Korine has been accused of being exploitative and shocking for the sake of being shocking, an accusation he has dismissively rebutted:

> I would say that I feel no need to justify what I'm putting out there. Maybe it's unusual because in most movies everything you're seeing, you're seeing for some kind of reason, there's some kind of explanation. And what's done in *Gummo* is that you're seeing these images and I'm not necessarily justifying them. The reason you're seeing these things is because these are all images I wanted to see, these are people I wanted to see, these are all obsessions, maybe personal obsessions – which I think is lacking in cinema today, and even in cinema past. But I think it should be this way, I'd like to create a cinema of passion and obsession...I don't give a fuck. I just want to do whatever I want to do. I don't care about any of it. I don't feel like anyone's being made fun of. I just wanted to see this.[41]

Indeed, similar to Clark, Korine distinctly regards himself as an American artist who makes art about America, and Korine suggests that *Gummo* is snapshot of a particular part of America, Middle America:

> I always felt that Middle America was interesting. Anytime that people do films about America, it's always this kind of romanticized version, something that is just false, and I think it's disgusting. I grew up in Nashville, so I wanted to make a movie with those people I grew up with. I wanted to make the first great American film about America, because I'm an American artist.[42]

And although his film is a representation of the Southwestern town of Xenia in the Midwestern state of Ohio, he uses the surrounding suburbs of his hometown of Nashville in Tennessee to double for Xenia.[43] Korine proclaims: "This is where I grew up. These people are interesting to me, and I'd never seen them represented on screen in a true way." Korine later extrapolates that *Gummo* is "one-hundred percent Southern."[44] And while Xenia is technically part of the Midwest in the U.S., not only is it the gateway to the proper South (Kentucky is only about a forty-five minute drive

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[41] Op. Cit., Walczak.

[42] "A Conversation with Harmony Korine" (Tom Cunha. *indieWire*. 6 October 1997). Also see: "Boy Makes World" (Steve Ramos. *City Beat*. 6 November 1997) and "Forward" (Gus van Sant. *Official Website for Gummo*. 1997).

[43] Anecdotally speaking, being someone who was born and raised in the state of Ohio and who has frequented that particular area of the state on several occasions, I can say that the parallel is rather accurate. However, there are plenty of impoverished and dying semirural towns and suburbs throughout the state, let alone the U.S.A. that could easily double for one another.

[44] Op. Cit., Pride.

southward), it is also where the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains begin. Moreover, places like Xenia are culturally indicative of the Appalachian south even more so than some of the more developed areas of states in the Deep South itself.

Korine, on the one hand, explains how he has attempted to be as original and authentic as possible with *Gummo*, how he wanted the film to "set its own standard" rather than merely quoting and referencing other films.[45] Yet on the other hand, Korine acknowledges several sources of high and popular culture, films and filmmakers included, which inspired his production of *Gummo*. In one interview, when asked of his familiarity, and the subsequent influence of past instantiations of the grotesque tradition, Korine affirms his familiarity with a variety of artists from the grotesque tradition as he simultaneously acknowledges their influence on his own grotesque vision and art, as he pays tribute to the likes of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to the modern and contemporary writings of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor to the photography of Diane Arbus.[46] In another interview, he again cites Godard as a point of reference describing how his approach is most similar to his own. In reference to Godard, he explains how:

> He looks at films in a different way, like a symphony, the way I think films should be made – in layers, with depth. I wanted to experiment, with images coming from all different directions…It's a similar technique, except that I'm not interested in politics.[47]

Also like Clark, Korine also references the gritty social realism of British filmmaker Alan Clarke as a major influence on *Gummo*, namely his BBC television productions of *Scum* (U.K., 1977), the story of a boys borstal, and *Christine* (U.K., 1987), the story of a teenage heroin-addicted girl. Clarke's influence, however, is less formal in terms of the structural organization of the content narratively inasmuch as he is an influence on the type of subject matter and content of *Gummo* as well as the visual texturing and representation of the imagery in terms of its gritty verisimilitude.[48]

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[45] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*.

[46] "Southern Culture on the Skids" (Tom Lyons. *The Eye*. 16 October 1997).

[47] Op. Cit., "Welcome To My White Trash Nightmare".

[48] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelley Interviews Harmony Korine"; Op. Cit., Hack; Op. Cit., LaBruce.

Rather than subscribe to some generic vernacular notion of realism, Korine describes his approach as "poetic realism". Korine manages to shift visual styles without disrupting the sense of realism across those shifts. Explaining his position on realism, Korine notes, "For me as a filmmaker, I only care about realism or the presentation of realism" that which he specifically refers to as a "poetic realism or poetic truth".[49] Similar to the French Impressionists' notion of "photogenié" and the Russian Formalists' notion of "defamiliarization", this seems to echo the idea that the artist's role is to intervene and amplify the everyday reality of that which is purview of his or her content, making anew and refreshing the perceptions of that subject which have been blunted as a result of its routineness or humdrumness.[50] In part, Korine achieves this through the juxtaposition of his many vignettes and his incorporation of various mediums that texture and exhibit his content. He defamiliarizes the mundane and the everyday for the spectator and shows the extraordinariness of the banal that is Xenia. Korine elucidates upon his notion of poetic realism and poetic truth further:

> *Gummo* is like America, even though when people say 'oh it's documentary or it's real,' it's definitely not. There's no such thing as realism in film or there's no such thing as truth. I'm only concerned with the poetry of realism, a supposed realism, and that's what *Gummo* is. That's why it's confusing to certain people. That it has this element. That it's organic. That everything seems like it's really happening but at the same time I'm tricking and I'm manipulating everything. It's made up. I'm genre-fucking, you know?[51]

Similarly, as one interviewer points out to Korine, both Korine and Fellini use non-actors which results in the creation of highly personal, even biographical films, that are also highly stylized in such a way where the odd and unusual behaviors of people are strange without seeming surreal in the magical or fantastical sense that the surreal has come to typify.[52] However, Korine rejects this association. He insists that Fellini is a surrealist, something which Korine denies being himself. Korine contends that, if

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[49] Op. Cit., Foundas. Also see: Op. Cit., Cunha and Ibid., Hack.

[50] See: Richard Abel's anthologized book, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939* [vol. I: 1927-1929.] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and Herbert Eagle's anthologized book, *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications 1981).

[51] Op. Cit., Ramos.

[52] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelley Interviews Harmony Korine".

anything, what he does is "surrealistic realism", in which all that is odd and strange is "presented as if it's 100 percent true".[53] In another interview he clarifies this further by adding that everything that he attempts to show in his films are based on "some kind of truth, even if it's oddly surreal."[54] Korine's realism is a dissonantly infused realism in which the ordinary, everyday, banal subject matter is presented as anathema to the viewer. By achieving a sense of the surreal without taking away from his films' gritty realism and is quite possibly one of the key principal aesthetic strategies which consign his work as being demonstrative of the modern grotesque.

Nevertheless, Korine makes heavy use of non-actors, many of the characters in *Gummo* are either the actual individuals, or based on other individuals, that Korine knew growing-up in Nashville; whereas, some of the characters are products of his imagination that are inspired by *types* of people that he has randomly encountered during his time in Nashville.[55] While the film has four professional actors – which includes Chloë Sevigny, who plays Dot; Jacob Reynolds, who plays Solomon; Linda Manz, an ex-child actor[56] who plays Solomon's mom; and Max Perilich[57] who plays Cole, a guy who pimps his Down's syndrome sister from out of their house – the majority of the film is populated with non-actors.

Korine explains that he finds it more interesting to cast the very people who inspired him to write a script in which his characters are based to play the roles he creates, or more accurately, adapts, rather than actors who may be too disconnected from the pathos of the characters to adequately portray them.[58] Korine contends that non-actors provide something that professional actors never can,

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Op. Cit., "Welcome To My White-Trash Nightmare".

[55] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*; Op. Cit., Herzog; and "Harmony Korine Interview" (Tom Huddleston. *Electric Sheep*. 4 March 2008).

[56] Manz featured as Linda, the affectless woman in a girl's body, in *Days of Heaven* (Malick, U.S.A., 1978), Peewee, the petite, young teenage girlfriend and vicarious leader of the Fordham Baldies gang in *The Wanderers* (Kaufman, U.S.A., 1979) and Cebe, the punk rock kid of an ex-con trucker, in *Out of the Blue* (Hopper, Canada, 1981).

[57] Perlich has previously featured in a number of teen screen films and television programs in the eighties – including *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Hughes, U.S.A., 1986), *The All Nighter* (Hoffs, U.S.A., 1987), *Can't Buy Me Love* (Rash, U.S.A., 1987), *Plain Clothes* (Coolidge, U.S.A., 1988), *Gleaming the Cube* (Clifford, U.S.A., 1989), *Lost Angels* (Clifford, U.S.A., 1989), *Drugstore Cowboy* (Van Sant, U.S.A., 1989), as well as appearing in an episode of *21 Jump Street* (Manners, U.S.A., 1988).

[58] Op. Cit., Foundas.

according to him, a personalized piece of themselves.[59] What Korine is referring to here is the way in which non-actors are more transparent in their performativity. The character and the actor is synonymous. They are one and the same. The actors are doing *what* they would and *how* they would were the camera on them or not; whereas, the professional actor cultivates the roles that they perform as an imagined persona or character which is disassociated from them as a performer.[60]

Following a similar sentiment to his use of non-actors, Korine primarily casts his characters according to their physical attributes – especially their faces and physiognomy – and the "feeling" that they elicit.[61] For *Gummo*, he iterates how he wanted the focal point of the film to be around "people who were amazing looking."[62] Korine describes his method for selecting his cast as being visually and viscerally motivated. He confirms: "It's based on two things, the way someone looks and a feeling they put off. It's not even so much how they read lines."[63] Korine discovered Nick Sutton, the kid who played Tummler, incidentally after watching an episode of *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show*, a daytime talkshow, in which Sutton appeared as a guest in an episode discussing teenage paint sniffers called "My Child Died Sniffing Paint".[64] Korine insists that he knew instantly that he was the person to play his imagined conception of Tummler. Korine also found Jacob Reynolds, one of the few professional actors in the film, who played the character Solomon, in a similar fashion.[65] Korine was drawn to Reynolds' unusually alluring face in a film called *The Road to Wellville* (Parker, U.S.A., 1994), a dramatic adaptation of the life and work of the doctor and nutritionist John Harvey Kellogg. In the film, Reynolds plays a minor role depicting the untamable adopted child of Kellogg, George. In one particular scene, a scene that stands out to Korine, George is shown repeating the demand "meat and potatoes" at the dinner table while banging his knife and fork on the tabletop after being served, once again, some kind of grain-based

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[59] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelley Interviews Harmony Korine" and Op. Cit., Cunha.

[60] Ibid., "Mike Kelley Interviews Harmony Korine".

[61] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo* and Op. Cit., Foundas.

[62] Op. Cit., Herzog.

[63] Op. Cit., Cunha. Also see: Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*; "Kids in America" (Cameron Jamie & Bruce Hainley. *Frieze*. January-February 1998), and Op. Cit., "Welcome To My White-Trash Nightmare".

[64] Op. Cit., Foundas; Op. Cit., Herzog; Op. Cit., LaBruce; and "Harmony Korine Interview" (Billy Chainsaw. *Bizarre*. July 2008).

[65] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo* and Ibid., Herzog.

mush for dinner. Korine enthusiastically confirms: "I knew that any way I photographed him it would be exciting because his face was so amazing."[66]

Possibly more influential than any film on Korine's vision in *Gummo* is his appreciation for vaudeville and carnival. For Korine, these two distinctive domains of culture and entertainment seem coupled. He reminisces of one of his earliest and most memorable encounters with carnivals and carnival folk:

> It goes back to vaudeville. The people I always loved were showmen, show people. When I was little, my dad was making documentaries, and one of the people he made a film about was a guy named Hamper McBee. When they were making that, we would go around to all these carnivals and circuses in Florida, and I spent summers with them when they were following him. And there was an energy to those people, and a strangeness I loved so much. And there was a bizarre chaos to Hamper and some of those carnies there. In some ways, I just always wanted to get back to that.[67]

Similarly, in reference to vaudeville, Korine confirms: "I'm a big fan of vaudeville. That type of entertainment, I love, that real showmanship. That's been a big influence on me."[68] Indeed Korine discloses that there is an entire "vaudeville subtext" in *Gummo*.[69] There are vaudevillian points of reference littered throughout. Even the name of one of the main characters, Tummler, Korine explains is a reference to the Yiddish term, 'tummler', which refers to a lower level warm-up comedian, often the master of ceremonies, who would regularly be found amongst the Catskill comics throughout the Borsch Belt.[70] Tummler indeed fulfills his role as tummler at points in the film. In a scene after Tummler visit's Cole's sister (who Cole prostitutes from the family home), while waiting for Solomon, Tummler entertains Cole with zingy absurdist one-liners while standing on a coffee table wearing a *Dio* t-shirt[71] and holding

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[66] Op. Cit., Cunha.

[67] "The Terrible Infant Speaks" (Jim Ridley & Jack Silverman. *Nashville Scene*. 8 May 2008).

[68] Op. Cit., Walczak.

[69] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelley interviews Harmony Korine".

[70] Catskill refers to an area of upstate New York which housed a number of resort areas that Jewish families would frequent. The chain of resort areas throughout the region became known as the Borsch Belt. The Borsch Belt refers to that region from a show business context and it is from there that a number of Jewish comedians/comediennes got their start in show business in the 1920s up until the demise of these sorts of resorts in the 1960s, something peripherally but famously represented in the film *Dirty Dancing* (Ardolino, U.S.A., 1987).

[71] Dio is a heavy metal band named after its lead singer Ronnie James Dio.

one of his shoes in his hand while he performs a Henny Youngman[72] monologue using a Jimmy Durante-like delivery.[73] During this sequence, a rendition of the vaudevillian folk song, "My Bonnie" by the Hoosier Hotshots is non-diegetically juxtaposed in the background.

Korine also adapts vaudeville's structure to organize his film. The organization is inspired by the way that film rhythmically oscillates between the main, anchoring, narrative strands and the juxtaposed interludes of other more peripheral characters that inhabit the world of *Gummo*, which ultimately, are as central and principal as the more conventional narrative strands. Korine, addressing naysayers and doubters of narrative presence and continuity in vaudeville, insists that "there is a narrative and there's a definite narrative in *Gummo*. It's just maybe more hidden, it's more the idea that the narrative comes through the idea of association, just by virtue of the scenes being kind of run along, put next to each other, that a narrative forms."[74] Again, Korine expresses his desire for narrative without plot. He creates order and meaning from otherwise disparate images largely due to the rhythm and order in which he arranges and organizes his imagery, similar to the approaches of American Underground and experimental filmmakers Kenneth Anger and Bruce Conner. Moreover, similar to Anger in particular, is his use of various subgenres of underground heavy metal based music which he uses to enrich the texture of the associations of his visual imagery.[75] To a much lesser extent, Korine's formal structuring, namely his use of music, also has links, albeit more tenuously, with the likes of more commercial ventures, such as *American Graffiti* (Lucas, U.S.A., 1973), which uses popular music to texture the film narratively as well as in terms of its

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[72] During the conception and production of *Gummo*, Korine explains that he was reading a lot of joke books by Milton Berle – the radio, film, and television comedian – which was largely instigated by his initial intention to make a Henny Youngman biopic called *Take My Life Please* (which to date has not materialized).[72] Youngman was dubbed the king of the one-liners. It is he who coined the famous zinger "Take my wife, please!", and it was Berle who discovered his published joke cards, which resulted in the two forging a friendship and professional working relationship throughout their careers.

[73] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelley interviews Harmony Korine".

[74] Op. Cit., Walczak. Also see: Op. Cit., Lyons.

[75] Korine's films also reflect the dialectical montage of Eisenstein films in the way in which he uses certain recurring thematic and even plot devices (I'm sure, terminologically speaking, is much to Korine's chagrin) to structure narrative associations.

mood.[76]

Korine uses this associational form to structure his vision of the film as a photo collage. This form, however, also incorporates the importance of music from a structural standpoint in the way that the movie flows with the rhythms of the music that he incorporates with the medley of other media with which he coordinates his audiovisual tapestry. But also, the way in which *Gummo* is composed using a variety of disparate self-contained episodes and vignettes, demonstrates the way in which the movie is also structured like a vaudeville show. Yet the movie nevertheless remains unified and coherent not only conceptually and thematically, but also narratively.

Intriguingly, Korine also identifies the vaudeville influence of *Gummo* as also sharing qualities with the modern phenomena of YouTube. Describing, *Gummo* as a film of "moments", Korine explains how he intended to make a film in which "you could blindfold yourself and stick your hand into the film and pull out a scene, and any given scene would give you something on its own, without your having to watch what came before it or after it…just like vaudeville."[77] He regards the pick-and-mix platform of YouTube streaming in a similar way to the variety show of a vaudeville performance. He elaborates how the spectator can take away something enjoyable even if they do not like it in its entirety. In short, *Gummo* has the structural format of both an old fashioned variety show as well as a new form of user submitted video. Ultimately, Korine's structural comparison of *Gummo* to vaudeville, the family photo album, and even the way in which he perceives YouTube ties in to his prevailing interest in collage.

JULIEN DONKEY-BOY

Korine's follow-up film to *Gummo* is the first American film to acquire a Dogme certificate of authenticity.[78] *julien donkey-boy* was made on a budget of approximately $1.5 million and was shot on location in the city of Yonkers, New York over a 25 day period. The film was independently produced and distributed by a

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[76] Anger and Connor employ this strategy for abstract purposes; whereas, Eisenstein and Lucas employ it for more straightforwardly narrative ones.
[77] Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.
[78] Dogme will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

consortium of companies who operate in the East rather than West of the U.S., outside of the Hollywood system. Like the above two films, it also initially premiered on the festival circuit, first showing at Venice Film Festival in September 1999 with its general theatrical release the following month while still being shown at festivals.[79]

The film revolves around a single dysfunctional family in the suburbs of Yonkers. The family includes a single father (Werner Herzog) and his adult children – Julien (Ewen Bremner) after whom the film is named, Pearl (Chloë Sevigny), and Chris (Evan Neumann) – as well as Grandma (Joyce Korine), who is rarely on screen. The appearance and texture of *julien* appears more like surveillance footage than it does documentary film or verité proper because it is not shot on film, but grainy digital video. This movie also has a multiform narrative structure like the other films discussed, but it seems to be primarily organized around the title character, Julien, regardless of whether he is directly involved in a particular sequence.

The movie follows the family both as a unit as well as individually. It chronicles their interactions with each other and other inhabitants of Yonkers as they live, what is initially conveyed as being, a mundane and banal existence. This, however, gradually changes and the eccentricity and dysfunction of the family emerges more and more showing that this is anything but the typical nuclear family. Julien is schizophrenic and spends time away from the house wandering Yonkers and having brief exchanges with the people he comes across. Pearl, Julien's sister, is heavily pregnant. We come to realize that Julien is the father of the baby that she is carrying. Pearl is the only member of the family that is capable of controlling Julien when he is experiencing one of his episodes, which are often manifest through obsessive compulsive repetition and moments of rage. Chris, brother to both Julien and Pearl, is committed to becoming a professional wrestler and regularly goes through various exercise routines throughout the house. He is also often the subject of the father's humiliation.. The father is a widower and is a megalomaniacal and neurotic tyrant who emotionally and mentally belittles his children.

julien shares Korine's overall aesthetic vision and, while it is stylistically

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[79] *Julien Donkey-Boy* also won a few awards and received a number of accolades at various film festivals and was nominated for even more (See: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0192194/awards).

reminiscent of *Gummo* both visually and structurally in many ways, it also differs noticeably in others. Like *Gummo*, *julien* is creatively motivated by Korine's aesthetic philosophy that is driven by his notion of poetic truth, his anti-plot method of episodic storytelling, and his keenness for the incidental, the accidental, and the improvised. However, although *julien* maintains a largely fragmented structure, he explains that *Gummo* is primarily about the succession of isolated images themselves; whereas *julien* is far more oriented around character and the development of character without losing the improvisational freedom that a more formalized script would likely curtail.[80] However, according to Korine, like *Gummo*, *julien* does not adhere to a causal narrative plot. It is highly episodic and often drifts from one scene to the next, yet it remains anchored by its recurring main characters. Unlike in *Gummo*, where the narrative strands of the principal characters carried equal weight, in *julien*, Julien's, and to a lesser extent, Pearl's, stories carry the most emphasis throughout. Moreover, whereas the character psychologies and the interpersonal relationships of characters are never really explored in *Gummo*, there are more psychological developments of character and especially of interpersonal relationships in *julien*. In this way the film is framed around the complexities of the family unit and how they deal individually as well as collectively with Julien's mental illness. Korine summarily points out how the "father feels only shame and hatred and resentment and the brother is embarrassed and the grandmother is just oblivious and the sister is very affectionate."[81]

Like *Gummo*, *julien* is, in some ways, a personal film that reflects Korine's own life. The main character, *julien*, is based on Korine's schizophrenic Uncle Eddie who is now institutionalized.[82] Korine affirms that the character of Julien, especially his behavioral mannerisms and cadence of speech, are based on his uncle.[83] Korine recalls some of the memories he has of his uncle that seem to remain clearly imprinted on him as he recollects some of his unusual behaviors:

> My uncle used to eat sticks of butter… When I first moved into my grandmother's house he was living there before he was institutionalized. He was a hardcore schizophrenic. He would only eat sticks of butter and

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[80] Op. Cit., "The Kid's Alright"; Op. Cit., Leigh; and Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".
[81] Op. Cit., "Complete Harmony".
[82] Op. Cit., Leigh; Ibid.; Op. Cit., LaBruce; and Op. Cit., Chainsaw.
[83] Op. Cit., Zimmerman.

he was getting really sick. So they had to take him off it, butter. His arteries were clogged, he was in really bad shape…He would drink Coca-Cola. He would have these Cokes in those cups. I always remember those huge cups with big ice cubes and he would shake them and put Crisco (Cooking Oil) in his hair. [84]

Korine originally wanted his uncle to play the leading role of Julien, but he was unable to obtain his release.[85] Instead, Korine recruited Ewen Bremner to play the lead, a decision he came to after seeing his performance as Archie in *Naked* (Leigh, U.K., 1993) and then subsequently for his role as Spud in *Trainspotting* (Boyle, U.K., 1996). Bremner prepared for the role by repeatedly listening to recordings of Korine's uncle after being taken by Korine to visit him in the mental institution.[86] In addition to the character of Julien being based on Korine's schizophrenic Uncle Eddie, the family home in the film is actually Korine's grandmother's house, which is where Korine's uncle resided when Korine would encounter and interact with him when he was younger. Korine's grandmother, Joyce Korine, plays the grandmother in the film.[87]

Korine's affinity with P.T. Barnum and the carnival comes to the fore once again in *julien* based on the strange, unusual, and even abhorrent characters and people that populate his film, which again solidifies him as an artist of the grotesque. However, whereas Barnum would travel the globe to acquire freaks and oddities to populate his museum of human oddities and his sideshows, Korine uses television to recruit "freaks" and oddities for his films. Korine explains how he always keeps a pad of paper and pen with him while he watches late night television in the event that he sees people who are in some ways extraordinary or unusual. He came to cast two such as characters in *julien*: a man born with no arms as a consequence of thalidomide who plays the drums with his feet, and a blind figure skater with the hope that she will one day qualify for the Olympics.[88] Korine affirms that he has always been fascinated by people doing things which they would not typically be expected to do.[89] This added

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[84] Op. Cit., LaBruce.

[85] Ibid. and Op. Cit., Chainsaw. His grandmother also purportedly did not think it was a very good idea to have him released.

[86] Ibid., LaBruce.

[87] Op. Cit., Leigh and Op. Cit., Kiley.

[88] Op. Cit., Heimlich; Op. Cit., "Complete Harmony"; and Op. Cit., Sato. Korine cast both of these people in his film after coming across them while watching reality and tabloid television, the armless drummer while watching The Learning Channel and the blind figure skater while watching the tabloid news program, *Hard Copy* (U.S.A., 1989-1999).

[89] Ibid., Heimlich.

dimension of incongruity with the anatomical anomalies of his characters compounds Korine's grotesque aesthetic.

Korine reiterates his preference for non-actors to populate his films of outcasts, pariahs, weirdoes, and freaks. Although Korine includes professional actors in all of his films, he reaffirms that: "A lot of times in my movies I'm not casting actors. If I write a part for a man with no arms or even for a brick layer, if it fits, I'd rather find a bricklayer than ask Tom Hanks to play the guy with no arms. So those people, if you cast for them, they already are them."[90] Korine describes his process:

> …it's like a chemical reaction. And then I work with the cinematographer and figure out where the camera should be. I always say it's a *mistakist* art form. When I'm making a movie, it's like *mistakist*, because everything comes out of weird mistakes and strange juxtapositions. So what I do is I say action and then just let it happen, just document it. I just want to photograph it.[91]

Korine believes that he draws authenticity from his characters in a way that cannot be replicated through acting. Likewise, while he acknowledges that opting for non-actors can result in a lesser refined, mistake strewn shoot, Korine embraces the results rather than gloss over them.[92] From this perspective, Korine is a performance artist, or at least a performance art orchestrator, who happens to use film to capture the performances that he organizes, or catalyzes. Korine views the making of *julien* as more of a happening or an event in which the film is less a movie and more an "artefact that documented some kind of action" not unlike the films of the Vienna Actionists.[93]

Although the imagery of *julien* is arguably as rich in its various textures as *Gummo*, it is not through the juxtaposition of various multimedia formats – film, video, polaroid – since *julien* is shot entirely on video. Korine explains his aesthetic rationale for shooting on video was to make use of the intimacy and immediacy that video provided during the shooting process.[94] Although he used video throughout, he

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[90] Op. Cit., Sato.

[91] Ibid. Emphasis included by me. This 'aesthetic philosophy' will be addressed more fully in this chapter in a subsection below. Also see: Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".

[92] Op. Cit., Lippy.

[93] Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".

[94] Op. Cit., Heimlich; Op. Cit., Nelson; and Ibid.

used over thirty different cameras and employed multiple effects that are intrinsic to the digital recording devices that he used to alter and modify the recorded image. The result was over one-hundred-sixty hours of footage which came from various professional grade digital cameras to smaller button sized spy cameras that were affixed to the actors.[95] Korine elaborates:

> I wanted to have such a really wide range of cameras…So what we did was, we went to people who make spy cameras. We went to a place in the US where they manufacture cameras for the FBI. For instance they can make cameras inside a tape machine or put little cameras the size of a pin in your watch…In the beginning I was only going to shoot with spy cameras. But then I wanted images to come from all directions. I wanted to be able to go anywhere…[96]

While the visual aesthetics of the video per se were not his primary motivating incentive for shooting on the medium, he nevertheless exploited the medium's various effects during both the production and post-production processes to manipulate the texture and appearance of the imagery. He explains how the prevailingly grainy and desaturated texture of the movie's imagery was achieved in post-production:

> The actual quality of the image came from purposely degrading the image. I wanted it to look like it had no time, like it could have been made at any time during the last thirty years or since colour film exists, or since the seventies. Because we were using three chip digital… the image was very clear in the beginning. We blew the entire film up to Super 8. And then from Super 8 to 35 millimeter. So in that process you lose lots of detail, but lots of colour bursts and different things happen. It was also a process of distraction in order to get this kind of end result.[97]

Other aspects of the movie's prevailing visual style are achieved through effects that were done directly through the camera during the recording process.[98] Most notably the still imagery that is incorporated throughout the movie is actually freeze-frame shots captured by the digital video camera.

Although the slight shifts in stylistic strategies are partially due to Korine's

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[95] Ibid., Heimlich and Op. Cit., Sato.
[96] Ibid., Sato. Also see: Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".
[97] Ibid., Sato.
[98] Op. Cit., Zimmerman.

own personal development as an artist, some of the technically motivated shifts in style largely have to do with certain self-imposed restrictions, namely his commitment to the DOGME '95 manifesto. DOGME '95 is the brainchild of Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. DOGME is a filmmaking manifesto purportedly inspired by the politico-aesthetic ideas of the Nouvelle Vague and the Cahiers du Cinéma. However, DOGME's aesthetic is far more prescriptive and ascetic in its aim and agenda according to the *DOGME '95 Declaration*.[99] It is motivated by a sober aesthetic fundamentalism which attempts to reinvigorate the modernist mainstream through a realist aesthetic(s) which favors "truth" over the "illusions" of "sensation", notions which echo Korine's own aesthetic vision. In order to fully achieve and realize this they have formulated a blueprint which consists of a number of principles, including ten rules and edicts by which all Dogme films must abide. Von Trier and Vinterberg call this the *Vow of Chastity*.[100] A film must adhere to the edicts of the *Vow of Chastity* in order for a film to be DOGME certified, a document certifying this precedes any DOGME approved film. Korine was approached by Vinterberg, during his trip to the U.S. to promote *The Celebration* (Denmark/Sweden, 1998), the first film to be released with Dogme certification.[101] Both Vinterberg and Von Trier, and director of the second certified Dogme film, *The Idiots* (Denmark/Spain/Sweden/France/Netherlands/Italy), released the same year as *The Celebration*, were of the opinion that Korine was the right artist to produce the first American certified Dogme film. Korine had already encountered both *The Celebration* and the *Idiots*, and according to Korine, he was already "slightly obsessed with" both films by the time he met Vinterberg.[102] And it was during a discussion with Vinterberg about Anthony Dod Mantle, the cinematographer of *The Celebration*, *The Idiots*, and eventually *julien*, in which Korine and Vinterberg agreed that Korine would be the pioneer of the first American Dogme film.[103] This, however, was not a very big leap from *Gummo*, which incorporated many of the stylistic as well as thematic techniques, strategies, and tropes of that Dogme was

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[99] See: APPENDIX #1 for the DOGME '95 manifesto declaration.
[100] See: APPENDIX #2 for the VOW OF CHASTITY.
[101] Op. Cit., Leigh and Op. Cit., LaBruce.
[102] Op. Cit., Capone.
[103] Op. Cit., LaBruce.

advocating.[104] However, *Gummo*'s use of non- diegetic music, its insertions of stock footage, its use of a variety of media, and the fact that the cat killing sequences were feigned and the cats were not real all precluded it from fitting the Dogme manifesto, not that it aimed to in the first place.

Although Korine inherently considers himself an American filmmaker, he embraces the inherent European mainspring of the Dogme project. He contends that "Americans don't like films about the real America - if you show them something unromanticised, they call it exploitation. Which is how the critics destroyed *Gummo*."[105] Korine's adoption of the Dogme manifesto provided him with the opportunity to further cultivate his realist impulse. Korine's improvisational approach to the scripting and shooting of *julien* was motivated by his attempt to garner what he conceives as an "organic" process of creation. Accordingly, by placing actors in real situations, and filming them performing and interacting in public spaces more accurately capture a "truth" and "honesty" that more conventional modes of filmmaking, especially those purporting to exhibit realism, fall short of achieving.[106] Korine discloses how, by using the various types of video cameras that he employed to shoot *julien*, he sent the "actors into situations with people who didn't know they were being filmed" and then procured permission afterwards from the members of the general public who were unwitting participants of the shoot.[107] This corresponds with Korine's attempt to strip down his realist vision and aesthetic to one that he describes as "documentation" rather than one premised on a prefabricated and scripted drama. His process reinforces his associations with artists such as Otto Mühl and Hermann Nitsch, who were members of the Vienna Actionists, who, like Korine, set-up aesthetic situations and subsequently documented the results.[108]

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[104] Op. Cit., Capone.
[105] Op. Cit., Leigh.
[106] Op. Cit., Zimmerman and Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".
[107] Op. Cit., Heimlich.
[108] Op. Cit., Kiley and Op. Cit., Lippy.

ON CONFRONTATION AND AGITATION

His films, indeed filmmaking itself, are quite personal to Korine, and while he insists that he is an artist who rejects the critical self-awareness and introspection that interviewers and critics come to expect of him, he demonstrates a high level of self- awareness regarding his supposedly instinctual motivations for his aesthetic vision and attitude. It emerges from a dissatisfaction with the state of cinema. Korine fully admits to trying to elicit a response from his audience, to confront and agitate them, similar to Clark; however, he insists that is only a portion of his motivation.

In an interview almost a decade after the release of *julien*, Korine professes that he felt as if cinema needed to be more confrontational and that he felt compelled to make films that were "disruptive".[109] His dissatisfaction with cinema fostered a highly "adversarial" post-adolescent who wanted nothing more than to destroy that which corrupted what he so dearly loved – the saccharin unimaginative films and filmmaking practices that had taken hold of the cinema world.[110] This desire to destroy is not without a desire for renewal. Echoing one of Mikhail Bakhtin's primary tenets of the carnivalesque grotesque almost verbatim (Bakhtin was introduced in the general introduction and will be revisited in the following chapter), Korine explains: "I want to get into as many situations, and get into as much trouble, and invent as much stuff as I possibly can while I'm here. I want to destroy as much shit, blow it up, love it, eat it, vomit it—it's all part of it."[111] Bakhtin posits that "copulation, pregnancy, birth, eating, drinking, and death" as well as defecation, urination, the release of sexual bodily fluids, and vomiting" are all the province of the grotesque.[112] Korine, like Bakhtin, celebrates the grotesque as an apocalyptic aesthetic, one which is as much regenerative as it is degenerative. That regeneration follows degeneration in a constant process, a constant cycle. He explains that *Gummo* and *julien* are both as much about confronting and destroying formal expectations of

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[109] "How One of the Freest Filmmakers around finally Got His Groove Back" (Elvis Mitchell. *Interview*. May 2008).

[110] Op. Cit., Friskics-Warren.

[111] "Harmony Korine Interview" (Trinie Dalton. *Anthem*. 21 May 2008).

[112] Op. Cit., Bakhtin 354.

narrative structure and storytelling as much as they are about confronting and challenging the audience with difficult subject matter and content.[113]

However, while he acknowledges that his films are confrontational and agitational, even admitting that he was trying to "rile" people with contentiousness, for a filmmaker who regards themselves an artist, he is also honest about the fact that he wanted his films to be liked.[114] Yet he remains intent that he never makes films to bait his critics in to a response. In fact, he considers the very idea of creating something with critics in mind as an odd thing to do, and while he acknowledges that he appreciates strong reactions to his films, he is adamant that it is not his sole motivating reason for making the sort of films that he does, but rather his desire to make films derives from his desire to be a showman, to exhibit those strange, wonderful, and sometimes difficult realities of life that contribute to making up the American landscape.[115]

ON MARGINALIZED CHARACTERS: EXPLOITATION OR EXPOSÉ

Korine has courted controversy in his use of non-actors in conjunction with his fascination with the grotesque, which has prompted questions of exploitation. The characters that inhabit Korine's films are people who are often marginalized by polite society and the establishment. Korine confirms that this is a recurring theme and motif across his films: "There's a through line in just about everything I've done. There's a connection with characters that, like you said, are marginalized. People who are dispossessed: tramps, vagrants, eccentrics — characters that some people consider scum."[116] Korine explains how he has always been fascinated by characters who are on the margins or outside of the system or who are "slightly tweaked".[117] Korine explains how this fascination was fostered by secondary or supporting characters in the cinema:

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[113] Op. Cit., Mitchell.
[114] Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.
[115] Ibid.
[116] "Don't Panic Stress Test" (*Don't Panic*. March 2008).
[117] Op. Cit., Capone. Also see: Op. Cit., Dalton.

> …when I watch movies…especially older movies…when the B characters from the film come on…I always find them infinitely more interesting or funny than the main story. And so, even when I was younger, I used to just start to daydream about what if the movie just detoured and we followed this kind of like tramp, you know, this poor schmoe. I don't know, it was just more interesting to me. I just always pay attention to people in the windows or in back alleys…I guess I have more of an affinity for that.[118]

These characters are rendered with an ambiguity and ambivalence in which they experience varying degrees of alienation and anomie. Korine acknowledges this by referring to his filmmaking as a "cinema of isolation"[119], which seems quite apt considering the types of people that regularly populate Korine's films, but they are also shown finding comfort as much as they are shown being despondent in a bleakly portrayed existence.

Fascination for characters of this sort has garnered Korine's eye and appreciation for the grotesqueries of real life. When straightforwardly asked by one interviewer whether Korine believes that he focuses on the "most grotesque aspects of the world" he replies in a similar fashion to Clark:

> Those are things I'm interested in, those were the types of pictures that I wanted to take, and those were the types of people and characters. It's what I loved, those were people that I loved, and found interesting. Some of them, yes, you could say that they were bizarre, you could refer to some of that as grotesque, but for me that's what I loved, that's what was exciting to me. Those were the types of images that I hadn't seen on screen. And I still love it. It's still what it is.[120]

Korine shares a fascination with the underbelly and the underrepresented people of American society with Clark. Korine's fascination may be best described as one of domestic exotica. This corresponds with his self-attributed affinity with P.T. Barnum and other modern European filmmakers – Herzog, Fassbinder, and Godard – who have similarly featured human oddities in a humanistic way and whom he seems to align himself with implicitly. This quality is both vital to Korine's aesthetic philosophy

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[118] Ibid., Capone.
[119] Op. Cit., *Don't Panic* and Op. Cit., Friskics-Warren.
[120] Op. Cit., Huddleston.

and emblematic of his aesthetic vision:

> For me at least, you can never look at something and find it wholly beautiful, or wholly disturbing. When people accuse me of being interested in things that are 'grotesque,' there are so many arguments in there that I don't understand. I mean, I'm attracted to girls with scars on their faces. I like girls with missing limbs. I always have. I'm sexually attracted to that. So a lot of times, what people consider to be grotesque, I'm really aroused by. But I also like the idea of making things a bit more confusing. I think what's gross about a lot of movies is that things have become so simplistic and so one- way. They exist on a very even plane. If you're making a film about life, based in some kind of truth, it's much more complex. And you can take something that's supposedly grotesque, an ugly image, and you can beautify it, shooting it in a certain way or adding some lovely music to it, making the image much more emotionally complex.[121]

Korine's acknowledgement of his fascination with the grotesque is coupled with his ambition to render his content through his conception of realism – aesthetic, social, poetic. The ambivalence that Korine refers to is a common feature of grotesque art, especially in relation to the way in which Korine attempts to show that which is conventionally ugly, disfigured, or abhorrent, as beautiful. This is an aesthetic strategy that characterizes grotesque art since Romanticism. In fact, Korine echoes Victor Hugo's conception of the grotesque from his *Preface de Cromwell* (1827) in which he describes the grotesque as the coexistence of the ugly or the disfigured and the beautiful.

Hugo insists that "the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light."[122] Hugo rebukes the received wisdom of his day that conventional notions of beauty should be the sole remit of art and literature, and that "the deformed, the ugly, the grotesque should never be imitated in art". Instead, he argues that the grotesque is an important component of the comedy of life and, as such, the ugly is rife for imitation and from it, the *grotesque* is cultivated.[123] Likewise, Korine,

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[121] Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95".
[122] Op. Cit., Hugo.
[123] Ibid.

articulates: "Sometimes when I see something beautiful I'll immediately think how to make it ugly and sometimes when I see something really ugly I immediately think of how to make it beautiful. Then I like to pervert the nature of certain things".[124] Hugo was one of the earlier writers on the grotesque who invested it with realist motivations in critical or theoretical writings on the topic. Ultimately for Korine, as it is for Hugo, the grotesque is a pervasive part of the everyday which is often found to penetrate even some of the most standardized constructs of beauty, and vice-versa, the beautiful is found concomitant within constructs that are prevailingly grotesque. This is something that is not only indicative of Korine's oeuvre, but Clark's as well, albeit from varying points of emphasis and perspective.

Because of his aesthetic philosophy in conjunction with his fascination with what can best be described as abnormal people – whether physically, psychologically, emotionally, socially, or some combination therein – as well as his regular use of non-actors, one of the accusations or questions that has persistently circulated around Korine's films has revolved around issues of exploitation. Indeed, Korine rebuffs those who claim that he exploits his subjects by turning the tables on those who admonish him by labeling them as the iniquitous ones:

> There are degrees, like if you're filming someone who's blind and not telling them. As long as people have their faculties about them...I'm not, like, filming people that have been lobotomized. It's all up to interpretation, I never felt like I've crossed any boundaries. Actually, I've always felt like everything seemed justified and beautiful. It almost seems like the reverse is disgusting – like, why wouldn't you put these people in? They should be celebrated.[125]

This once again reaffirms Korine's affinity with a showman like P.T. Barnum, but unlike exhibiting exotic people from the far off reaches of the world, he sees himself as functioning as a showman that exhibits the exotic peoples that populate the domestic landscape of everyday middle-America. It also reaffirms his affinity with Hugo's romantic aesthetic philosophy of the beauty of that which is typically regarded as ugly and grotesque. This is, however, something with which Korine has wrestled.

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[124] "Kodak Lecture Series: Harmony Korine" (Ryerson University, Canada. 1 April 2005).
[125] "Harmony Korine Interview" (Eric Kohn. *IndieWire*. 29 April 2008).

Korine does acknowledge sensitivity to boundaries, one which is demarcated by taking advantage of those who are unable to make choices for themselves, but he has ultimately come to the conclusion that he is "righteous" in his creative intents and motivations.[126] However, Korine distinguishes between the subjects that he uses in his films, which are often non-actors that he conscripts because of their perceived unusualness in some sense, and the subject matter and content that he broaches and engages, of which he rejects any limits or boundaries. But also, similar to Hugo, as well as Barnum's sideshow performers for that matter, Korine vehemently contends that the people that populate his films do really exist and while, as an artist, he reiterates that he does "enhance or tweak" his depictions, all of his characters are in some way based on real people and insists that "they're all based on someone I know or have met or experienced in some way. Otherwise I'd be making cartoons."[127] But there are no taboo topics, according to Korine:

> I don't think there's any such thing as a real taboo and if there is I think that it should be broken right away. I wouldn't shy away from anything. I don't think there's any way to go too far myself. There's things people can do that go too far in a stupid and silly way just to do it for the sake of doing it, and I'm not really concerned with that. The idea of shock for shock's sake...I am a provocateur in a sense, but I don't find anything I've ever done 'shocking,' and I don't think that I've done anything that's taboo. I just don't see things as taboo. I think that people think and have day dreams of all sorts of things, I mean, if the idea of making love to a twelve-year-old girl passes through your mind does that make you a bad person? Because we all have these thoughts, it's just that we don't necessarily act upon them.[128]

Korine suggests here that the artist's imagination should not be restricted and that art should be confrontational, but not simply for the sake of confrontation. It should reflect a certain truth regardless of the gravity or levity of that truth. Conversely, he also acknowledges that the subject matter and content of his films will inevitably elicit a varied response that is informed by a variety of moral compasses; it is a matter of interpretation, as he puts it. Subsequently, as Clark has acknowledged with the reception of his films, some will be offended, but also like Clark, Korine is

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[126] Ibid. and Op. Cit., Friskics-Warren.
[127] Op. Cit., Chainsaw.
[128] Op. Cit., Martin.

unbothered. On the one hand, he argues that his films reflect the realities with which he is confronted and his aim is to incorporate them into his aesthetic vision.[129] On the other hand, he takes a decadent-aestheticist stance, also similar to Clark, when he says: "It doesn't really matter to me. I make stuff because I want to see it. I need to see it. If it offends someone, it really doesn't bother me."[130]

ON STYLE AND MODE OF FILMMAKING

Between Clark and Korine, Korine's films probably contain the largest proportion of grotesque moments. Both *Gummo* and *julien* are formalist in conception in that there is as much if not more emphasis on form, style, and technique as there is on the subject matter and content. They are themselves deconstructions of conventionalized constructions and expectations of image and language that operates through intentionally fragmented films. His films are orientated by his fascination with the randomness, chaos, and yet prevailing order of collage.[131] Korine's approach to filmmaking, paired with his predilection for "dissonant" imagery[132] and unusual subject matter becomes clearer in the following disclosure:

> What I remember from movies – and real life – is characters. Moments. Feelings. And scenes. In some ways, when I first started making movies, I only wanted to have the good stuff. I only wanted to go with the best moments. I wanted to make a film that consisted entirely of moments. I thought you could compare it to looking at a book of your parents' photos, where you have a picture of you riding a camel right next to the first time your mother bathed you in a sink, next to your dad with a new car, next to your puppy dog. Each photo on its own is what it is, but the book itself is the narrative of a family. Without all the boring middle parts.[133]

This illustrates Korine's affinity with the home movie and the photo album, both composed and organized like a collage of thematically unified images. However, his approach also highlights the way in which the grotesque tends to appear as moments or

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[129] "Harmony Korine Interview" (Phil Concannon. *Phil on Film*. 10 November 2007).
[130] Op. Cit., Friskics-Warren.
[131] Op. Cit., Huddleston.
[132] Op. Cit., Heimlich.
[133] Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.

flashpoints in feature length films. These moments are often the most memorable parts of those films, thus resulting in the films themselves being referred to as grotesque films in quite totalistic ways. It is then no surprise then that Korine's films are collections of grotesque moments. It just so happens that those grotesque moments are synonymous with he refers to as the 'best bits' of movies.

Similar to Clark, one of the conceptual dimensions of Korine's filmmaking is his subtle and impartial treatment of that which is typically perceived as abhorrent, abnormal, or odd. When one interviewer submitted to Korine that he is quite adept at rendering subject matter and content that is disgusting in quite a "delicate" manner, Korine confirmed that is something for which he strives. He explains that he is motivated by ambivalence:

> I tried to do the same thing with the first movies I directed, but maybe it's a little different. I always felt that the best thing was to feel multiple emotions. Like to find something funny, but feel guilt. When I'm really moved by something its usually something that works on multiple levels like something I'm attracted to but repulsed by. Or something that I'm hopeful for but saddened by. Things that aren't just one way and are easily settled...[134]

While this does not always revolve around the physical or visual characteristics of the characters themselves – as it sometimes revolves around their behaviors, statements, or actions – it nonetheless almost inevitably revolves around the way his characters are depicted. Korine affiliates this motivation with his realist tendencies which are cultivated and rendered through his humanistic expressivity. To Korine, most movies proffer a very closed and finite expression of human experience. He explains: "I always feel that movies show most things so one way, but I've never felt that about life. In life, you can be attracted and disgusted to something."[135] The simultaneity or co-presence of what are typically perceived as being conflicting or incongruous emotions is a characteristic that is often associated as being indicative of the grotesque. Once again, however, he demonstrates an affinity with a Hugo-derived Romantic conception of the grotesque, and beauty for that matter, in which the ugly,

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[134] Op. Cit., Staple.

[135] "Catching up with Harmony Korine" (Alex Hagwood. *The New York Times*. 9 May 2008).

or in this instance, the repulsive, is counterbalanced by an undeniable attraction.

Perhaps it is inevitable that the visual texture and style of Korine's films reflect his immersive and 'anorak-like' knowledge of popular culture, art, literature, and cinema. While the movies he watched as a child were originally shot on higher grade film stocks, he was, of course, viewing films on the degraded medium of VHS recordings on television. Korine's own films, at least in part, adopt a televisual style in which he opts for low-fi grade video or low millimeter home movie film stocks – such as 8mm, Super 8mm, 16mm, or Super 16mm – which textures his film production in a personalized way according to his own reception and experience of movies as a youth himself. However, Korine does not privilege or promote one audiovisual medium over another; he does not take a purist stance on the moving image devices and technology. Korine explains his view of style and technology:

> I have no kinship or overriding sense of format that I'm in love with. I might make my next film on a camera phone. I don't really care, it's all just different modes of documentation, technology. Video, HD, Super-8, still photo, everything comes with its own personality, texture, feel. I kind of improvise…[136]

As his aesthetics of film are primarily motivated by the characters, the story, and what he calls the "feeling" that is being purveyed, ultimately the style of his films are extensions of his own "emotional state at the time of making them".[137] They are expressions, in the most literal sense of the term. Nevertheless, as it will be addressed more fully in chapters to come, his use of various mediums, has distinctive effects on the way in which his imagery is perceived and experienced, which facilitates Korine's prevailing aesthetic of realism and the grotesque.

The feeling is undoubtedly linked with the way in which Korine's visual dynamism is influenced by his love of music, a non-visual medium, and its incorporation as a structural component of Korine's aesthetic. This tie can be seen in

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[136] Op. Cit., Dalton.
[137] "Harmony Korine Interview" (*The Big Picture*. 8 May 2008).

the way that Korine playfully records and captures his imagery and the way in which he rhythmically engages and paces the episodic structuring of those various multimedia sourced images. Korine affirms that:

> I can't play instruments, and I can't really improvise myself – filmmaking, there's something studied and stunted about it. So I like the idea of trying to play the camera like you'd play an instrument, to improvise, invent it as you go, to riff on it. Shooting at different speeds, camera placement, really long lenses. I try to entertain myself with it. I try to make everything interesting.[138]

Korine compares his strategy of filmmaking to that of a free-jazz or garage rock jam session. On the one hand this invokes comparisons to experimental filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger, both of whom have used associational methods of editing and sound to create a collage of associational meanings to elicit visceral responses. However, on the other hand, it draws comparisons to more modern cultural trappings which, even Korine himself acknowledges, have influenced him: MTV, television talkshows, home videos, and surveillance imagery.[139]

MISTAKISM

Korine refers to his general approach to filmmaking as "Mistakism". Mistakism embraces the accidents, the mishaps, and the unintentional moments caught by the camera that are instigated by the filmmaker.[140] Korine describes it as:

> …the mistakes and awkwardness of real life that I've always been attracted to…But I'm not waiting for it to happen. I like to instigate it. It's like the real world that's slightly tweaked…It's like when you put chemicals on a jar and shake it up, and then you document the explosion.[141]

Not only does this affirm Korine's affinity for the real, albeit in a somewhat different way to that of Clark, it also affirms his affinity for agitation and provocation. Korine

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[138] Ibid.

[139] Op. Cit., "The Kid's Alright" and Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.

[140] Op. Cit., Hack and Ibid.

[141] Ibid. Also see: Op. Cit., Staple.

elaborates upon his Mistakist philosophy in a publication of three of his screenplays (one of which remains unfinished and unreleased) in his *Collected Screenplays 1: Jokes, Gummo, julien donkey-boy* (2002). He explains:

> I'm basically interested in the explosion of things. Like a science project gone awry... all I ever wanted to do was set up the scene and document the explosion... the blood on the wall and the stuff back in the corners that usually gets swept right up without a thought...that's my films I think...accidents...mistakes...life and poetry, whatever you want to call it...making sure to always maintain that perfect margin of the undefined... that perfect novel with pages missing in all the right pages. Yes, this can be 'mistakism'.[142]

Korine contrasts his Mistakist approach to Hitchcock. He refers to the Hitchcock's calculated precision in adhering to a script and filmmaking as the antithesis of his approach, calling it the anti-Hitchcock mode and style of filmmaking. For Korine a script is merely a guideline for the actors to follow but in no way is a hard and fast template that is to be dogmatically or programmatically adhered to.[143] Placing actors in a location and capturing the public's reaction is a product of this approach, as is enhancing the 'shortcomings' of various techniques. Not only does Korine's Mistakist approach to filmmaking facilitate his realist and sometimes surrealist aesthetic, it also highlights or activates those latently grotesque aspects of his film that bubble just beneath the surface in American society and culture, which are ultimately the central focus of Korine's cinema.

ANTI-PLOT/PRO-NARRATIVE: A STORY WITHOUT A PLOT

One of the things that Korine has been insistent about throughout his career is his utter disdain and abhorrence for plots while remaining committed to narratives and storytelling.[144] Image supersedes plot for Korine.[145] Korine explains how films are an inherently visual aesthetic experience: "What I remember from films are specific

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[142] "Harmony Korine Interview" (*Function*. April 2005).
[143] Op. Cit., Hack.
[144] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*; Op. Cit., Herzog; Op. Cit., Martin; Op. Cit., "Complete Harmony"; Op. Cit., "The Name of this Book is Dogme 95"; Op. Cit., Huddleston.
[145] Op. Cit., Staple.

scenes and images, so in my movies I don't want to have to hear the story to justify the images, I just want to make a movie to see [those images], only."[146] Yet he remains adamant that it is a rejection of classical narrative storytelling, not storytelling altogether. In fact Korine is keen to regard himself as a storyteller of American life. For him, plots are unfaithful to real life.[147] This reaffirms Korine's realist motivations and imperative. He argues that traditional plots with a rigidly defined beginning, middle, and end runs contrary to his aesthetic vision, a vision fashioned through Korine's notions of Mistakism and poetic truth. Instead, Korine opts for character driven films that more abstractly generate "a mood, a tone, and a feeling".[148] It is thus unsurprising that Korine prefers working with non-actors. He believes that they are less conscious of the camera because they have no formal training, and because of this they better facilitate his Mistakist objectives.[149] Korine uses scripts as catalysts for inspiration, so his actors to take the dialogue in a direction of their own.

Korine's dislike for conventional plots but fondness for storytelling is indicative of Korine's commitment to a form of realism, which he shares with (European) Art Cinema and factions of the American Underground. That being said, the narrative structures – the film form – and the visual textures of his films do not align as comfortably with Art Cinema and the American Underground alone, also sharing with documentary, and other experimental and 'avant-garde' modes of filmmaking as well as aspects of Art Cinema and the American Underground.[150] Korine's visual and narrative style, as mentioned above, directly coincides with personal expression and his overall aesthetic vision:

> I think the films reflect the mental state at the time you're making
> them. Making the other films, I had a very strong idea of cinema, a

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[146] Op. Cit., "Complete Harmony".

[147] Op. Cit., LaBruce; Op. Cit., Huddleston; Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.

[148] Op. Cit., Huddleston and Ibid., Ridley & Silverman.

[149] "Harmony Korine Interview" (*Function*. April 2005).

[150] David Bordwell thoroughly typologizes the formal poetics of Art Cinema in his eponymous essay "Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice" (*Film Criticism* 4.1: Fall 1979, 56–64). Bordwell observes how art cinema is motivated by two prevailing principles – realism and authorial expressivity – rather than the cause and effect logic of classical narrative filmmaking. Similarly, art cinema tends to be structured using more episodic narrative structures which drift from one sequence to the next in a deliberately vague and ambiguous fashion, instead highlighting the psychology, emotion, and general human condition of the characters involved in conjunction with the mood and feeling through which that is delineated based on the filmmaker's visual style.

> specific kind of cinema, and the way I wanted to watch movies, that was very much about collage – a chaos narrative, a kind of noise narrative. I didn't care about making sense. I wanted to make perfect nonsense. I wanted images coming from all directions, falling out of the sky, sound.[151]

Again, this approach to structure, or anti-structure, as he seems to see it, further enhances his films affiliations with realist as well as the grotesque aesthetics. Korine regards himself as a documenter who happens to use film or video to archive events that he orchestrates (not unlike the Vienna Actionists), but it tends to take place in the public sphere amongst the social landscape (not unlike Direct Cinema or Cinema Verité documentary). Even when the imagery seems to lack causal narrative motivation, his films remain thematically and rhythmically tied together in an associational capacity, and because of the coherence and unity of his juxtaposition of image and sound, a story is told.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

While Korine himself is a very knowledgeable and well-read artist, he remains skeptical of over-intellectualizing his films. Korine expounds:

> …there's always a misconception about the films from the beginning like *Gummo* or *julien*, that in the movie there was something to be got. That it was like you either got it or you didn't, like you needed to somehow qualify yourself to understand the films. I always found that disappointing because that was never my intent. My films were not meant to be got, they were just meant to be experiential and to be felt. I never wanted to make movies that you could just talk away in words and that made perfect sense.[152]

Korine resists analysis, declaring, "I'm not a big believer in introspection. I don't really care to know much about myself or why I do the things I do."[153] In large part, it seems he dislikes the intellectualization of his work because he feels able to express in films what words alone cannot capture. Korine reiterates:

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[151] Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman.
[152] Op. Cit., *The Big Picture*.
[153] Op. Cit., LaBruce. Also see; Ibid.

> I try to work from intuitive and lyrical places. If I could express it in words, or it was something I could talk away, I would never feel the need to make it…in truth, I don't really know. It just feels right. I make films because I feel like I have to…I make films because I want people to react, to see them and to be moved or confused by them."[154]

Based on the primacy of experience, it would seem that Korine believes that the answers that people are looking for are there to be observed, witnessed, and experienced in his films. Yet it will never be a clearly defined answer, one that "complete[s] the circle".[155] He intentionally leaves "a margin of the undefined".[156] This element of ambiguity fuels the ambivalence of emotional responses that his movies elicit. This is indicative of not only various realist modes and styles of filmmaking but is also a quality indicative of grotesque cinematic art. It is to the grotesque in film that the next chapter will turn.

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[154] Op. Cit., Dalton. Also see: Ibid., *The Big Picture*.
[155] Op. Cit., Ridley & Silverman. Also see: Op. Cit., Bill Friskics-Warren.
[156] Ibid., Friskics-Warren.

SUMMATION:
THE GROTESQUE IMAGINATION
AS
AESTHETICS OF PERVERSION

In his essay addressing spectator engagement with "perverse" characters and scenarios, Murray Smith argues that "moral evaluations and judgments frequently underlie our emotional reactions – one that characterizes emotions in terms of both bodily arousal and cognitive judgment."[1] An aesthetic encounter with the grotesque elicits both a visceral and a moral response. Arguably, this is something that is elicited upon encountering any aesthetic form or mode. Encounters with the grotesque, however, tend to elicit intense emotions and reactions, ranging from disgust and outrage, to laughter and hilarity, to the mixed reaction of unease and ambivalence. The visceral and the moral tend to be elicited simultaneously when encountering extreme aesthetic modes and forms such as the grotesque, or, indeed, when attributing something as grotesque from a more palpably subjective position.

Broaching the longstanding debates on 'identification' in Film Studies dominated by psychoanalytically inflected theories of perception and emotion, Smith makes a crucial distinction between the way in which we, the spectating audience,

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[1] Murray Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances" (*Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. Eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M.Smith. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 218).

are structurally aligned with events perceptually through the strategies of film form and style, and the allegiance that we may form on an empathetic level, or antipathy and emotional detachment that may be fostered, with those characters and scenarios in which we are aligned. This dynamic distinction of engagement is something that has long been conflated by psychoanalytic theories of identification. The perverse in film, he notes, is such because of the way in which some films are structured so that we, the spectating audience, are aligned with "perverse" characters. Smith's approach to the perverse aligns with my own approach to the grotesque in several interconnected ways. He emphasizes the importance of authorial intent, and also the formal organization of a film, without ignoring the subject matter being portrayed.

Smith defines perversity as "the deliberate violation of a moral precept". Given this definition, if there is a moral precept that we adhere to (or not), our emotional response to this character is necessarily affected by morality. Smith further explains that morality is an unavoidable element of our cognitive responses. According to his cognitive account of moral evaluation and emotions, "morality must enter into "perverse" emotional responses as much as it does into "straight" responses."[2] Smith makes further clarifications in his definition between what he refers to as *first-order* and *second-order perversity*:

> First-order perversity involves a direct taking of pleasure in that which is morally or socially proscribed, while second-order perversity involves taking pleasure in some action *because* it is so proscribed. The first-order pervert just likes (say) using iron filings as a culinary seasoning, or prefers sex with a dead body or an inert dummy over that with a responsive human agent; the concept of first-order perversity recognizes the existence of impulses and desires not morally or socially sanctioned. The second-order pervert, however, enjoys the transgressiveness of what she knows will be looked upon as "perverse"…particular cases seem to involve both first- and second-order perversity.[3]

While, as Smith indicates, there is an overlapping of the two orders, we can say that according to the experiences and interests indicated in their authorial legends,

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

the artistic intentions of Clark and Korine would fall into the first-order; whereas, for example, the likes of John Waters would fall into the second order.

Smith's essay provides a useful heuristic for addressing the way in which the grotesque is aesthetically experienced and interpreted viscerally and cognitively, or more specifically, emotionally and morally. But possibly of even more use is the way in which it provides a framework for interpreting the creative dispositions of the grotesque "perversions" of the creative imagination. In this way, Smith shares similarities with Ruskin's conception of the grotesque as ultimately emanating from a particular temperament and disposition of the artist's imagination. Smith also identifies perversions as stemming from the artist. Smith traces the reveling and celebration of perversity in art as emanating from a Romantic aesthetic disposition and temperament and anchored in the rich traditions of the Aestheticist and Decadent movements from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Artists of these movements challenged conceptions of beauty. They considered that which is purportedly perverse and even ugly as being equally beautiful to that which is cherished by the more standard conventions of beauty as well as that which is perceived to be sublime.

Similarly, the aesthetics of the modern grotesque in this thesis are largely motivated by the rejection of conventions and normalcy; Clark and Korine also pervert conventions in their embrace of the grotesque. This perversion comes in a variety of forms: as a structural perversion of formal conventions (e.g. methods of storytelling or the collapsing of traditionally fictional and non-fictional techniques), through the perverse engagement with abnormal subject matter and content (e.g. unabashedly displaying abnormal bodies, teenage sex and drug use, extreme poverty, and various paraphilias), or some combination therein; all of this in conjunction with a seemingly detached or disimpassioned attitude toward the content being conveyed.

The Aestheticists and Decadents took what they regarded as an amoral view of art. Rather than view art as an expression of the best and most beautiful in the human world, they instead stressed the idea and value of "art for art's sake", rejecting moral criteria for evaluating art. Smith notes several representatives of this position,

including the likes of Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Oscar Wilde. Whereas art and criticism up to this point was largely orientated around more transcendental notions of role of art and beauty, the Decadents and Aestheticists dismissed this idea, in favor of the "discovery of beauty in acts of violence and depravity."[4] Like Ruskin's conception of the grotesque mind, the Aestheticists and Decadents are principally motivated by a "cultural attitude", or as Smith hastily refines, a "countercultural attitude", one that "prides itself on an ironic distance from, or subversion of, mainstream values and attitudes."[5] And while, as artists, this attitude is ultimately expressed through "matters of style and taste" in their work, it is their "detachment" from establishmentarian morality and their "deliberate flouting" of the moral establishment that allocates not only their work, but also their intentions, to the realm of the perverse.[6]

Based on some of the proclamations made by both Clark and Korine that have been brought to light in the previous two chapters, it becomes clear that they share a similar outlook. They reject the establishment criteria of beauty being measured on a moral basis and also find that aesthetic beauty can be found in the perverse. The realist and grotesque aesthetic sensibility of Clark and Korine is similarly congruent with Aestheticist and Decadent movement in general. Indeed some of those at the forefront of the Aestheticist and Decadent movements, namely Baudelaire and Poe, have been regularly attributed as artists who have embraced, if not epitomized, particular conceptions of the grotesque. It is my contention that enough similarities exist between Clark and Korine and the Aestheticists and Decadents, Clark and Korine can be situated amongst the American gothic grotesque tradition, an American aesthetic tradition that, while it has its roots in Europe, has in some ways come to define the aesthetic underbelly of American popular culture through its distinctively American appropriation of the gothic as well as the grotesque. This is something that becomes the most apparent with the way in which the overall milieu of Clark's and Korine's films, but especially Korine's, which fosters the prevailing mood and atmosphere of the grotesque. This is something that is elaborated upon in CHAPTER 5.

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[4] Ibid., 228-229.
[5] Ibid., 229.
[6] Ibid.

Smith suggests that the American Underground cinema from the 1960s by the likes of Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, George Kuchar, Barbara Rubin, Robin Nelson, Andy Warhol, and Ken Jacobs are the most demonstrative of a Decadent and Aestheticist sensibility which are conceived and rendered from a *supposedly* amoral, or anti-establishmentarian moral perspective.[7] Smith goes on to cite Jonas Mekas' description of the American Underground as cultivating a distinctly "Baudelairean" cinema. Echoing the Romantic sentiments of Victor Hugo and his conception of the grotesque, Mekas describes the American Underground cinema as a "world of flowers of evil, of illuminations, of torn flesh; a poetry which is at once terrible and beautiful, good and evil, delicate and dirty."[8] This balance of seemingly contradictory or opposing extremes is an underlying sensibility which can also be extended to the grotesque and realist aesthetic visions of Clark and Korine, based not only on their aesthetic proclamations that we have seen in the past two chapters, but also upon further evaluation of their films which will be examined in both CHAPTERS 5 and 6.

It is important to note, and as Smith points out, that Aestheticism and Decadence are not amoral, but reject moralism and Puritanical morality.[9] Citing H.L. Mencken, Smith affirms that the Aestheticist and Decadent aesthetics and sensibility are a "moral revolt against the moral axiom."[10] Artists adopting the Aestheticist and Decadent worldview oppose Puritanicalism from a social and aesthetic standpoint. Smith elaborates:

> Puritanical morality which is perceived to be intolerant on (at least) two fronts: first in terms of actual behavior, especially with regard to unconventional sexuality; and second with regard to the bounds of propriety in representation. Aestheticism and Decadence underline the distinction between representation and reality, maximizing the space for the knowing play of the imagination; Puritan morality, by contrast tends to literalize representations, treating them as the equivalent of the actions represented.[11]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. Jonas Mekas, "On Baudelairean Cinema" (Village Voice. 2 May 1963).

[9] Ibid. 229-230.

[10] Ibid., 229. H.L. Mencken, "Introduction" (Wilde, Oscar. *A House of Pomegranates*. New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1918. i-viii).

[11] Ibid., 230.

This, however, poses a dilemma for the amoralist. Holding such an aesthetic attitude attracts recriminations of impropriety, incorrigibility, and depravity, as we have noted with the Clark's and Korine's critics. However, the irony is that by representing acts and behaviors that are perceived to be morally reprehensible by the moral establishment in a morally objective fashion, artists are deemed immoral because there is no moral recrimination present in their artistic representations. Smith refers to this as the *paradox of amoralism*:

> The *paradox of amoralism* is that the amoralist's detached treatment of moral issues will always be treated as *immoral* by the moralist – and this is often recognized in advance by the (ostensible) amoralist. So an amoral gesture is often, in reality, an immoral gesture. But this in turn can be construed as a kind of moral gesture, as an instance of what has been dubbed "moral immoralism" – the holding up of a particular moral doctrine for ridicule, for the sake of a superior moral claim. Aestheticism and Decadence speak a rhetoric of amorality, but in reality they fail to escape the gravity of moral space, and so it is that works in this tradition frequently become an object of heated debate regarding their immorality or morality.[12]

Clark and Korine have fallen within this paradox. Both filmmakers have garnered a considerable amount of critical debate about as well as moral indignation against the content and subject matter of their films. However, they have both also garnered their fair share of support in the artistic and critical community. While much of the discussion surrounds their visual style within this community, the majority of the discussion involves their choice of subject matter and content and those discussions tend to be framed by moral hypotheses regardless of their realist aesthetics. The filmmakers themselves unsurprisingly defend their films (albeit exasperatedly when being pressured to justify their films), but it is their commitment to realism and the realities of the social underbelly of American culture – the grotesque realities of American culture and life – that simultaneously form their respective rhetoric of amoralism and much of the critics rhetoric attributing them as immoral or counter-moral.

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[12] Ibid.

In some ways, this makes the supposed art for art's sake view, previously suggested of Aestheticism and Decadence, seem somewhat reductive. The freedom to explore a subject simply for art's sake, without any clarified objective remains an intrinsic part of the Aestheticism and Decadence. However, the commitment to contravening intolerance towards peoples and behaviors undermines the sometimes realist motivations and dimensions (i.e. the revealing of what is really 'out there' in the world) of their cinema art. Regardless, both filmmakers actively foster the grotesque in their work through the cultivated ambivalence achieved by casting the perverse in implicit contrast to the established moral order without ever truly revealing what they consider the status of the perverse thing to be within the moral order. This, in conjunction with the various non-fictional techniques and devices, is the very balance required in order to obtain an aesthetic that straddles the domain of the grotesque as well as that of realism. Moreover, as Smith points out, an acknowledgement of the perverse in relation to the conservative moral response facilitates the pleasures of perverse, and in turn, grotesque art.[13] This characteristic of Aestheticist and Decadent philosophy and their art runs the risk of becoming over-determined. As Smith rightly points out:

> …Decadent artwork may delve so deeply into the domains of the morally perverse that any underlying moral claim is undermined. The representation of what most of society has now come to at least tolerate – homosexuality, bisexuality, group sex – is often conjoined in decadent works with the approving representation of more questionable practices, such as necrophilia, rape, and nonconsensual sadism – acts that can only be morally justified according to the most extreme versions of moral egoism.[14]

This is to say that the aesthetic and philosophical objectives of Aestheticism and Decadence, which utilizes the profane and the obscene to repudiate intolerance and Puritanicalism can itself become an exercise in contrarianism that celebrates the profane and the obscene for its own sake, or simply for the sake of shock value. This in-and-of- itself could be regarded as a form of hedonistic moral immoralism. This, however, is the point at which Smith's articulations of Aestheticism, Decadence, and

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[13] Ibid., 232.
[14] Ibid., 231.

the perverse meet with Clark's and Korine's aesthetics of the modern realist grotesque. While the films of Clark and Korine do not endorse the morally perverse activities of its characters per se, they definitely do not condemn them either. However, because of the realist imperatives of both filmmakers' aesthetic visions and the executions of those visions, the grotesque becomes even more profound and complicated in their Aestheticist/Decadent approaches to their film art. Because, while they do not seemingly endorse the extreme morally perverse content that appears in the films, they fully endorse the frank and candid representation of that subject matter and content as a reality worthy of artistic expression.

PART III

Beyond the grotesque lies…the grotesque.

(Harpham, 1982: 191)

CHAPTER 4
CHRONICLING THE GROTESQUE IN FILM

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will chronicle the grotesque in cinema. It will explore the films and ideas that comprise the dialogue on the grotesque within Film Studies. Similar to other fields, the grotesque is broadly employed in two ways in Film Studies, as an aesthetic concept or a critical evaluative concept. Aesthetically, the grotesque tends to be attributed to films according to the formal and stylistic strategizing of its themes, subject matter, and content. Films that have been classified as grotesque from a critical evaluative standpoint tend to symptomatically assess the subject matter and content of films for their perceived moral and/or political implications. That is, they are assessed as cultural or social rather than aesthetic artifacts. These two approaches to the grotesque are not impermeable and sometimes overlap within the same study. The difference is a matter of emphasis and degree.

There are three overarching themes which recur within both approaches to the grotesque within Film Studies. The principal tropes that prevail in discussions of the grotesque in cinema are: *the grotesque body or the bodily grotesque*; *co-presence of seemingly opposing, incompatible, incongruous, or contradictory elements and the emotional ambivalence of the visceral affect that it elicits*; and *estrangement, alienation, cognitive dissonance and dislocation from the phenomenal world*. Similar to

the overlap of the two general approaches, one trope is rarely used by authors to the exclusion others. Like an author's emphasis on aesthetics or critical evaluation, certain tropes also tend to predominate within any given discussion. In this sense, my research is no different. Each trope provides a useful foundation to explore Clark's and Korine's films in the remaining chapters that follow.

THE GROTESQUE BODY

The grotesque body is by far the most dominant of the grotesque tropes within Film Studies regardless of whether the grotesque is being explored aesthetically or used as a critical evaluative concept. The body is central to almost all grotesque art. The films and filmmakers that fall under this category specifically focus on the materiality or corporeality of the imagery of the body and/or its processes. In many instances the body serves as a vehicle for disgust, estrangement, or ambivalence, which will be seen in subsections to follow, and while this is not to say that the grotesque body in this section does not have a greater function, such as to caricature something or critique representational systems, it is the visceral and material body in-and-of-itself that secures the presence of the grotesque aesthetic.

Many who discuss the grotesque body in Film Studies borrow from Bakhtin's conception of the bodily grotesque, whether implicitly or explicitly.[1] As this is the case, it is worthwhile to briefly revisit Bakhtin's work. His conception of the grotesque is initially shaped by his ontological distinction, which is typified by "the fusion of different natural spheres, immeasurable and exaggerated dimensions, and the multiplication of different members and organs of the human body".[2] Similarly, according to Bakhtin, the key elements of the grotesque aesthetics, which are fundamentally the ways in

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[1] Bakhtin originally submitted a version of this as a dissertation to the Gorky Institute in 1941, but it was regarded as too ideologically controversial at the time. It was later published as *Rabelais and His World* for the first time in 1965, and subsequently translated to English for the first time in 1968. Intriguingly, a monographic study of Rabelais and the grotesque titled *Word Formation as a Stylistic Device Exemplified by Rabelais* was published in 1910 by Leo Spitzer.

[2] Op. Cit., Bakhtin 44, 303.

which the grotesque is embodied, entails "[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness."[3]

Historically, the grotesque also has a dimension of realism. Bakhtin notes that, during the medieval period in Europe, the grotesque body was widespread within art, literature and the culture at large.[4] The grotesque is an aesthetic reflective of the social psychology of the folk culture to such an extent that it is intricately woven into the zeitgeist of the material social world as well as being symbolically expressed in the art and literature of the time. He suggests that the grotesque was *the* prominent mode of 'bodily representation' during the time of Rabelais to such an extent that it functioned as a critical mode of realism. Thus, he shapes his concept of the grotesque through the body and realism.

According to Bakhtin, the more familiar non-celebratory conception of the grotesque that engenders more pejoratively oriented expressions of fear, disgust, and a sense of alienation is a relatively new understanding of the grotesque which emerges during one of the revivalist periods of the grotesque by the Pre-Romantic and Romantic critics of the eighteenth century.[5] He insists that the grotesque was not only pervasive in medieval art, but also in the folk culture of the European people, especially within their humor. The manifestation of grotesque humor materializes through the "theme of mockery and abuse" and represents the "unofficial speech of the people."[6] Correspondingly, Bakhtin identifies the comical dimensions of the bodily grotesque as being firmly ensconced within the social sphere of the folk culture during the medieval period:

> Wherever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images. The body copulates, defecates, overeats, and men's speech is flooded with genitals, bellies, defecations, urine, disease, noses, mouths, and dismembered parts. Even when the flood is contained by norms of speech, there is still an eruption of these

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 347.

[5] Ibid., 34-52. This conception of the grotesque is thoroughly explored by Kayser. Bakhtin, in his "Introduction", even attributes Kayser's study as the most authoritative on the post-Renaissance conception of the grotesque.

[6] Ibid., 319.

images into literature, especially if the literature is gay or abusive in character. The common human fund of familiar and abusive gesticulations is also based on these sharply defined images.[7]

For Bakhtin, the grotesque concept in art and literature is manifest through corporeal processes that are both enacted *by* and *upon* the body. The embodied 'stuff' of everyday existence – that which involves the material, functional, and pleasurable elements of the body – are grotesque topics and subjects of grotesque humor.[8] Processes enacted upon the body, are also sources of the grotesque: "dismemberment and detailed anatomic descriptions of wounds and deaths" as well as other body based anomalies or abnormalities: gigantism, dwarfism, or any other anatomically based birth defect or disease, such as leprosy.[9] However, these grotesque bodily processes enacted upon or through the body, at least within the domain of art, remain celebratory, as they are often motivated by political acts of resistance in the context of carnival. When satire and parody of grotesque humor is used to debase the subjects of official culture, it functions as a symbolic means of resistance.

Robert Stam's book, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (1989), uses Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body and carnival to address the distinctions between erotic and pornographic filmmaking, justifying what he views to be the liberating aesthetic and political value of erotica, in contrast to the reactionary, paltry, base, and exploitative character of pornography.[10] Providing a facetious analysis of pornography using a Bakhtinian framework, Stam suggests:

> One taking such a position might argue that pornography constitutes a contemporary version of Bakhtin's "carnival" overthrowing puritanical taboos, fostering carnival's "free and familiar contact" and the promiscuous "intermingling of bodies." Within this perspective, the close- up attention to male and female genitalia shows carnival's predilection for the body's "lower bodily stratum." Zoom-ins to spread-eagled actresses pay homage to the "protuberances and

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 354.

[9] Ibid., 355.

[10] Ibid., 34-52. This conception of the grotesque is thoroughly explored by Kayser. Bakhtin, in his "Introduction", even attributes Kayser's study as the most authoritative on the post-Renaissance conception of the grotesque.

orifices" of the body, and the privileging of male ejaculation, multiplied to surrealistic dissemination via optical tricks in films such as *Behind the Green Door*, provides a modern day equivalent to ancient seasonal rituals   of fecundity.[11]

Stam insists that Bakhtin would find "most pornography" as being "oppressive" because of its hierarchy of bodily functions. According to Stam's interpretation of Bakhtin, there is "no conceptual hierarchy" between bodily processes, so the "inexorable zoom-ins to the fuck, the cock, the cunt, its endless repetition" is itself a grotesque distortion of the grotesque.[12] Ironically, Stam adopts a critically evaluative usage of the grotesque while adopting Bakhtinian elements of the bodily grotesque.[13]

More important is Stam's use of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's ontological conception of the bodily grotesque, while systematically wedded to his notion of the carnival spirit, is not contingent upon it. Consequently, while I am inclined to agree that a lot of porn is not carnivalesque, which is a characteristic that Stam seems to conflate with the grotesque, it exemplifies Bakhtin's conception of the bodily grotesque. Whereas the carnivalesque is a critical intervention afforded by an attitude, the grotesque is an ontological status of a thing, in Bakhtin's rubric, a body.

Mikita Brottman discusses corporeality and visceral nature of the grotesque in terms of *Cinéma Vomitif*. *Cinéma Vomitif* is a "disreputable substream of the horror/exploitation genre" and is situated "somewhere at the crossroads of the slasher movie and the exploitation film".[14] Brottman elucidates the aesthetic characteristics in which she identifies as being the prevailing characteristics of *Cinéma Vomitif*:

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[11] Ibid., 166.

[12] Ibid., 177-178.

[13] Furthermore, Stam appears guilty of the same criticism he uses to attack porn. He has created a "monologic" discourse, to use Bakhtin's term, to address what he describes as "canonical" porn without taking stock of the sheer variety of overlapping bodily functions – let alone styles, subgenres, kinks, and fetishes – that are contained in it which are indicative of the bodily grotesque. Would his argument change if he had chosen to view slosh porn, foot fetish porn, or feminist porn where the hierarchy is more ambiguous?

[14] Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films: Toward an Anthropology of Cinéma Vomitif* (Westport and London: Greenwood, 1997, 4-5).Brottman's study is not restricted to a particular historical period. In fact she even declares that her study explicitly spans "last seven decades" at which point she promptly itemizes the release dates of the films she intends to discuss in her book which includes: "1932, 1959, 1963, 1973, 1974,

> Comprised of the fundamental and often gross realities of human flesh and the grotesque living body, this kind of cinema is an extremely radical force. It shows us personal, everyday forces of human life and all those coarse realities…birth, death, sexuality, defecation, ejaculation, evisceration, and all our shared bodily functions that in other forms of cinema are made abstract…*Cinéma Vomitif* displays a bodily mirror world…only in the mirror can we see humankind as it really is: a grotesque and freakish parade of bodily deformities and perversions.[15]

Echoing Bakhtin's conception of the bodily grotesque, Brottman suggests that *Cinéma Vomitif* reflects the reality of material human existence and his conception of the bodily grotesque in "medieval carnival".[16] Moreover, she argues that it can assist in elucidating "our own obsessions with the deformed human body" that are found in "contemporary mass-media representations".[17] She makes a direct comparison, for instance, between Bakhtin's descriptions of the grotesque in Rabelais' writing and the mutilated faces in Neo-Mondo movies. However, she adopts Bakhtin's conception of the bodily grotesque devoid of its celebratory progressivism and instead combines it with the notion of the abject. Such a conception is indicative of a post-Romantic conception of the grotesque body and indeed the grotesque in general.

Brottman extends her adaptation of Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque to discuss *Freaks* (Browning, U.S.A., 1932). Motifs of the bodily grotesque reminiscent of medieval carnival such as "distended bodily members, areas of the body exaggerated to gigantic dimensions" as well as consisting of an "array of carnival figures, including giants, hunchbacks, and dwarves" and "bodies that transgress the limits between animal and human flesh".[18] Similar to Bakhtin, Brottman also attributes the imagery as being "a direct expression of human ambivalence about the material bodily stratum, helping us to understand (if not come to terms with) precisely what it means to be human".[19] In paralleling *Freaks* with medieval conceptions of the carnival grotesque, Brottman locates the film as being part of the same historical

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1983, and 1989-94 respectively" (Brottman, 2). And it should be pointed out that not all of the films encompassed there are discussed in terms of the grotesque.
[15] Ibid., 4.
[16] Ibid., 50-51.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 50-52.
[19] Ibid., 52.

continuum as Rabelais' chapbooks, a continuum that figuratively reflects and embraces the material conditions of human existence in all of its corporeal manifestations and glory.

Barbara Creed advances Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's reworking of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque, namely his notion of the bodily grotesque, combined with Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject.[20] She uses these notions in her critical interpretations of the politics of representation of the body, gender, and class in horror film, providing a lucid and erudite discussion of the pervasiveness of the abject and the 'female grotesque' in contemporary horror cinema. Her initial endeavors in engaging this topic are peppered throughout her book, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), but it is in her essay "Horror and the Carnivalesque: The Body-Monstrous" (1995) that she more fully develops her perspective on the grotesque in horror film. She unequivocally asserts that, "Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body' is particularly relevant to the horror film; indeed if one word can be used to describe all manifestations of the body found in this genre it is 'grotesque'."[21]

Creed draws from Stallybrass and White's observation that: "It is striking how the thematics of carnival pleasure – eating, inversion, mess, dirt, sex and stylised body movements – find their neurasthenic, unstable and mimicked counterparts in the discourse of hysteria."[22] This, however, is not altogether a new idea. It is an elaboration of Bakhtin's own observation that the post-Romantic conception of the grotesque has come to be psychologized in a pejorative fashion rather than ritualized in celebratory one. Nevertheless, it is this post-Romantic conception of the grotesque which provides Creed with the fertile ground to incorporate Kristeva's notion of the abject, which only differs in *perspective* from Bakhtin's notion of the bodily grotesque, not in content. Kristeva's 'abject' aligns closely with the post-Romantic

[20] Peter Stalllybrass and Allon White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1986) and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[21] Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Carnivalesque: The Body-Monstrous" (Ed. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman. *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995, 136).
[22] Op. Cit., Creed 131. This is Creed directly quoting Stallybrass and White (Stallybrass and White, 182).

conception of the grotesque. The abject, ultimately, encompasses that which is repugnant and disgusting and is indicative of impurity and the defilement of that which is clean, vibrant, and vivacious. This includes all visceral and phenomenal experiences associated with the diseased body, the decaying body, and the dead body; but it also entails the bodily excretions and evacuations that Bakhtin refers to from a distinct perspective of repugnance – bodily fluids and waste such as "the sickly acrid smell of sweat", urine, menstrual blood, vomit, and bodily pollutants.[23]

Creed thus proposes: "Like carnival, the horror film mocks and derides all established values and proprieties: the clean and proper body, the desire for immortality, the law and the institutions of church and family, the sanctity of life".[24] The "monstrous body" of the grotesque in horror film emphasizes the "inside and outside", and, more literally, the inside-out "in order to shock and horrify".[25] For Creed, the destruction of the body in the horror film is a celebrating the symbolic destruction of "prevailing values and norms of behavior".[26] Unlike Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, there is no sense of renewal or regeneration, only further degeneration and destruction. In some instances, the calculated use of comedy and comic devices is one of the few ways that some horror films maintain the parodic spirit of Bakhtin's conception of the Rabelaisian grotesque in conjunction with the body monstrous.[27]

Creed also identifies two particular leitmotifs in which the bodily grotesque is regularly manifested: the *possessed body* and the *invaded body*.[28] The possessed body "defies all known laws governing bodily powers; it is horrifying precisely because possession desecrates the body (its own or the bodies of others) in its presentation as grotesque, engorged, disgusting, or abject".[29] Creed identifies the possessions from

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[23] Op. Cit., Kristeva 3, 71.
[24] Op. Cit., Creed 132.
[25] Ibid., 136.
[26] Ibid., 149.
[27] Ibid., 134.
[28] Ibid., 139, 145. Creed adduces a typology of twelve motifs of the body-monstrous, which she refers to as the twelve faces of the body-monstrous. Subsumed within the majority of those twelve motifs are overlapping subcategories which form leitmotifs. She also adduces a further typology of six bodily zones and wastes that expresses the various inside/outside motifs of the monstrous and abject body (Ibid., 136-148, 148-153).
[29] Ibid., 139.

The Evil Dead (Raimi, U.S.A., 1981), *Evil Dead 2* (Raimi, U.S.A., 1987), *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, U.S.A., 1973), and *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanksi, U.S.A., 1968) as exemplars of this leitmotif. The invaded body "acts as a host to some form of infestation" in which the body becomes a gestational or incubational nest.[30] *The Thing* (Carpenter, U.S.A., 1982), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Kaufman, U.S.A., 1978), *Rabid* (Cronenberg, Canada, 1977), and even *The Elephant Man* (Lynch, U.S.A., 1980) represent this leitmotif. The invaded body is not altogether different from the possessed body. The former is a product of the physical realm, even if that realm is extraterrestrial, whereas the latter is a product of the supernatural realm. Creed identifies that the horror in both of these leitmotifs "is generated because of an inability to distinguish the human from the 'thing'."[31] What Creed ultimately identifies here is the ambiguity of the status of the human form, which is a common element within the bodily grotesque.

She further identifies two bodily zones in which the expressions of the bodily grotesque and the monstrous converge: *the skin* and *the womb*.[32] The skin is the most common and apparent bodily zone in which the abject bodily grotesque is represented in horror films:

> The horror film abounds in images of cut and marked skin, skin erupting from within into pustules, skin infested with parasites, skin covered with blood, skin bubbling and transforming itself as the beast from within erupts, skin that expands to permit the creature inside room to grow. The representation of skin as mobile, fluid, and fragile reinforces an image of the grotesque body as constantly in state of becoming.[33]

However, again, unlike the Bakhtinian concept of the medieval grotesque, which is typified by the cyclical carnival spirit of degeneration and renewal, the abject grotesque body reaches an endpoint at disintegration. The womb also negates Bakhtin's Rabelasian idiom of the grotesque, because it is an agent of further defilement and destruction and if any renewal exists, it is a traumatic renewal through destruction. The grotesque horror of the womb is a central motif to Creed's politics of

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[30] Ibid., 145.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 151, 152-153.
[33] Ibid., 151.

gender representation in horror film, which revolves around themes of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. She affirms that this theme is "central to many horror films (sci-fi horror) where woman is depicted as monstrous because she is capable of breeding and giving birth in abnormal ways."[34]

Mary Russo's conception of the 'female grotesque', while not the first to coin the concept, as it will be shown later in the chapter, has nevertheless been the key source in gendering Bakhtin's concept of the bodily grotesque. Nevertheless, her book, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1994), is significant in the way that she has adapted Bakhtin's notion of the bodily grotesque as a heuristic device for specifically assessing the politics of gender representation across a number of media including live show performances, literature, illustration, photography, as well as film.[35] However, it is the essay that she wrote some eight to nine years prior, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" (1986), in which she initially posed her gendered conception of the bodily grotesque, which was almost undoubtedly the inspiration for pieces such as Creed's above, let alone a plethora of others engaging with the grotesque representations of the body through the lens of identity politics, some of which will be addressed below.

Russo distinguishes between two permutations of the grotesque: the carnival grotesque and the uncanny grotesque.[36] Examining a wide array of artistic and cultural practices, Russo's engagement with film principally focuses on the independent art-film, *Freak Orlando* (Ottinger, Germany, 1981). She argues that the politics of gender are played out through the carnival grotesque in Ottinger's film. The film is inspired by Virginia Woolf's novel, *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), but is influenced by the avant-garde and Tod Browning's *Freaks*. Russo holds that Ottinger's film redresses the "visualization of the crisis of reason in Western culture" in the way that "grotesque inversions" and "intertwinings" are aesthetically expressed through

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[34] Ibid., 136, 152.

[35] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

[36] Ibid., 7.

gendered conceptions of the bodily grotesque.[37] This is expressly demonstrated when "chickens with female doll's heads are dropped into the 'Goya' sequence of Ottinger's film, Browning's famous image of the woman-becoming chicken freak is reversed: the freak chickens are 'becoming- women'."[38] Russo proposes that since the 'freak' in Ottinger's film defies rationality, visually, it illustrates the crisis of reason and contravenes the bodily canon of official culture.[39] Thus, Russo argues that the 'crisis' and 'rationality' are false constructs of idealizations which the 'freaks' function to reveal or expose.

Drawing further on Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais, Russo describes the "radically aesthetic, pictorial logic" of *Freak Orlando*.[40] Similar to Bakhtin's observation that the grotesque bodies of Rabelais' characters, specifically the giants, often merged with the physical setting and formed part of the topographic landscape,[41] Russo suggests that the "grotesque body and constructed environment" in *Freak Orlando* are "seen metonymically as surface and detail of one another in an elaborate cross-referencing worthy of Arcimboldo, Escher, and Calvino".[42] From this Russo further extrapolates that, similar to Bakhtin's contention regarding the grotesque body, the freak body in Ottinger's film is a "radical model of sociality" in which the body is an open and externalized entity that is interconnected and interwoven with the material world, reiterating that the "fantastical connections" made in the film establish an inextricable link "between and within genders, bodies, costumes, subcultures, architectures, landscapes, and temporalities", which is again analogous to Bakhtin's corporeally orientated conception of the grotesque. Although her articulation of the bodily grotesque vacillates between the literal and figurative throughout her critical assessment of *Freak Orlando*, the very corporeality of the body remains the principal site of the grotesque. It is the endpoint in her evaluation of the gendered status of the female grotesque body that is being rendered by Ottinger.

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[37] Ibid., 94.
[38] Ibid., 95-96.
[39] Ibid., 95.
[40] Ibid., 97.
[41] Op. Cit., Bakhtin, 342.
[42] Op. Cit., Russo, 97.

Jodi Brooks extends Russo's gendered reworking of Bakhtin's adoption of the bodily grotesque as a framework for evaluating Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* (Aldrich, U.S.A., 1962). The film stars the aging Bette Davis (as Baby Jane Hudson) and Joan Crawford (as Blanche Hudson) who both play has-been film stars that are unable to cope or accept being shunned by the limelight that they once commanded and enjoyed. According to Brooks, the two main characters, Jane and Blanche, are "freaks" that engender and embody the grotesque. This is embodied in the way that they failingly, even deludingly, resist the aging process which is manifest through their deteriorating female bodies in which they persist to dress-up like vivacious adolescent girls.[43] Brooks borrows Mary Russo's conceptualization of "performance" and the "female grotesque" as a means to address the characters designation as freaks. Whereas Blanche is an "emotional monster" who engenders the grotesque through her madness and irrationality, Jane's embodiment of the grotesque is based on both her behavior and her appearance.[44] Brooks describes Jane as being emblematic of the bodily grotesque citing her "looseness of flesh, powderiness of skin and hair, and probably most of all, little girl precociousness in an aged and decaying body" in conjunction with her twisted "desire to perform" as if she were still the young girl like she was when she was a star.[45]

In her essay "The Female Grotesque: Gargoyles in the Cathedrals of Cinema", M.C. Kolbenschlag was the first to critically explore the notion of the 'female grotesque' in film in her attempt to redress the politics of representation with regards to the cinematic portrayal of women.[46] She focuses on representation of women in films of the late 1970s from a liberal feminist perspective.[47] She contends that these films are peopled with the grotesque female characterizations which

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[43] Jodi Brooks, "Fascination and the Grotesque: *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?*" (*Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 5.2: 1990). Available: http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/5.2/Brooks.html (Retrieved: 13 March 2002).

[44] Op. Cit., Brooks.

[45] Ibid.

[46] M.C. Kolbenschlag, "The Female Grotesque: Gargoyles in the Cathedrals of Cinema" (*Journal of Popular Film* 6.4, 1978: 328-341).

[47] Intriguingly, Kolbenschlag makes reference to the female grotesque fourteen years prior to Russo yet Russo makes no reference to Kolbenschlag's essay.

include "prostitutes, neurotic spinsters, schizos, nymphos, alcoholics, flakos and other crazies".[48] Kolbenschlag makes a similar argument to Russo's gendered assessment of the bodily grotesque in which she suggests that women are represented as freaks; however, the body is ancillary to the behavior, mentality, psyche, and activities of women in film during this time. Kolbenschlag attributes the saturation of female characters portrayed as grotesque as being the consequence of both male and female "contemporary filmmaker's inability to conceptualize and project directorial ego through female characters" because of their obtuse "directorial narcissism".[49]

Addressing the material characteristics that characterize the grotesque, Kolbenschlag adopts Thomson's trope regarding the physical nature of the grotesque and the notion that the grotesque inherently signifies abnormality.[50] She claims that the grotesque is conveyed by the "physically abnormal", which typifies the "antipathy for female anatomy…and the expressions of denigration and disgust…associated with misogyny".[51] She argues that the physical deformity of the female characters in conjunction with the "misogynist attitude" through which the characters are rendered makes the grotesque aesthetic tangible, Theresa Dunne (Diane Keaton) in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Brooks, U.S.A., 1977) is Kolbenschlag's first exemplar of this dynamic.[52] Dunne is afflicted with a "congenitally deformed spine, cursed with a limp and a hideous scar on her back"; furthermore, she is also a "schizoid nymphomaniac, a disguised masochist who unloads the conditional guilt of her misshapen "Catholic" upbringing by grooving on kinky sex".[53]

In her book, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (2003), Francesca Royster addresses the grotesque as gendered and racialized in her exploration of the way in which the representation of Cleopatra's femininity has shifted over time. Royster concentrates on the way in which glamour and the

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[48] Op. Cit. Kolbenschlag 332.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Op. Cit., Thomson 8, 24-27.
[51] Op. Cit., 331. First quote is Kolbenschlag directly quoting Philip Thomson (Op. Cit., Thomson 9).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 331-332.

grotesque combine and conflict in the politics of representing the race and gender in Hollywood cinema and popular culture. She examines the ways in which the grotesque emerges through imagery that reflects the prevailing cultural anxieties of the period.[54] Royster conducts a cultural analysis of various contexts – the production context surrounding the film, the state of race and gender politics, the role of celebrity culture at the time, and the film itself – surrounding the production of the epic film *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, U.S.A., 1963). She argues that the monstrousness is a product of cultural anxieties which are embodied through the aesthetic racializing and gendering of the skin with the grotesque or glamour being contingent on the effect.[55]

Royster argues that Hollywood's construction of glamour is a "symptom of a white racial hierarchy" which is reinforced through the hegemonic machinations of the Hollywood system. The majority of Royster's general argument involves her broader discussions involving the inextricable link between the celebrity status of Elizabeth Taylor and her starring role as Cleopatra and the way in which: "Liz Taylor – in *Cleopatra* – would suggest an image that satisfies ready-made patterns of white femininity" which results in a conflation of her starring role and her celebrity status to such an extent that the two became synonymously identified.[56] She argues that upon the release of *Cleopatra*, Taylor's body was "treated as grotesque in the press" which was itself subsequently emblematic of "larger stereotypes about female sexuality" in the way that the perception of her personal life and her role as Cleopatra were regarded as inextricable.[57] Royster alleges that:

> …Elizabeth Taylor's body, figured as a grotesque, becomes the stand-in for the film's financial woes and for Twentieth Century Fox Studio's increasing structural weakness. The grotesque here is one version of the changeable, transitional Cleopatra icon, where change is figured as deterioration of the body. In turn, Taylor's Cleopatra becomes

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[54] Francesca T. Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 94).

[55] Ibid., 94. While Royster's general discussion primarily focuses on *Cleopatra*, her observations and analysis of the grotesque is split between the two films in almost equal measure.

[56] Francesca T. Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 93).

[57] Ibid., 93-94.

synonymous with the increasingly outdated excesses of the Hollywood epic, the death of the studio made "star" and the resurrection of the celebrity.[58]

Not dissimilar to Jodi Brooks' analysis of *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?*, Royster draws on Geoffrey Galt Harpham's idea of paradigm crisis and of liminality as being logically parallel with the grotesque. She argues that the embodied cultural status of Taylor's Cleopatra is indicative of the liminal phase of paradigm shifts whereby certain norms can no longer be explained by old paradigms, but they are displaced prior to the emergence of a replacement paradigm or the acceptance of the replacement paradigm that has invalidated the previous one.[59] The resultant effect, according to Royster (and indeed Harpham), is an "attraction" and fascination with the grotesque object while simultaneously experiencing a "distinct feeling of *repulsion*".[60]

In his essay "Surrealism, Fantasy and the Grotesque: The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer" (1989), Michael O'Pray claims that for a better appreciation of the films of the animated-live-action films of Švankmajer, "more is to be gained from a study of writers like Schulz, Kafka, de Sade and Mikhail Bakhtin and of painters like Arcimboldo, Hieronymus [*sic.*] Bosch and Max Ernst than from most contemporary film theory and criticism".[61] This is a consideration which he extends to a more specific and focused study involving the Czechoslovakian film animator Jan Švankmajer and his work. O'Pray avers that Švankmajer shares a "fascination with the grotesque and the morbid" and that his aesthetic vision often demonstrates the "real" being instilled with an "aura of strangeness and the fantastic".[62] This places Švankmajer's films in contrast to "Hollywood's mainstream narrative genres and the naturalism or realism of much European art cinema".[63] For that reason, O'Pray contends that his films "rupture or exceed the dominant cinematic conventions" through a combination

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[58] Ibid., 27.

[59] Ibid., 100-101 and Op. Cit., Harpham 17-22.

[60] Ibid, Harpham 9, 11 (emphasis in the original).

[61] Michael O'Pray, "Surrealism, Fantasy and the Grotesque" in *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1989. 253).

[62] Ibid., 254.

[63] Ibid.

of various stylistic techniques and devices as well as a variety of forms and modes of representation.[64]

Concentrating on the very "surface materiality" of the grotesque, O'Pray identifies Švankmajer's films, *The Last Trick* (Czechoslovakia, 1964) and *Dimensions of Dialogue* (Czechoslovakia, 1982) as representative of Bakhtin's medieval grotesque.[65] The former film entails "two dueling magicians are reduced to tearing each other apart until only an arm of each remains".[66] The latter is a film that is indicative of the Mannerist tradition of painting – specifically to Arcimboldo's portraits – where there is "the spewing out of the Arcimboldian figures after being devoured".[67] O'Pray identifies the bodily grotesque in these films, but he also sees Bakhtin's "communal act of assertion and renewal" and the realization of Bakhtin's political capacities of the grotesque within Švankmajer's work.[68] Since Švankmajer operates outside of the mainstream genres in Hollywood and Europe, by employing grotesque aesthetics, he fundamentally resists the dominant film culture. O'Pray clarifies that the grotesque functions as "a sign of resistance, a symbolic destruction of official culture" which is achieved through "liberated thought…imagination…degeneration…low humour...and a celebration of the body's base functions".[69]

In many instances, the corporeal focus of the grotesque body is advanced to highlight the monstrousness of a character, whether physically or behaviorally, literally or figuratively, as a caricature or hyperbole. Robert Sinnerbrink's essay evaluates *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Greenaway, France/U.K., 1989) as an allegory of Thatcher's Britain through the mode of a Jacobean revenge tragedy.[70] According to Sinnerbrink, the film adopts aesthetics of the grotesque to effect a sense of disgust. The focal point of Sinnerbrink's analysis is the 'thief'

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 263.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 258.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Robert Sinnerbrink, "The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover" (*Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 5.2, 1990). Available: http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/5.2/Sinnerbrink.html. Retrieved: 13 March 2002.

character, Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), who is the "grotesque embodiment of consumer capitalism" who is symbolic of the excessively and conspicuously consuming habits indicative this social group.[71] Citing Bakhtin, Sinnerbrink suggests that Spica exceeds or extends beyond "the confines between the body and the world…[it] grows at the world's expense."[72] Spica is the "embodiment of greed, insatiable appetites and grotesque corporeality" who is representative of the "'vulgarity' and 'bad taste' of the nouveau riche" who "seeks to master the world by consumption" in excess.[73] Though Spica is characteristic of the grotesque body of excess found in Rabelais, he is also indicative of a mode of corporeality found in Jacobean revenge tragedy which draws attention to the representation of the body.[74] The Jacobean themes, motifs, and structure which comprise *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* are commensurate with the excesses of the Rabelaisian grotesque body whereby the body is the site of "purely animal aspects of human existence, eating, drinking, defecation, and copulation".[75] However, whereas in Rabelais' time the bodily grotesque is used in celebration and comedy through the carnival, the body of such acts in Jacobean drama is conceived through post-Romantic conceptions of the grotesque, and it is generally designed to evoke disdain and disgust for its base qualities, similar to the way Creed sees the function of horror.

Cory A. Reed's literal reading of the bodily grotesque as being inscribed into the monstrous characters of Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* (U.S.A., 1989) is in complete contrast to the allegory of Sinnerbrink. Reed almost entirely conducts his analysis using Bakhtin's concepts of the carnivalesque and the grotesque. Reed tightly argues that Tim Burton's production of *Batman Returns* is imagined through the aesthetics of Bakhtin's notion of grotesque realism.[76] Reed subscribes to Bakhtin's notion that grotesque realism "attack[s] high culture and bring[s] it down to the lowest common

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid. This is Sinnerbrink directly quoting Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 282-283).

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid. This is Sinnerbrink directly quoting Gamini Salgado's, "Introduction" (Ed. Gamini Salgado. *Three Jacobean Revenge Tragedies*. Harmondsworh: Penguin, 1965, 20).

[76] Corey A Reed, "*Batman Returns*: From the Comic(s) to the Grotesque" (*Post Script* 14.3: 1995, 38).

denominator of the material level."[77] The grotesque realism that underpins Burton's world in *Batman Returns* degrades the struggle between good and evil found in the 1960s television series, providing a "more serious contemplation of society and psyche".[78] He further argues that Burton's rendering of Gotham City and its inhabitants is shaped by "the parodic spirit of grotesque realism" thus undercutting the very genre conventions that structure previous media renditions of *Batman*.[79]

Reed also identifies the characters of *Batman Returns* as monstrous combinations of human and beast, which satirically function to "expose and criticize some deficient or abhorrent aspect of society".[80] Here Reed borrows from Bakhtin's elucidation of Victor Hugo's view that "the aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous".[81] Reed elaborates upon this notion by interpreting that the monstrous combinations of human and beast in relation to the main characters of the film – Bat-man, Cat-woman, and Penguin – represents a struggle between humankind's "divine and bestial natures".[82] Because of his simultaneous embodiment of the divine and the bestial aspects of humanity, the Penguin is "the true emblem of the monstrous" in the tradition of grotesque realism.[83] The inextricable dualistic identity as the aristocrat Oswald Cobblepot and the blood and bile spitting, nose-biting Penguin is not only the embodiment of the bodily grotesque par excellence, but he also engenders what Bakhtin deems to be the unalienable ambivalence of grotesque realism.[84]

In her essay, "Making the Old New Again: Robert Altman's *Pret-a-Porter*" (2002), June Werrett discusses the ways in which Altman employs the grotesque in order to aesthetically critique the fashion industry. She also suggests that the grotesque characters in *Pret-a-Porter*, which she describes as 'freaks' due to their

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 37.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 40.
[81] Ibid., 40. This is a direct quote made by Reed from Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 43).
[82] Ibid., 41.
[83] Ibid., 42.
[84] Ibid.

physical distortions (i.e. the characters are dwarves, transvestites, ad sexual oddities),

are similar to the characters found on the *Jerry Springer Show.* The film "confuses the

boundaries between freak and ideal, inside and outside and it offers a social critique of

the mediated world through the means of comic and ridicule".[85] The grotesque bodies

in Altman's film function to caricature the conventions of what is typically perceived as

a closed system of bodily representations in the fashion industry, but it is the distorted

bodies which are the focal point of the grotesque.

Elizabeth Cleere also proposes that Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small*

(Germany, 1970), *Fata Morgana* (Germany, 1971), and *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*

(Germany, 1972) are indicative of the modern grotesque.[86] She elaborates how

Herzog's films are principally populated with "freaks and outcasts, misplaced persons in

alien and hostile environments that both evoke and distort our familiar conception

of reality."[87] Cleere concisely surmises:

> *Even Dwarfs Started Small* features dwarfs and midgets in a
> setting composed of over-sized objects and an imposing, barren
> landscape that resembles the moon as much as its own planet. Similarly,
> the native and foreign inhabitants of the landscape in *Fata Morgana*
> dwindle in significance against the backdrop of the dream-like,
> impenetrable mountains and deserts of the southern Sahara, cluttered
> with animal carcasses and the debris of civilization. In *Aguirre, the
> Wrath of God*, a band of mutinous conquistadors led by a madman
> is involved in a constant struggle with the alien and increasingly
> surreal Amazon River and its surrounding jungle, peopled by an invisible
> enemy.[88]

Cleere argues that Herzog's films embrace the bodily grotesque as a means to

confront and degrade orthodoxies of official culture. This is most apparent in

Dwarfs, the entire cast of which is little people, a film filled with confrontations that

are hyperbolized by the dwarfs' behavior, who persistently emphasize their genitals

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[85] Op. Cit., Werrett.
[86] Elizabeth Cleere, "Three Films by Werner Herzog: Seen in the Light of the Grotesque" (Wide Angle 3.4: 1980, 16).
[87] Ibid., 12.
[88] Ibid.

through gesticulatory movements and gesture obscenely during conversation throughout the film.[89] As Cleere notes:

> The traditional association of dwarfs in the carnival is heightened by the fact that within the course of the film the dwarfs paint their faces, dress up in costumes and indulge in a series of theatrical, often violent escapades. [In] the spirit of the carnival…[t]he actions of the dwarfs, both verbal and non-verbal, are deliberate, exaggerated violations of the moral and social order, motivated by the revolutionary spirit of carnival. The obscene and abusive language used by the dwarfs is directly linked to the carnival tradition of folk humor.[90]

The ontological boundaries between "people, animals and objects" are blurred or collapsed into one another in Herzog's films as well. This is exemplified in *Dwarfs* when blind dwarfs, who wear goggles and helmets, are segregated from the rest of the group. They are even given the pejorative title of "Chicklets" by the other dwarfs and visually linked to the "cannibalistic and vicious chickens".[91]

The scatological dimensions of the bodily grotesque are also directly expressed through a number of characters in Herzog's films who are primarily focused on eating and defecating. The bodily grotesque is also expressed more abstractly in Herzog's films, such as during the final scene which shows a raft full of dying men alongside the corpses of those that have already died being overrun by masses of monkeys. This makes a "transitional link between man and animal."[92]

Similar to Cleere's assessment of Herzog, David Lavery suggests that the southern European imagination of Fellini is "dedicated to the subversion" of the "bodily canon" in his essay "News from Africa: Fellini-Grotesque".[93] His films regularly consist of anatomical, sexual and cultural grotesques – 'drag queens', 'hermaphrodites', "nudists", "mental patients", "twins", "giants", and "dwarves" – presented in a non-judgmental manner, and they are often shown celebrating the

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 15.
[91] Ibid., 15, 18.
[92] Ibid.
[93] David Lavery, "News From Africa: Fellini-Grotesque" (*Post Script* 9.1/9.2: 1990, 82-98). Available: http://www.mtsu.edu/~dlavery/grotesque (Retrieved: 13 March 2002).

visceral and graphic renewal processes of the biological human.[94] In other words, Fellini adopts the grotesque aesthetic as a positive and affirmative aesthetic expression that contravenes the idealized bodily canon and cherishes the grotesque body in his films.[95]

In Fellini's earlier films the grotesque is manifest through Rabelaisian scenes rejoicing in the "[l]usty, exuberant scenes of eating" with the scatological elements of the grotesque becoming more prominent as Fellini's career progresses.[96] In *Fellini Satyricon* (Italy/France, 1969) scatology is treated as a social ritual where characters relieve themselves while seated at a table. Farting and belching is a topic of discussion and contemplation as the characters fart and belch in a casual and festive manner. One character's belches are even subject to the interpretations, or 'readings', and further instruction as to appropriate technique by another character.[97] The scatological is also demonstrated through the performative "antics" of the "augustes" in *I Clowns* (Italy/France/Germany, 1970) in the way that they engage in farting charades by simulating farting sounds throughout the film.[98] Moreover, scenes of the scatological grotesque are evident in *Roma* (Italy/France, 1972) when a mother "ushers her young son into the aisle to relieve himself" while attending a burlesque show, after which a "devotee of the bodily canon" expresses her disdain at the mother and her urinating son.[99]

Lavery's analysis of the scatological grotesque in Fellini culminates in *his* evaluation of *Amarcord* (Italy/France, 1973). Lavery observes various unconnected scenes imbued with the scatological grotesque covering bodily functions such as urination, farting and shitting. While scavenging for the Contessa's diamond ring, "[s]ubmerged up to his armpits" in a cesspool, the ironically named character Eau de Cologne (Fredo Pistoni) explains, in a Bakhtinian rationale, that "there's no difference between a scent and a stink" and that shit is a "human product, just as much as

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

our thoughts are" to the observing Count (Antonio Di Bruno), who is repulsed.[100]

Farting also plays a prominent role in *Amarcord* when a pupil who is listening to a

"tedious lecture" responds to the "hot air" of the lecturer with "wind of his own" by

making fart sounds during an elocution lesson. Urine is a recurring motif. It is both

presented as a grotesque reality, or natural process, and is used to disrupt the social

order. One character recites a poem about urine and another character pisses from a

balcony onto the hat of a character below who is of prominent status and repute. In

another scene, a character urinates on a local dignitary at the dinner table.[101] The

grandfather of the offending character then leaves the room, "grabs hold of a chair

with both hands, bends slightly, and farts rhythmically, as if relieving himself of all

the tension in the air".[102] This scene also ties in another significant social ritual of

Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body and grotesque realism – the banquet and

eating – which Lavery claims culminates in a "truly Rabelaisian wisdom…what you eat,

you shit".[103]

Like Lavery, John C. Stubbs' also addresses the grotesque in Fellini through

a comparative historical analysis of Fellini's narrative and visual style with more

traditional artists.[104] Also similar to Lavery, Stubbs recognizes the many examples of

"freaks" within Fellini's films – similarly enumerating the plethora of grotesques:

"giants, dwarfs, hunchbacks, large fleshy women, transvestites, and characters with

large noses or hollow eye-sockets" – but he differs by incorporating Wolfgang Kayser

to aid his analysis. Lavery adopts Kayser's distinction that the grotesque can be

divided into two schools: "that of Hieronymus Bosch and that of Pieter Brueghel the

elder", with Stubbs positing that Fellini's films are similar to Brueghel, because of their

alignment with "caricature, exaggeration, and the amassing of figures".[105]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] John C. Stubbs, "The Fellini Manner: Open Form and Visual Excess" (*Cinema Journal* 32.4, Summer 1993: 49-64).

[105] Ibid., 56. I will address the significance of Wolfgang Kayser's contribution to the theoretical conception of the grotesque in the subsection to follow. While this is an intriguing and useful distinction, Stubbs' heuristic borrowing of Kayser's paradigm is very slight, so that it barely influences his theory.

Contradistinctively, Fellini's use of the grotesque as a comic device distances the filmmaker from the demonic invasion of the phenomenal world imagined by Bosch.

Similar to Lavery, Stubbs is interested in the gallery of physically grotesque characters that populate Fellini's later films. In *Amarcord*, Stubbs observes how the "photographic portrait scene of the school children" aptly conveys a Brueghelesque awkwardness of the variety of "odd proportions" evident in adolescents who are in the throes of puberty.[106] Ultimately, Stubbs insists that Fellini's proclivity toward the grotesque is demonstrative of his "tendency to break down the rational norm at some point in his films."[107] While the "gallery of grotesques" is a hallmark of Fellini's later films, his earlier films are also populated by "collections of odd characters or characters in odd costumes".[108] In *Roma*, for instance, a character portraying an eighteen year-old Fellini arrives to his new abode, a boarding house, to encounter the following characters:

> a Chinese man cooking spaghetti who bows to the young man, a little boy wearing glasses and sitting on the toilet who announces, "I've done it!" a tiny grandmother hunched in her rocking chair in the attic, a ham actor with tinted glasses and a broad brimmed hat, an overweight beauty drying her long black hair, an old man with the bald head and a jutting chin of Mussolini who recites the doctrine of Il Duce, and an enormous, block-figured mistress of the pension who lies abed with inflamed ovaries and is eventually joined by her sunburnt, grown-up son in an odd parody of an oedipal situation.[109]

Also similar to Lavery's exploration of Fellini is Naremore's observation that Stanley Kubrick's oeuvre recurrently employs a style that reflects "his anxious fascination with the human body".[110] Naremore observes how his fascination with the corporeal and material grotesque is demonstrated throughout Kubrick's imagery, particularly the way in which he renders the "exaggerated performances and caricatured faces and

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[106] Ibid., 58.
[107] Ibid., 56.
[108] Ibid., 58.
[109] Ibid.
[110] James Naremore, "Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque" (*Film Quarterly* 60.1, September 2006: 4-14).

bodies" of his characters.[111] Naremore notes that this fascination is evident throughout Kubrick's oeuvre, enumerating a variety of characters across the span of his career: "the leering hotel keeper named "Swine" in *Lolita*, the metallically wigged and mini-skirted "Mom" in *A Clockwork Orange*, the grossly made-up "Chevalier de Balibari" in *Barry Lyndon*, [and] the pudgy Japanese men in bikini underwear in *Eyes Wide Shut*".[112] Also, similar to Lavery's exploration of Fellini, Naremore observes that Kubrick also shares an interest in "scatology" with a recurring theme of "staging scenes in bathrooms" throughout his films, noting the presence of this across his oeuvre in *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, as well as *2001*.[113]

However, unlike the Rabelaisian grotesque which is also inflected with the carnival spirit, Kubrick's films lack the ambivalent comic humor that Bakhtin referred to. Comparing the aesthetics of Kubrick to Orson Welles, Naremore notes technical similarities, "especially the wide-angle lens and the long take" for crafting their other mutually shared similarity, their fascination with caricature.[114] Yet Naremore locates them at different ends of the spectrum in terms of their respective affinities for the grotesque. Kubrick's characters are engendered using a cold humor which disaffects and isolates his characters from their environment, which fosters a nihilistic sense of anomie rather than a hedonistic sense of corporeality and indulgence. Comparatively, Naremore explains that:

> In Welles, the grotesque is…inflected with affectionate, sentimental, and even tragic emotions. When the fat, rumpled Captain Quinlan chews a candy bar in Tana's parlor in *Touch of Evil*, he seems childlike, pathetic, and oddly noble. In *Mr. Arkadin*, when the title character looks down on the grubby, dying Jacob Zouk and chuckles to himself, Zouk asks what he is laughing at. "Old age," Arkadin says, in a tone redolent of King Lear. Especially in *Chimes at Midnight* (1966), Welles delights in the earthy, festive pleasures that interested Ruskin and Bakhtin. Kubrick almost never ventures into that territory. For him, it is as if the body is

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[111] Ibid., 11.
[112] Ibid., 10.
[113] Ibid., 11.
[114] Ibid.

the source of a horror that can be held in check only with a kind of radical, derisive humor…[115]

Accordingly, Naremore posits that Welles' characters are engendered with an ambivalent humor indicative of what Ruskin and Bakhtin refer to as the consumption of lowbrow material delights. Naremore is the only film scholar to explicitly invoke Ruskin's conception of the grotesque, although he adopts a minor aspect of Ruskin's work in which he shares the greatest similarity with Bakhtin. Yet he disregards the vice and sensuality of what John Ruskin would refer to as the ignoble sportive grotesque in terms of his grotesque aesthetic imagination and temperament.[116]

Like Naremore, Adrian Martin also attributes the characters in the film as engendering and embodying Roman Polanski's vision of the grotesque. Martin contends that Polanski "cherish[es] the grotesque" and is a "master of artifice and stylization".[117] Martin specifically notes the characters that Polanski himself plays as being indicative of this, citing the hired goon who slits Gittes' (Jack Nicholson) nose in *Chinatown* (U.S.A., 1974) and the main character, Trelkovsky, in *The Tenant* (France, 1976). Martin argues that Polanski portrays his characters in a similar manner to Kubrick in the way that he renders "the human body and the actor's performing style into a kind of exaggerated cartoon, in all aspects of costume, posture, and vocal tone".[118]

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[115] Ibid.

[116] If we recall for a moment, for Ruskin, while the grotesque is observed and ascertained in the material aesthetic expressions of the art objects, the source of the grotesque ultimately emanates from the mentality – temperament, attitude, disposition, or even worldview – of the artist, which the material expression of a true/noble or false/ignoble grotesque ultimately reveals. It is puzzling that Ruskin is not adopted by more scholars within Film Studies because his conception is the most agent-centered and Film Studies rightfully still places great significance on the role of the filmmaker. Used in the context of film, Ruskin's ideas highlight the filmmaker and the way that observable properties and qualities of the grotesque are a direct expression of the mentality, imagination, creative proclivities, and worldview of the artist.

[117] Adrian Martin, "Landscapes of the Mind: The Cinema of Roman Polanksi" (*Senses of Cinema* 15. July-August 2001).

[118] Ibid.

D.E.A.D.: DISSONANCE, ESTRANGEMENT, ALIENATION, DISLOCATION

Another dynamic of the grotesque that is often discussed in Film Studies is its capacity to disorient, dislocate, alienate, or estrange. These capacities are discussed in relation to the characters within the diegetic universe of the film and/or the spectator who is aesthetically engaged with the film. Most commonly, authors who discuss this dynamic refer to the way in which it jolts or shocks the viewer out of their comfort zones, and the way that it prompts a cognitive, moral, or emotional dissonance by challenging, confronting, or transgressing expectations and norms.

Richard Murphy produces an interesting discussion of this capacity as it is expressed within *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, Germany, 1919). In this film, Murphy explains that the grotesque is woven into the fictional world in such a way that it acts as an "intrusive and disruptive element". While this world contains familiar elements, it also contains disjunctive elements that cause "estrangement" of the "familiar and recognizable world".[119] Murphy adopts his position from Kayser's notion of the grotesque as "the ridiculously distorted and monstrously horrible ingredients" which indicate "an inhuman, nocturnal, and abysmal realm".[120] Murphy writes that:

> ...the dynamic of the grotesque text often rests upon a central contradiction in which it traps both its protagonist and interpreter alike: at one level, in its own representational structure, it is organized according to a set of rationalist values and pragmatic-realist attitudes which it appears to put forwards as a valid method of orientation and meaning, while at another level, as a form of dialogical counter-discourse it works completely discrediting these same values.[121]

Murphy extends Kayser's notions of the grotesque to *Caligari*, suggesting that the "grotesque and the abysmal" enters the film through the "theme of sleep".[122] In the film sleep, according to Murphy, is where the estrangement of the rational occurs

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[119] Richard Murphy, theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1998, 210-211).
[120] Ibid., 210. This is Murphy directly quoting Kayser (Op. Cit., Kayser: 58).
[121] Ibid., 211.
[122] Ibid.

through an "alien and impersonal force".[123] Murphy subsequently suggests that the presence of the grotesque removes the ability to "impose rationalist solutions and meanings" within the logic of the diegesis.[124]

Also borrowing from Wolfgang Kayser's conception of the grotesque, Mark Fearnow also asserts that the American horror films of the 1930s are imbued with the grotesque. He persuasively argues that these films perform "a sort of exorcism of a culture's despair by first naming a horror and then deflating it with the comic."[125] Similar to Bakhtin, Wolfgang Kayser attests that the grotesque engenders a sense of estrangement in those that encounter it because of the "ambiguousness" of the grotesque object. However, unlike Bakhtin, Kayser emphasizes the negative characteristics of the grotesque alleging that: "By viewing our surprise as an agonizing fear of the dissolution of our world, we secretly relate the grotesque to our reality and ascribe to it a modicum of "truth"."[126] Kayser thus summarily asserts that:

> The grotesque world is – and is not – our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence.[127]

Ultimately, he contends that the grotesque is our own world estranged and our estrangement stems from our inability to "orient ourselves in the alienated world, because it is absurd."[128] Thus the grotesque is the aesthetic expression of "our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe".[129] Kayser's notion of the grotesque is conceived as an uncanny sense of dread that invades and violates our world, the phenomenal world, which results in an existential sense of estrangement and alienation from the unfamiliarity of the familiar.

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[123] Ibid., 212.
[124] Ibid., 211.
[125] Mark Fearnow, *The American Stage and the Great Depression: A Cultural History of the Grotesque* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U P, 1997. 176).
[126] Op. Cit., Kayser 31.
[127] Ibid., 37.
[128] Ibid., 185.
[129] Ibid.

Fearnow suggests that Depression cycle horror films are indicative of "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world".[130] The horror film proved fertile ground for expressing the fears and anxieties that riddled American society during this period of history through its combination of realism and the fantastical using both dark humor and eerie atmospheric visuals.[131] Fearnow observes that:

> These narratives of mad scientists, mind control, vampirism, forced transformation, and the diminution of human beings – occurring as they did within one genre and within one decade – are cultural signs of the grotesque. They stand as depictions of the culture's anxiety at being transformed, seemingly against its will, into a destructive and insensible monster by a scientific cult that it hardly trusted. Longing to be "cured" and return to "normalcy," Americans were finding the way blocked, the foundations of religion and commerce having crumbled behind them…

> The films are also disruptive in the grotesque images that they present: a monster playing with a child, a man kissing a creature who is half woman and half panther, a young woman purring and crouching like a cat in heat, people reduced to the size of rodents and darting like rats among middle- class furnishings. These images, the result of a conflation of disparate things, defy facile categorization or dismissal.[132]

Fearnow observes the presence of Kayser's conception of the grotesque within the Depression cycle of American horror films highlights the estrangement from the familiarity and security of the phenomenal world. This characteristic is present both compositionally, within the diegetic world of the film itself, as well as in the way in which the films aesthetically and symbolically express the sense of dislocation of the cultural landscape of American society at the time.

Peter Hutchings refers to the Amicus production company's horror films of the 1970s as coupling the "grotesque and the absurd".[133] This, according to Hutchings, is accomplished in the way that the subject matter and content of Amicus films are composed by juxtaposing "elements not usually conjoined", making specific reference

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[130] Op. Cit., Kayser 188.
[131] Op. Cit., Fearnow 34-35.
[132] Ibid., 40-41.
[133] Peter Hutchings, "Amicus House of Horror" (British Horror Cinema. Eds. Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 131).

to the escaped homicidal maniac dressed as Santa Claus, which is set during the Christmas season featured in the "And All Through the House" segment of the portmanteau film, *Tales from the Crypt* (Francis, U.K./U.S.A., 1972).[134] This seems more appropriately suited for the subsection to follow that situates the grotesque as primarily resulting from the combination of seemingly incompatible or incongruent elements; however, Hutchings' reference to the horrific effect as being analogous to the grotesque effect due to the disorienting terror and estrangement that the aforementioned combination of elements fosters places the emphasis on the estranging dissonance that the abysmal effects.

Kolbenschlag, also exploring films of the 1970s, similarly attributes the grotesque representation of female characters as being reflective of broader social trends of their time, particularly the "changing sexual roles in the social landscape".[135] She argues that the threat of women's social role transformation results in the images of women being portrayed as "grotesque caricatures" across an array of genres and national contexts through estranging female archetypes.[136]

Arguably, the most perceptible of the female grotesque archetypes – "temptress", "witch", or "demonic source of evil" – are developed in the horror film genre in films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, U.S.A., 1968), *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, U.S.A., 1973), and *Carrie* (De Palma, U.S.A., 1976).[137] She adopts Kayser's notion that the grotesque is "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" which expresses "our failure to orient ourselves in an alienated world".[138] She argues that the "recurrence of the demonic theme" in conjunction with images of femininity in the films of this period is indicative of the dislocation and disturbance of the actual social world.[139] Given the social upheaval of the time, the grotesque representation of the feminine, for Kolbenschlag, allows the audience to "barbaric[ally]

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[134] Ibid.
[135] Op. Cit., Kolbenschlag 333.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., 332.
[138] Ibid. This is Kolbenschlag directly quoting Kayser (Kayser: 188).
[139] Ibid.

delight" in the treatment of women.[140] The sadistic enjoyment of the grotesque is manifest through female characters that are conveyed as both "victim and victimizer"; they function as "objects for misogynist catharsis" where the audience cheers the "violence or failure" that they experience.[141]

Kolbenschlag also looks at how gender politics are expressed in dramas and melodramas shaped by verisimilitude where delight is taken after female characters "get their comeuppance".[142] Kolbenschlag specifically cites Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Forman, U.S.A., 1975) and Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway) in *Network* (Lumet, U.S.A., 1976) as affecting such a delight in their downfalls.[143] Similarly, she argues that Robert Altman's drama, *3 Women* (U.S.A., 1977), generates trepidation and apprehension as a consequence of the deforming and distorting effects of the grotesque.[144] Consequently, the audience may be able to identify with the dilemmas that the female characters face in the narrative, but they remain unable to identify or form an allegiance with the female characters themselves as "they are too grotesque".[145]

Likewise, the same change in the social landscape that leads to the misogynistic distortions of female characters also results in instances where images of male characters are also portrayed as grotesque. However, Kolbenschlag contends that rather than evoking antipathy towards the female grotesques, the dislocated male characters evoke sympathy due to the "ethos" in which films are framed.[146] In films where both the female and the male protagonists are portrayed as grotesque, the male character is conveyed as a "manipulated victim or puppet" when they are in fact a "neurotic-hysteric" such as R.P. (Jack Nicholson) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or a "psychopath" such as Howard Beale (Peter Finch) in *Network,* as opposed to being

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[140] Ibid., 333.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 333-334.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 335.
[145] Ibid., 335-336.
[146] Ibid., 334.

perceived, like the female characters, as a "devouring ego" in some "curious inversion of the patriarchal norm".[147]

Another motif of the female grotesque that Kolbenschlag observes involves irrationality and madness. Adhering to her adoption of Kayser's notion that an "encounter with madness is one of the basic experiences of the grotesque", she attests that this is "almost exclusively the domain of women" within popular culture.[148] The irrationality and madness found amid the grotesque is emblematized by "schizophrenia, addiction and obsession" in many of the "best films of the seventies" which also feature a female character as the central protagonist.[149] Although Kolbenschlag attributes film in general as being saturated with such characters, she enumerates a few specific examples, which she deems as being emblematic of the irrationality and madness reflected by the female protagonists in films from this period including: *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (Page, U.S.A., 1977) in which the character is a schizophrenic; *A Woman Under the Influence* (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1974) in which the character is a drug addict; and *The Story of Adele H* (Truffaut, France, 1975) in which the character is a neurotically obsessed with one of the male characters.[150]

In her analysis of *Pret-a-Porter*, June Werrett advances the idea of the grotesque as promoting a sense of dissonance and estrangement in her analysis of a scene that shows a naked and pregnant model strutting down a catwalk. She is

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[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid. Latter quote is Kolbenschlag directly quoting Kayser (Kayser: 184).

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid. Female directors are equally capable of misogyny. Kolbenschlag alleges that the female grotesques in Lina Wertmüller's films are reactionary because of way in which they contrast and counterpoint the male characters in her films whereby the male characters represent normality and the female characters represent abnormality. The female grotesques in Wertmüller's films are exemplary of "caricatures: eccentric, deformed or defamed, bizarre and threatening" and that this evocation of a "sense of the "abnormal" prevents any sense of identification or allegiance from the audience; whereas, the male characters function as the "central consciousness" of her films and are who the audience identifies with or commits their allegiance (Ibid., 337). Moreover, Kolbenschlag avers that the female characters in Wertmüller's films become "more grotesque and fantastic" in each of her subsequent films (Ibid., 338). She specifically identifies the "seduced wife" in *The Seduction of Mimi* (Italy, 1972), the "whores" in *Love & Anarchy* (Italy, 1973), the "bourgeois shrew" in *Swept Away* (Italy, 1974), and the "Nazi commandant" in *Seven Beauties* (Italy, 1975). Kolbenschlag argues that Wertmüller's films foster grotesque female characters threaten the perceived "social order" by using "icons" of the patriarchal myth of the types of women that govern men (Ibid.).

contrasted with the other models that walk "with the cold modernity of the living dead".[151] Their bodies appear "emaciated" as they "walk with determined precision in their steps…controlled as if in an austere performance of modern dance" almost like robotic automatons that are pre-programmed. The transgression of the typical model's body combined with the seemingly dehumanized status of the other models reinforces the estranging dynamics of Kayser's notion of the grotesque. Werrett argues that by combining "the mixed emotions of attending a live side-show fused with the theatre of the absurd", which invokes a sense of "something primordial and strangely sterile" as opposed to the sexual titillation often evoked by nudity, thus prompting a sense of estrangement through its undermining of the expectations of a fashion show.[152]

Hakan Lövgren uses the disjunctive and dislocating conception of the grotesque in quite an intriguing way. He discusses the strategies and effects of intellectual montage in *October* (Eisenstein, U.S.S.R., 1928). He argues that one of the key strategies to the art of intellectual montage is ensuring that associations between juxtaposed imagery are controlled and delimited in such a way that it achieves its intended allegorical effect. He contends that: "The more grotesque the juxtaposed images appear – for instance, in being diegetically incompatible – the more effort is needed for the analogy-making process".[153] Using Harpham's notion that the grotesque is an aesthetic of displacement, Lövgren asserts that "the grotesque is embodied in an act of transition, of metonymy becoming metaphor, of the margin swapping places with the center. It is embodied in a transformation of duality into unity, of the meaningless into the meaningful."[154] Lövgren singles out the sequence of religious idols juxtaposed in the film to demonstrate the way in which the non-diegetic status of the imagery is recognized by the audience as not belonging to the same spatiotemporal continuum as the rest of the narrative, but that this displacement of time and space has an associational significance. While not alienating, the aesthetic

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[151] Op. Cit., Werrett.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Hakan Lövgren, "Eisenstein's *October*: On the Cinematic Allegorization of History." (*Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*. Eds. Al LaValley and Barry P. Scherr. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2001. 83-84).

[154] Ibid., 84. This is Lövgren directly quoting Harpham (Harpham, 71).

grotesque effect here is an internal dynamic of contrast that establishes a figurative compatibility between two images that are literally incompatible in the physical world. Thus it is the very disjunction of imagery that leads to a conceptual-associational link which prompts the spectator to comprehend the imagery figuratively – as a metaphor or metonymy – rather than literally. This manifestation of the grotesque is isolated to the aesthetic realm as it reflexively calls attention to the cinematic devices that created it. It does not stimulate a visceral affect, nor does it prompt the spectator to extrapolate what they are experiencing as in any way having a link to the phenomenal world. Like the grotesques of antiquity, it is isolated to the aesthetic realm; the content of the imagery has no referential currency outside of its symbolic status in terms of its mimetic reflection of the phenomenal world.

Similar to Lövgren, Manuela Gieri refers to the way in which the films of the commedia all'italiana prompt a sense of dislocation and estrangement. Gieri attributes the films of the commedia all'italiana as employing what she refers to as a grotesque "mode of discourse" as a means to satirize and caricature modern Italian society.[155] She argues that Dino Risi's film, *The Easy Life* (Italy, 1962), is innovative in the way that it "transformed the commedia all'italiana" in its embracing of the grotesque.[156] Gieri argues that the grotesque is employed as a political aesthetic mode for Risi to wage his "devastating indictment of contemporary Italian society" by subverting and transgressing an idealized notion of the society.[157] This influenced other commedia all'italiana filmmakers – Marco Ferreri and his film, *The Queen Bee* (Italy/France, 1963) and Lina Wertmüller and her film, *The Lizards* (Italy, 1963) – to employ the grotesque as an aesthetic political device.[158]

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[155] Manuela Gieri, "Hands Over the City: Cinema as Political Indictment and Social Commitment" (Ed. Carlo Testa. *Poet of Civic Courage: The Films of Francesco Rosi*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996. 43).
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] *The Queen Bee* is also known as *The Conjugal Bed*.

AMBIVALENCE: FROM CO-PRESENCE AND INCONGRUITY TO AFFECT

In some instances the principal function of the grotesque is to foster ambiguity and to garner a sense of ambivalence, whether it is through what is represented onscreen or produced affectively with the spectator. This tends to be typified by an incongruity of seemingly incompatible parts in which there is a co-presence or coexistence of opposing elements (i.e. comedy and horror, sentimentality and apathy) or the simultaneous presence of conflicting emotions or affects (i.e. fascination and repulsion) rather than the previous subsection in which the sole effect and consequential affect is one of estrangement and alienation. So while the corporeal remains the observable site for the manifestation of the grotesque, it is the function of ambivalence or the ambivalent affect that is the basis for securing the grotesque aesthetic rather than the ontological status of the object alone.

Ellen Bishop's analysis of the grotesque focuses on the grotesque body, but the body functions as a vehicle for ambivalence, and it is that ambivalence that secures the grotesque aesthetic in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam, U.K., 1975). Bishop addresses the way in which Bakhtin's notion of the medieval grotesque is used to stimulate a comic ambivalence through parody and mockery of the high seriousness of the themes and motifs of Arthurian legend – namely rituals and attitudes towards religion and death.[159] Bishop argues that *Holy Grail* indicates a "resurrection of the grotesque and ambivalent universal carnival spirit" found in medieval folk culture. The ambivalence is generated by the way in which *Holy Grail* dualistically appeals to the "audience's familiarity with Arthurian tales" through the comedic mockery of the more serious variety of those renditions such as that found in *Excalibur* (Boorman, U.K., 1981) and *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, Sweden, 1957).[160]

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[159] Ellen Bishop, "Carnival and Comedy: The New Grotesque in Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (*Film Criticism* 15:1, 1990: 49-64).

[160] Ibid., 53-54. It should be noted that *Excalibur* did not come out until 1980, yet Bishop suggests that it is referenced by *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* which came out in 1975, which she also erroneously cites as being released in 1973.

Bishop specifically identifies the ambivalence produced by *Holy Grail* through depictions of aggression and violence on the body. It is here where the dualism is manifest. Violent acts enacted upon the body are rendered in a comical fashion, which is in stark contrast to the more serious depictions of such violent and aggressive acts found in the more serious dramatized portrayals in the films mentioned above.[161] Bishop specifically references two well-known scenes in *Holy Grail* as examples. In the first, a dead collector (Eric Idle) trolls through a plague-ridden village, announcing "Bring out your dead!" with his accomplice pushing a cart of corpses. The other scene shows Arthur's (Graham Chapman) encounter with the Black Knight (John Cleese) at a small bridge crossing.

In the plague scene, a male villager approaches the dead collector to dispose of an old man who is slung over his shoulder, but the old man decries not only that he is alive, but well, so well, in fact, that he says that he thinks that he may take a walk later in the day. Throughout this, the villager who is carrying the old man contradicts his proclamations, all the while negotiating with the dead collector. He first tries to convince the dead collector that the old man is almost dead and should be taken. He then tries to arrange for a later time to return to collect the old man once he is fully dead. In the end, the dead collector thumps the old man dead on the head so that he presumably dies and throws him onto the pile of bodies already mounted in the cart. Bishop maintains that the grotesque generates ambivalence between the more serious subject matter that is being comically satirized while ensuring that at least traces of the serious referent that is being undercut remains perceptible. In this instance, the "fear of death", while visually maintaining some semblance of the horror of the plague, is mitigated by aesthetically rendering those scenes of plague and human decay using the "grotesque of the carnival comic".[162]

The scene with the Black Knight also mitigates the fear of death through mockery and satire while maintaining a stable visual indicator of the horrors that are being parodied. The Black Knight is initially shown to be mysterious, serious, and

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[161] Ibid., 58.
[162] Ibid.

even brooding (or as much as a character can appear in a Monty Python film). However, once the battle commences the Black Knight character becomes more and more ridiculous upon having each of his four limbs dismembered from his body. Arthur assumes the battle is over after chopping off the Black Knight's arm. The Black Knight dismisses the injury, claiming to have experienced worse. After having his other arm chopped off, the Black Knight proclaims that is nothing more than a "flesh wound" and taunts the befuddled Arthur. When Arthur dismisses him and kneels down to pray, the Black Knight again provokes him by kicking Arthur in the face, continuing to taunt him. Arthur swiftly chops off one of his legs, and the Black Knight continues to verbally assault Arthur with childish insults and taunts while hopping around with projectile blood squirting everywhere. Arthur chops off the final limb leaving the jabbering torso and head insisting that Arthur is running away from an unfinished fight like a chicken. This again demonstrates the Bakhtinian conception of the grotesque in which acts of violence and aggression upon the body, especially dismemberment, are comically rendered to prompt a sense of ambivalence.

Mark Fearnow similarly argues that the U.S. Depression-era comedy film farces of the 1930s, namely those of the Marx Brothers, are typified by Bakhtin's notion of the comic grotesque. He attributes them as being indicative of the ambivalent humor of the medieval grotesque elucidated by Bakhtin. Fearnow adapts Bakhtin's view of the grotesque "as an essential tool of folk culture, a weapon that uses the power of 'carnival laughter' to deflate the dogmas and symbols of the 'official culture'" and that this act of comedic debasement functions as a 'liberating force' that eradicates fear through the 'triumphant laughter' of the people.[163] Fearnow contends that the films are both "funny and threatening, as conventions of language and meaning break down and the order of communication is overturned."[164] Moreover, by combining ridiculous wordplay with anarchic, antinormative, antisocial physical gags developed from earlier forms of slapstick, the films convey "a fictional world that is far from safe."[165] The ambivalent humor of the grotesque is liberating from both social and

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[163] Op. Cit., 176-177. Fearnow is directly quoting Bakhtin in the quotes within the quotes (Bakhtin: 24, 47).
[164] Ibid., 42.
[165] Ibid., 43.

individual dogmas of comportment prescribed by establishmentarian culture. The films shatter "conventional patterns" of social order and the implicit compliance and obedience of its norms.[166]

Syndy M. Conger and Janice R. Welsch also attribute Depression-era horror films as engendering the grotesque; however, they specifically focus on James Whale's Frankenstein films – *Frankenstein* (U.S.A., 1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (U.S.A., 1935) – rather than the whole of American horror cinema from the period. Conger and Welsch suggest that Whale's films combine the comic and the grotesque by juxtaposing the "playful" and the "fantastic" with the "abysmal" and the "ominous and sinister".[167] Following Kayser's conception of the grotesque, Conger and Welsch affirm that the presence of the two modes – the grotesque and the comic – tend to alternate in emphasis. Indeed, they argue that the comic tends to be interjected as a way of displacing the more ubiquitous presence of the grotesque, but that whenever the "comic prevails in *Frankenstein*, the grotesque, although not altogether banished is subdued."[168] There are, however, some moments where the grotesque and the comic are simultaneously coexistent such as when the monster "invades the world of the pastoral" and infers "his own macabre, unspoken logic (a logic that fails tragically to distinguish between plant and human) that a girl can be tossed into a lake".[169] This logic is effectively expressed by Whale through his visual portrayal of Karloff's performance showing the monster's reduction that a "flower, soft and pretty, floats; girl, soft and pretty; therefore, girl will float".[170] Whale similarly revisits this motif of the monster's desperate attempt to comprehend the world that he's been thrust into and even more dauntingly to understand life and humanity again in *The Bride of Frankenstein*. This is distinctively portrayed in a sequence where the creature is shown being drawn to the cottage of a blind hermit playing the violin. The monster encounters compassion and "hospitality" after having some wounds tended to and being fed. After he "sheds his first tears" from

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., 241. This is Conger and Welsch directly quoting Kayser (Op. Cit, Kayser: 38, 118).
[168] Ibid., 245.
[169] Ibid., 245-246.
[170] Ibid., 246.

experiencing friendship for the first time, he has it stripped away from him by riotous townsfolk.[171] These two scenes harness ambivalence by simultaneously establishing empathy with the monster and "his growing capacity and desire for human contact" and then disrupt our empathy by joltingly reintroducing the perceived inherency of the monstrousness of the creature.[172]

Prior to affirming that Švankmajer's films are imbued with a Bakhtinian materiality that is established by a "sense of physicality" indicative of bodily stratum in which the "mouth and anus are sites of transgressions – spitting, vomiting, farting, shitting, cannibalism and so forth",[173] Mike O'Pray, attributes Švankmajer's films as corroborating Kayser's elaboration of the post-Romantic grotesque as "not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister".[174] While O'Pray attributes the grotesque imagery as being imbued with an ambivalent humor that coexists alongside "the horrific, the macabre and repulsive", he ultimately focuses on the materiality of Švankmajer's films.[175] O'Pray distinguishes the subtle yet distinctive differences between the *uncanny* and the *grotesque* by suggesting that the uncanny can be "undermined, transformed and neutralized" by humor; whereas, the grotesque "constantly meshes humor and horror" where both are simultaneously coexistent.[176]

Like O'Pray, Peter Hames observes that the grotesque is one of many ingredients within Švankmajer's recipe of surrealism in his essay, "The Film Experiment" (1995). Similar to O'Pray, Hames also enumerates the aesthetic and thematic strategies and modes embraced by Švankmajer through his use of stop-motion animation of normally inanimate objects across his oeuvre which raises intriguing points about his negotiation of reality and unreality. Hames notes:

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[171] Ibid., 248.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Op. Cit., O'Pray 263.
[174] Ibid., 256. This is O'Pray directly quoting Wolfgang Kayser (Op. Cit., Kayser 21).
[175] Ibid., 255.
[176] Ibid.

> The concern with reality and unreality (making the real imaginary and the imaginary real), collage, the manipulation and re-presentation of objects, a dialogue with childhood, black humour, the grotesque, the absurd, and an attraction to silent comedy are all present.[177]

These modes and strategies combine to induce a sense of "fear and anxiety" regarding the "bleak outlook on the (im)possibilities of dialogue" between officious bureaucratic rationalism and the magic of the irrational imagination.[178] Like O'Pray, Hames highlights the co-presence of the humorous and comedic sides of Švankmajer as well as the dreadfully ominous mood and atmosphere that his films tend to express. Unlike O'Pray, Hames primarily locates the grotesque on the way in which Švankmajer's films are seen to estrange the phenomenal world from its normal conditions of existence.

Primarily addressing film comedy, but also opening the debate up to horror film, the ambivalence in which the bodily grotesque elicits is also central to William Paul's *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror & Comedy* (1994). Similar to Brottman's classification of *Cinéma Vomitif,* Paul claims that "gross-out films" explicitly embrace "scatological and sexual matters" in a Rabelaisian manner.[179] Based on Paul's discussions, gross-out films are not isolated to a single genre. They are a cycle of films that stem from both the horror and the comedy genres respectively. Paul elucidates:

> The grotesque establishes an ambivalence within the films themselves: the horror films often become farcical in the extremity of their devices, while the comedies often move into nightmare sequences. The two genres draw on different traditions of the grotesque to arrive at their respective gross-outs. The horror film generally follows what Bakhtin sees as the post-Renaissance tradition of viewing the grotesque as supernatural and demonic, while the comedies revert to earlier traditions of folk and popular culture that view the grotesque as natural and animal.[180]

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[177] Peter Hames, "The Film Experiment" (Ed. Peter Hames. Dark Alchemy: The Films of Jan Švankmajer. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995. 40).

[178] Ibid., 42.

[179] William Paul, Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 45).

[180] Ibid., 68.

Paul argues that the ambivalence produced by the grotesque imagery of gross-out films simultaneously fascinates and repulses. It is this "contradiction" that is quintessential to the mode of address of gross-out movies.[181]

Paul primarily focuses his analysis of the grotesque in gross-out comedy on *Revenge of the Nerds*. When he does use the grotesque as a critical concept in connection to other comedy films he does so in a quite casual and transient manner or as a counterpoint to *Revenge of the Nerds*. He notes that the "conventional movie typology" of grotesque characters in *Revenge of the Nerds* is markedly different from other Animal Comedies and their precursors[182] because the clown-like characters remain "sexual".[183] He also notes how the grotesque can be used to deride the antagonists of a film in, for example, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Heckerling, U.S.A., 1982) and *Heaven Help Us* (Dinner, U.S.A., 1985).[184]

Moreover, according to Paul, the characters in *Revenge of the Nerds* are part of a "grotesque tradition" indicative of Bakhtin's conception, where comical figures are portrayed as physically aberrant or deformed, but the physically manifested exaggerations take on positive, even celebratory, attributes. Aside from the unusual pairing of grotesque characters that remain sexual, *Nerds* is also unusual to Paul because the characters are not rendered through typical channels of "social status", as is the case in other Animal Comedies.[185] In *Nerds*, *all* characters are grotesque.[186] Paul, again borrowing from Bakhtin, asserts that satirical manifestations of the grotesque are inflected through "ridiculing laughter". Accordingly, no character is ineligible for the ridicule of the satirical grotesque. To support this idea, Paul notes a scene where the character, Booger (Curtis Armstrong), who is explicitly a grotesque character, because of his incessant nose-picking, derides another group of characters for being grotesque when he alleges that they are "a bunch of pigs".[187]

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[181] Ibid.
[182] A more typical Animal Comedy would include: *Animal House* (Landis, U.S.A., 1978) with its precursors being Marx Brothers films and early Woody Allen films.
[183] Ibid., 217.
[184] Ibid., 111.
[185] Ibid., 220.
[186] Ibid., 217, 242.
[187] Ibid., 218-219.

Paul's assessment of the grotesque in horror cinema focuses on one film, *The Bad Seed* (LeRoy, U.S.A., 1956).[188] Paul suggests that the character Rhoda (Patty McCormack) embodies the grotesque because she possesses a combination of opposing categories, producing "ambivalent" imagery of the "child murderess". Rhoda demonstrates characteristics of both "adult and child, experienced and innocent, sighted and blind" and it is from these seeming contradictions she appears as "monstrous".[189]

Like Bakhtin's study of Rabelais, Paul intriguingly argues that gross-out films are reflective of the historical period from which they emerge. While Bakhtin argues that the grotesque during Rabelais' period is indicative of a celebratory comic variation whereas the post-Romantic period is indicative of a more pejorative and estranging variation, Paul suggests that both are equally valid in our modern era.

Similar to Paul, Kolbenschlag identifies the way in which the physical abnormalities of the female characters in 1970s films are more pronounced in the horror films of this era. Like Paul, Kolbenschlag argues that in the horror genre, the ambivalent co-presence of traditionally incompatible, opposing, or unlikely qualities are manifest through the "coexistence of the beautiful with the repulsive, the sublime with the gross, the carnal with the spiritual".[190] She notes the films *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, and *Carrie* all feature an "innocent…and pubertal" girl who is "invaded by demonic influence" and whose innocence is consequently "perverted and corrupted by a transcendent source of evil".[191]

Corey Reed's in-depth analysis of *Batman Returns* reveals how the majority of the grotesque aesthetics in the film are fundamentally tied to the dark carnivalesque satirizing of the norms and conventions of official culture. Thus, while the bodily grotesque is a component of the aesthetic in its own right, the ambivalence generated through grotesque imagery and themes is of greater overarching importance.

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[188] *The Bad Seed* is not actually part of the gross-out horror subgenre. It pre-dates it.
[189] Ibid., 272-273.
[190] Op. Cit., Kolbenschlag 332.
[191] Ibid.

According to Reed, the characters and plot of the film are two of the many ways in which the grotesque realism is manifest in *Batman Returns* and, in turn, satirically inverts and undercuts the Romance genre.[192] Reed critically extends Bakhtin's assumption that "the essence of grotesque realism lies in its degradation of the models and traditions of high culture" to highlight how *Batman Returns* undercuts the romance genre.[193] *Batman Returns* is an "anti-romance in which ugliness overwhelms beauty, disorder reigns triumphant…and evil proliferates in a nocturnal, labyrinthine world".[194] The characters and plot of the film oppose more traditional narrative archetypes in the way that "the search for identity" predominantly involves the antagonist – the Penguin – rather than the protagonist.[195] Furthermore, in contrast to the "more pure romance of the comic books and the TV series" where the villains come back each issue or each episode, the antagonists in *Batman Returns* are conveyed through the aesthetic of grotesque realism as dying "violent and final deaths".[196] This is exemplified by the darkly carnivalesque minions of the Penguin who are known as the 'Red Triangle Circus' gang. The 'Red Triangle Circus' gang include a variety of characters similar to those that inhabited the carnival that Bakhtin referred to: "harlequins, circus clowns, and fire-breathers, in addition to more sinisterly dressed devils, [and] demonic jugglers".[197] Unlike a traditional carnival imbued with "values of hope and renewal" the Red Triangle Circus gang "leaves death, mutilation, and destruction…and…an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair" in its wake.[198] These icons of the carnivalesque, which are traditionally domains of grotesque realism, are said not to be bringers of the regeneration and renewal that Bakhtin claims to be inherent of the carnivalesque, but only the degeneration and destruction, according to Reed.[199] However, the anarchism of the Red Triangle Gang aims to destroy the old to usher in the new, which does situate them as having a regenerative aim. But is this not commensurate with Reed's own observations that the film is itself an ambivalent inversion of the traditional Romance plot? Indeed the

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[192] Op. Cit., Reed 44, 45.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid., 45.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 45.
[197] Ibid., 46.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid., 46.

ambivalence that Reed identifies can be taken even further. The ambivalence of this inversion is made even more complex by the leader of the Red Triangle Gang, the Penguin, who is the interstitial embodiment of both the reigning ruling order as a Cobblepot and the revolting (no pun intended) new order as the Penguin.

The satire found among grotesque realism located in *Batman Returns* is also furnished through the inversions that the dark carnivalesque and the grotesque elements that comprise its imagery (i.e. the carnival and circus motifs used as an anarchistic force of societal annihilation). This functions ambivalently, according to Reed, as a commentary "on the ugliness of society and the failure of its institutions to address social problems".[200] Reed continues to follow Bakhtin's conception, insisting that the satire found in grotesque realism "exposes depravity but also entails a corrective dimension"[201] that is capable of positively regenerating the negative aspects that have been degraded. Reed conjectures that the film is ultimately conveyed through the aesthetics of grotesque realism which portends that a society that fails to address its social problems will "inevitably result in the collapse of social order".[202]

Brooks' analysis of *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* also addresses the ways in which Jane's embodiment of the bodily grotesque is a vehicle for ambivalence, not only of the image, but for the spectator. *Jane* "becomes the site of dread and fascination" through her excess. The excess is manifest through Jane's obsessive need to perform, her "make-up, her heavy (but at the same time nimble) body" as well as her histrionic "gestures and facial expressions".[203] It is evident through Jane's physical appearance as an aging geriatric in conjunction with her histrionic performances where she relives her childhood showbiz acts, which is especially apparent in a scene when she performs a song and dance to "I've Written a Letter to Daddy" while "mastering the codes of a coy little girl".[204] Brooks likens Jane to Bakhtin's description of the "pregnant hag", which is the closest Bakhtin comes in establishing a gendered

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[200] Ibid., 48.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid., 48.
[203] Op. Cit., Brooks.
[204] Ibid.

conception of the grotesque body. Brooks summarizes the way in which the pregnant hag symbolizes the ambivalent materiality of the body as the "figure of grotesqueness which embodies both birth and decay, connected to life and death".[205] Jane is a "composite" of an "endlessly transforming body" which ambivalently combines her "coyness and coquettishness [*sic.*]" on one hand and her "domesticity" and "sloppiness and excessiveness of her body, dress and gait" on the other.[206] Consequently, the ambivalence of her grotesque body – physically and behaviorally – is the cause for ambivalent fascination that simultaneously fosters a sense of "attraction and repulsion".[207]

June Werrett similarly extends Harpham's conception to address the "attraction/repulsion" dynamic that Harpham attributes to the grotesque in her evaluation of the "playful politic of contempt" that *Pret-a-Porter* directs towards the audience.[208] Werrett shifts her attention to Harpham's designation of the grotesque as a state of antithesis to the "ideal", which fosters a "tension that is perfectly controlled" resulting in a "civil war of attraction/repulsion" to those who encounter it.[209] Werrett observes that a recurring "scatological" motif of people continuously stepping in dog shit that seems to saturate the city stimulates this ambivalent response.[210] The ambivalence of attraction and repulsion is further facilitated through Altman's strategic deployment of certain stylistic strategies which oscillates between a pseudo-documentary or verité effect at times and the more straightforward dramatic staging of a conventional fiction film.[211] This stylistic technique is a strategy which I focus on as intensifying the grotesque aesthetic of Clark's and Korine's films.

SUMMATION

The discussions of the grotesque in film are quite dynamic and the concept is used to address a number of issues. In the first section, I presented film scholars who

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Op. Cit., Werrett.
[209] Ibid. This is Werrett directly quoting Harpham (Op. Cit., Harpham: 11).
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

consider the manner in which the bodies and bodily acts of the characters are the endpoints of the manifestation of the grotesque. Bodies that are distorted, exaggerated, distended, severed, disproportioned in size or ratio, incomplete, or unnaturally merged with other ontological domains; bodies that are engaged in acts that involve the secretion of bodily fluids and bodily functions, whether voluntary or involuntary, whether acting or being acted upon, are the principal sites and sources corroborating the presence of the grotesque in film. As David Lavery so aptly put it, "what you eat, you shit".[212] While the bodily grotesque is the endpoint for some film scholars as the site of the grotesque, it is not the endpoint of its observed function. As many have observed, the various instantiations of the grotesque body can reflect an array of expressions and perspectives be they realist or fantastical; political, nonpolitical, or apolitical; comical, horrific, or melodramatic. What remains consistent is that the ontology of the body – be it human, animal, or something in-between – is the source of the grotesque.

The grotesque can also stem from the presentation of disjunctive elements. However, it is not the disjunctive elements that are the sources of the grotesque per se, but rather the metaphysical consequences that a disjunction elicits. The consequences are disturbing, provoking a sense of estrangement and alienation, anomie, dissonance, or even dread. Some film historians and critics identify this within the diegetic world of the film, exploring the ways that certain characters are affected by the disjunction, such as Richard Murphy's study of *Caligari*; whereas, others address the way in which a sense of estrangement is an affect elicited from the spectator, such as Hakan Lövgren's study of *October*. Still others assess the ways in which the estranging content of certain films symbolically reflect the social disconnect and alienation of its time, such as with Mark Fearnow's study of American Depression-era horror films of the 1930s.

In other instances the combination of incongruent or incompatible elements furnishes ambivalence. However, in these cases, the disjunction itself is the principal

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[212] Op. Cit., Lavery.

source of the grotesque. The ambivalence stemming from the disjunction is something that can also be assessed within the diegetic content of the film and/or affectively within the spectator. Ambivalence being assessed within the film is exemplified in the way that Cory Reed identifies how the coexistence of animal and human as well as the underclass and high society is embodied by the Penguin/Oswald Cobblepot in *Batman Returns*. The ambivalence experienced by the spectator upon encountering the grotesque is elaborated by William Paul's assessment of the ways in which gross-out comedies simultaneously elicit laughter and repulsion.

The existing literature on the grotesque in film provides a useful backdrop for exploring and examining the grotesque in the films of Clark and Korine. As this chapter has demonstrated, the grotesque is a versatile and powerful concept, but it cannot be reduced to any particular element. One cannot say that because the caricatures that populate Polanski's or Kubrick's films are grotesque but that Švankmajer's impossible dueling magicians are not; or that because the hemorrhaging bodies of *The Thing* or *Evil Dead* are grotesque that the characters in *3 Women* or *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* are not. The grotesque in film is, indeed, manifest and identified in an eclectic and diverse variety of ways.

As I have demonstrated in the previous two chapters, I subscribe to Ruskin's idea about the mentality and attitude of the artist who creates the grotesque as being fundamentally important to understanding a grotesque work. Understanding the aesthetic imaginations and visions of the filmmakers helps to better identify the motivations for a grotesque aesthetic. And while I implicitly and explicitly borrow from Carroll's, Bakhtin's, and Thompson's conceptions of the grotesque quite regularly, rather than attempting to extend a single paradigm or definition, I explore the manifestation of realism and the grotesque in Clark's and Korine's films by primarily using a quotidian and dianoetic approach to the concept of the grotesque. That being said, to reiterate what I explicitly declared in the GENERAL INTRODUCTION, when I refer to or attribute something in the films of Clark or Korine as grotesque I am minimally suggesting that there is: *a violation of standing concepts and categories as a*

consequence of a typically or seemingly incompatible elements that affectively jolts or shocks, and elicits an ambivalent sense of unease or consternation coupled with fascination, humor, and/or horror; or a sense of astonishing dissonance. This tends to be manifest through a moral incongruity or co-presence that centers on the anomalousness of the body – whether physically, mentally, or behaviorally – or other incongruities relating to human interaction with the material world or environment.

Through a close descriptive analysis, my aim is to strike a balance between the abstract notions of the grotesque and realism and the 'literalness' or concreteness of the films' aesthetics – the form, style, subject matter, content, themes, and motifs. But it is the films themselves that take center stage, and I believe this will highlight how Clark's and Korine's formal and stylistic strategies and techniques combine to facilitate and shape the grotesque and realist aesthetics of their film art.

PART IV

...REALLY TO UNDERSTAND THE GROTESQUE IS TO CEASE TO REGARD IT AS GROTESQUE.

(HARPHAM, 1982: 76)

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the grotesque predominantly emanates from and revolves around the bodies of the characters and things that they do and have done to their bodies. While this is not always the case, exceptions still tend to, in some way, involve corporeal or material themes and motifs, such as food, other biological organisms like animals, and even the materiality of the environment which the characters inhabit. The grotesque is generated in the *ways* in which the bodies of the characters are depicted in transgressive acts. It is the often graphic and explicit visual depiction of these acts that contributes to the imagery of these films being grotesque. It is not only *what* these characters are represented doing, but also *how* they are aesthetically rendered doing them. The aesthetic approach, such as the visual techniques and devices in portraying what is seen and how it is seen, and the resultant texture of the imagery in Clark's and Korine's films is typically affiliated with non-fictional, documentary modes of audiovisual production. In addition, it is the manner in which the subject matter and content of the films are rendered as motifs that fosters an ambivalence. That ambivalence may simultaneously provoke fascination and repulsion, horror and humor, pleasure and discomfort, a sharp sense of unease and uncertainty, or apathy and indifference.

While he argues that "immorality is not a fundamental ingredient in the grotesque", Noël Carroll acknowledges that the immoral is regularly coupled

with grotesque imagery.[1] Yet, Carroll observes, "violations of moral concepts" are not necessarily intrinsic "defining feature[s] of the grotesque".[2] He argues that the mixing of "moral and emotional characteristics in dissonant and exaggerated ways" is a metaphorical extension of the grotesque.[3] However, one of the chief elements of my working conception of the grotesque in the realist cinema of Clark's and Korine's films is largely, but not entirely, based on the ways in which they, similar to Murray Smith's notion of perversion,[4] aesthetically render perversions and violations of moral and cultural concepts, norms, and conventions through the graphic and explicit depiction of the subject matter of their films.

Within Clark's and Korine's films, the violations often revolve around children and adolescence; sex and sexuality; sexual paraphilias; perceptions and representations of bodily anomalies; and the embodiment of mental, emotional, and behavioral anomalies. Moreover, it is Clark's and Korine's so-called amoral perspective or attitude toward their subject matter, or as Smith noted, what is often referred to as an immoral perspective according to critics, which further reinforces and enhances their grotesque palate. Thus, it is their often incongruous combination of conventionally incompatible things – the normalized, uncritical depiction of things that are deemed cultural and moral ideological transgressions or taboos – in conjunction with their nonfictional, documentary, televisual, and home video aesthetics that I argue make their films both grotesque and realist with the latter inextricably contributing – enhancing, intensifying, or contingently determining – to the former.

In Clark's and Korine's films it is my contention that the bodily grotesque is thematically manifest through three prevailing motifs: paraphilias and sexual transgressions; human anomalies; and latent or nascent violence. Paraphilias and sexual transgressions tend to be graphically depicted through full nudity and often unsimulated sex scenes. Human anomalies include anatomical curiosities, mentally or psychologically disturbed personas, or quasi-anomalous characters who look or behave

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[1] Op. Cit., Carroll 296.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Op. Cit., Smith 228-233.

in an abnormal or anomalous way but who are not anomalous in any medicalized way – freaks, in short.

Latent or nascent violence is prevalent in otherwise non-violent films where violence often unexpectedly and joltingly erupts to the surface, sometimes in scenes of ultraviolence. All three motifs are present across all the films of both filmmakers in some way, whether visually or referentially through spoken narration. The grotesque imagery in Clark's films predominantly tends to be expressed through motifs of paraphilias and sexual transgressions and latent violence. Korine's films, on the other hand, tend to revolve around his depiction and exhibition of the human anomalies that pervade the everyday world of the American landscape which tend to go unnoticed or are disregarded.

The following two chapters explore the manifestation and presence of the grotesque by primarily implementing a close descriptive analysis of Clark's and Korine's films. I also draw upon other formal and aesthetic approaches to supplement this, which include: textual and intertextual analysis, aesthetic film history, poetics, and classical film criticism. However, in the main, I will implement a close descriptive analysis of their films as I draw upon the *notions* of realism and the grotesque that I have introduced and elucidated up to this point. The next chapter will address the paraphilias and sexual transgressions and human anomalies that comprise the subject matter and content of Clark's and Korine's films. The chapter that follows will address the latent/nascent violence that structures the milieu, mood, and atmosphere of their films.

CHAPTER 5

THE PHYSICALITY AND MATERIALITY OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE FILMS OF CLARK AND KORINE: PRESENCE, CO-PRESENCE, AND FUNCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

By and large, the grotesque is pictorial. The grotesque, as apprehended within representational art, tends to involve the corporeal and material aspects of the world – the physical, the biological, the anatomical, the bodily, as well as the material aspects of the environment. Within realist art, such as the films of Clark and Korine, the grotesque emerges within the material, phenomenal world that the characters inhabit. The grotesque content of realist motivated grotesque aesthetics tend to be cultivated and depicted through the parochial, provincial, mundane and banal. Yet, it simultaneously remains alluring, fascinating, extraordinary, and even exotic while provoking repulsion, causing alarming apprehension, and/or humor. The realist grotesque renders the hidden underbelly, the discarded, the disenfranchised, the forgotten, the never known, and the marginal subsections of the social world in tactile ways. The realist grotesque fosters ambivalence stemming from the delicate balance between empathetic depictions of humanity and dissonance from the

unfamiliar mannerisms, appearances, and behaviors of the characters.

Although physicality and materiality dominate the manifestations of the grotesque in both Clark's and Korine's films, the physical is far more varied in Korine's films. It is manifest corporeally through the bodies and behaviors of the characters, but it is also manifest through the material environment. In Clark's films, the physical is almost entirely manifest through bodily imagery, specifically as it overlaps with depictions of graphic sexual transgressions and paraphilias, in which he uses full frontal nudity pervasively as a means of emphasis. The bodily grotesque in Korine's films revolves much more around characters with behavioral anomalies, physical anomalies, and/or unusual appearances and mannerisms.

LARRY CLARK REVISITED

What I would describe as literal anomalous bodies – bodies without limbs, disproportionate bodies, deformed bodies – are sparse in Clark's films. The legless beggar mentioned in CHAPTER 2 who scoots along a subway carriage repeatedly exclaiming, "I have no legs", as he jingles a polystyrene cup in *Kids* is one such instance. There are, however, more instances where literal bodily grotesques are present as a consequence of being acted upon. These are sexually or violently violated bodies. An example of this in *Kids* is presented during a scene in which Telly and Casper's crew brutally batter a mouthy post-adolescent youth in the park; the physical grotesque is demonstrated through the destruction of the human body. Similarly, in *Bully*, there is a brief moment depicting bodily mutilation when Bobby's body is shown in the shallow waters of some marshes being fed upon by a horde of crabs that cover the bloody corpse. Likewise, the other imagery of the abject bodily grotesque is momentarily shown in the beginning of *Ken Park* when the title character commits suicide at a skate park. His blood-splattered brains are shown as they are blown out of his head when he shoots himself in the head. Finally, another scene depicts Tate severing his grandfather's carotid artery as blood squirts onto his

squinting face.[1]

However, the majority of the bodily or physical grotesques in Clark's films are manifest through the graphic depictions of bodily acts that revolve around sex with bodily fluids and the consequences that it entails – semen, saliva, and disease – which is emblematized by his depictions of fully nude youth as the principal characters engaging in illicit sexual acts. The incongruous juxtaposition of the age of the participants and their actions serves to emphasize this aspect of the grotesque. Adolescents are participating in acts typically associated with the adult world. The romanticized image of childhood innocence is here revealed as both corrupted and corrupting, with the innocence of youth either already truly lost by mid-adolescence (or in some cases, even at the start of adolescence) by the actions of other predatory adolescents who themselves have already been long corrupted.

KIDS

Kids is the least graphic of Clark's films. This film contains less nudity than all of Clark's films, especially in scenes depicting sex. However, due to his distinctive verité style and the narrative plot that revolves around an HIV positive teen who is obsessed with deflowering younger teenage girls, even the sex scenes are staged using only implied nudity facilitate his grotesque aesthetic imagery. This punctuates the one scene of graphic nudity present in *Kids* all the more. The scene shows a drug-hazed Casper raping Jennie who is unconscious. The grotesque nature of this scene as a whole emerges from multiple elements: the sexual transgressiveness of the act, the lascivious way in which the scene is developed, and the verité visual style in which the scene is shot. The result is a contemplative and graphic style that highlights the grotesque. The naturalistic lighting results in a dark contrast between the characters and the space that they occupy. The medium and medium-close shots captures the rape scene through a slightly shaky handheld steadicam which is positioned in such a

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[1] These scenes of the physical grotesque, scenes which are directly linked to violence, will be addressed in more detail and in a different context in the following chapter, which addresses the ways in which the latent violence bubbling beneath the surface contributes to the grotesque aesthetic.

way that it emulates the position and locale of one of the other party-going youths, voyeuristically recording the incident. This accentuates the tragedy of a girl being raped by a friend in a room full of mutual friends without anybody conscious enough to intervene. The grainy imperfect image in conjunction with the neorealist and verité cinematographic techniques and mise-en-scene – naturalistic costume, acting, setting, and unstylized lighting – reinforces an impression of authenticity that invokes the by establishing a verisimilitude that schematically elicits the same 'presumptive assertion' that accompanies documentary and non-fictional modes of filmmaking. That is the content combined with the audiovisual style elicits the same schemata and cues that tend to be prompted by documentary rather than fiction films. The bodily grotesque itself, however, is conveyed through Casper's negotiation of Jennie's limp, semi-clothed body. He leaves her shirt on but takes off her trousers and panties completely. He flops her drug-induced, unconscious body around like a ragdoll. After sliding his own trousers down, Casper folds Jennie's legs over her head. Although the scene masterfully blocks out the majority of the exposed genitalia through staging, framing, and a clever use of shadows cast by natural lighting, Jennie's *mons pubis* is periodically exhibited throughout her rape, as are Casper's bare buttocks as he bounces up and down. The peekaboo glimpse of genitalia adds to the scene's sense of fascination and discomfort, as Jennie's contorted, unconscious body enhances the primacy of the bodily grotesque in this scene.

Full nudity is not, however, a prerequisite to depict the sexual transgressions that constitute Clark's bodily grotesque in *Kids*. The scenes revolving around Telly's exploits of predatory deflowering adolescent girls are full of visual and auditory grotesquery and yet they contain no graphic nudity. Nevertheless, visually, it is in the semi-nude bodies of Telly and his virginal conquests through which the bodily grotesque is depicted.

Aurally, we are confronted in the opening scene, the screen still black, with a slurping, almost clucking sound. The sound is then anchored to an image of a close-up shot of a boy and a girl lip-locked, open-mouthed kissing. This is both our first

introduction to Telly and the opening shot of the film. The authenticity of the grotesque and its resultant affects are as much about how the subject matter and content is rendered as it is the subject matter and content itself. The evenly lit and grainy low-stock imagery, the handheld camerawork, and the naturalistic mise-en-scene reinforce the verisimilitude of the aesthetic representation of the content while simultaneously enhancing the perverse moral incongruity of the veraciousness of the grotesque bodily imagery. The wet slurping, sucking sounds persist as the two adolescents continue to make out as small beads of perspiration are visible on their foreheads. The kissing and the shot continue uninterrupted and unabashed for almost a full minute. The sounds draw attention to the bodily secretions exchanged between the two kids which are representative of the bodily grotesque. A cut to a medium shot reveals the two facing each other upright in their underwear on a bed, Telly's legs overlapping the girl's, in what is clearly a teenager's room based on the items scattered throughout – Beastie Boys posters, stuffed animals, awards and medals of some sort, pictures of her friends and family, as well as the color combinations of textiles and linens. Telly pulls back, gazes into the eyes of the girl, and asks, "Do you know what I wanna do?" The girl softly replies, "Yeah", with Telly coming right back at her, "What do I wanna do?", in which she promptly replies, "You wanna fuck me…but you can't." Telly asks if she does not want to because she is a virgin, but the girl says that it is because she does not want a baby.

Up to this point the entire dialogue and imagery revolves around a Bakhtinian conception of the grotesque body and bodily acts – the open sexualized body is accompanied with sounds of body-on-body intermingling with the slurping as well as frank discussions of fucking and its regenerative material consequences. After turning on his Casanova 'charm', which foreshadows the lasciviousness of his soon-to-be-revealed paraphilia, the girl concedes, which prompts more kissing with associated sounds. A shaky handheld over the shoulder shot shows Telly unlatching her bra as she slowly lays back. Graphic, without portraying nudity, a continuous handheld tracking shot then shows Telly twisting around to get on top of her. The girl is shown on her back with her bra still just covering her semi-exposed breasts with her tan line peeking

through the fringes of her panty covered-genitalia. The observational style of the cinematography is accompanied by naturalistic, seemingly unstylized, lighting and acting by what are youthful looking, non-professional actors. This stylistic strategy functions to reinforce the impressions of authenticity to such an extent that it intends to garner a verisimilitude that elicits the same presumptive assertions that are solicited with actual documentary modes of production which exacerbates the disturbing affect. These stylistic strategies not only reinforce Clark's own expressive objectives as a realist, they also enhance the moral grotesque of the bodily based aestheticizations of the grotesque subject matter and content.

The sexualized dimension of the bodily grotesque is accented by subtle, darkly comical elements throughout Clark's films as well. In this instance, the eager Telly, who at first seems only to have his boxers on, is then revealed to also still be wearing glowingly white gym socks. Furthermore, Telly's 'charm' is matched with an awkward sensuality. After the two commence again with the wet open-mouthed kissing, he works his way down her body with kisses, looking like a boy who has learned how to have sex by watching porn flicks and soap operas. His efforts at romance invoke ambivalence. The foreplay is both awkwardly comical as well as uncomfortably disturbing. These comic elements are present in tandem with elements that realistically portray this unromantic adolescent sex encounter. The girl's discomfort from Telly's rough thrusting is clearly indicated by her strained face and groans of pain as the two bounce up and down in the frame.

While the verité style visually persists, the façade of the documentary approach is exposed as conventional narrative devices are introduced in order to anchor and guide the spectator. Juxtaposed over the diegetic sounds of the groaning girl and moaning Telly is a voiceover from a triumphant Telly candidly declaring, "virgins. I love 'em. No diseases, no loose as a goose pussy, no skank. No nothin'. Just pure pleasure," before cutting to a close-up of him riding the girl without any regard for her discomfort, as she, off-screen, quietly pleads, "please, it kinda hurts." The girl's obvious pain is juxtaposed with Telly's jubilation at his conquest as the shot cuts to the title and

credit sequence. Telly declares his darkly ironic preference for a type of body that is celebrated because of its perceived uncontaminated purity while he unknowingly embodies the very abject grotesque body that he is attempting to avoid due to his HIV positive status.

Afterwards Telly meets up with his closest friend, Casper, who is reading a comic book while waiting for him on the stoop of the outside entrance to the girl's front door. A more pervasive verité approach is reinstituted as motifs of bodily grotesque imagery persist. Shot using a series of handheld tracking shots, Telly provides details of his conquest to Casper as they walk on the sidewalk through a NYC neighborhood. The impression of authenticity is reinforced by the naturalistic staging – the dialogue, dress, and demeanor of the two characters, as well as the location setting – as they stroll through the actual streets of New York. The camera centrally captures the characters, but the grainy texture of the image and the shaky framing provides the appearance of an observational documentary as they pass by other inhabitants on the street. Throughout Telly boasts about how well the girl that he just deflowered could "fuck for a virgin", but Telly assures the questioning Casper of her virginal status, exclaiming that "there was blood everywhere", and that she screamed loudly upon his initial penetration. Casper listens intently, grinning throughout Telly's recounting of his exploit. The grotesque imagery is again conjured through dialogue as Casper, reveling in the story, asks how the girl smelled. Rather than explain, Telly puts his index and middle finger under the nose of Casper and says "Here, smell", whereupon Casper sniffs and responds "Ummm, butterscotch." Casper later asks for another "whiff" as they continue to discuss the virtues of sex with virgins. Thus while the imagery invoked by the dialogue is exemplary of the grotesque, it is the verisimilitude achieved by the audiovisual strategies and style that simultaneously secures the realist aesthetic and intensifies the authenticity of the moral incongruity of two youths openly discussing the pleasures of deflowering virgins.

While one might assume that this adolescent Casanova is merely boasting, and exaggerating about his sexual prowess and preferences, Telly's predatory search and

conquest of virgins is played out again throughout the film. In one such instance, we are privy to the entire predatory process from its inception. At the end of the film and by the end of the night at a party that all the kids in the 'crew' are attending, Telly again successfully executes his lascivious and deceptive courtship process on another girl, Darcy (Yakira Peguero). Making out with her for most of the night, Telly lures Darcy to his friend's bedroom. After several scenes similar to the one in the beginning of the film – shots of the two facing each other in bed in a similar position, smacking sounds of their saliva-heavy kisses filling the audio track, and even their state undress with the girl wearing only her bra and panties and Telly his boxer shorts…and white socks – Telly ends up having sex with Darcy with very little convincing. Jennie, who lost her virginity to Telly through a similar tryst, witnesses Telly's predatory seduction of Darcy while peering through the door using P.O.V. shots from Jennie's perspective. However, Jennie fails to intervene. The somewhat shaky P.O.V shot imitates amateur unstaged caught-on-tape style exposés. The peeping camera imperfectly gazes into the room catching as much of shadows and darkness of the naturalistically looking lit room as it does the sexually engaged adolescents, further reinforcing the prevailing verité strategies that visually structure the film and subsequently the verisimilitude that anchors the film's aesthetic within a realist framework.

There is a cut to a close-up of Telly's still socked feet with the camera panning up his skinny bare legs thrusting forward with Darcy's moans being the only accompanying sound. The camera lingers before it pans up to show the sheet-covered bum and bare-shouldered Telly plowing away at Darcy. The combination of the moral incongruity of Jennie's nonintervention, her knowing that Telly is HIV positive as well as her knowledge of Telly's predatory game, produces an ambivalent fascination and astonishment that garners the grotesque. The discomfort in viewing is heightened by Darcy's increasing discomfort, which is verified by her tearful declaration that "It huuurts". Unmoved and unrelenting, Telly continues, apathetically and dismissively stating "You're doing fine." Once the camera reaches their faces, it reveals Darcy's severe discomfort exhibited by her tightly shut eyes and grimacing face. Telly only

slows his pace slightly, without desisting, once Darcy releases a deeper pained cry. The naked sweat gleaming bodies of the two interconnected bodies in sexual congress with the knowledge that Telly is HIV positive again reiterates the bodily grotesque. His abject grotesque body is opening-up and contaminating the purity of these girls' previously closed and uninhibited bodies.[2] While the incorporation of more conventional narrative techniques undermine a purely verité approach, the dark contrast from the naturalistic lighting, the naturalistic setting, acting, and visual texturing through, such as the handheld shooting, graininess of the film stock and the subsequent texture of the image, and mobile framing reinforces the imperfect visual perception of verité documentary techniques. Subsequently, the impressions of authenticity and immediacy that intensifies the verisimilitude of the realist aesthetic and the amoral expressivity of the morally incongruent subject matter and content is also reinforced.

Telly's paraphilia is a transgression that garners the presence of the grotesque in *Kids*. Telly is effectively an adolescent hebephile. The girls that he preys upon are as young as twelve. Their youth, and Telly's excitement at their youth, are confirmed during a conversation between Telly and Casper. Telly describes how he commented to the girl about how she looked cute when she was little, referring to a photo in her house. He relays how the girl corrected him, saying the picture was taken just last year, which Telly explained just turned him on even more because he knew she had only recently begun puberty. Once it seems that Telly has revealed the full extent of his paraphilia, he then further discloses to Casper that believes he is getting addicted to deflowering virgins, and that he now also feels compelled to "stick it in their ass" as well.

By implicating the spectator as a witness in the moral violation of not only the paraphilic acts of Telly, but also the other various bodily grotesque acts of hedonism through his verisimilitude instilling verité cinematography and composition, Clark fosters an impression of authenticity of the grotesque. Their fidelity to representing the 'real',

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[2] Op. Cit. Bakhtin, Op. Cit. Kolbenschlag, Op. Cit. Paul.

in turn, elicits the various grotesque affects, be they an ambivalence of fascination, astonishment, and disgust or a sense of dissonance from the presumptive assertions and cognitive schemas that are activated in seeing the activities of the adolescent underbelly through a documentary and neorealist aesthetic framework. To the adult viewer, the youth of the characters and the apparent youth of the actors playing the roles, their awkwardness, the scenarios played out and Clarke's verité style instigate questions of the spectator. This imagery is fascinating, unsettling, and even causes a sense of consternation and elicits the question 'Is this allowed?' or even 'Should I be watching this?' This simultaneously alluring and repellant imagery is where the grotesque festers in Clark's film.

BULLY

The composition of *Bully* is far crisper that that of *Kids*, or *Ken Park* for that matter. The surface texture of the imagery has a sharper, more televisual look to it. It makes use of central framing, pervasive use of medium and close-up shots, as well as the more transparent classical continuity editing patterns that coheres its space. The televisual classification, however, is only made in relative terms as compared to both other mainstream narrative films as well as a majority of American independent films. *Bully* still retains a raw gritty look through the regular use of handheld and steadicam shots and naturalistic mise-en-scene. The more extreme graphic depictions of nude young people engaged in sexual activities than is present in *Kids* compensates for the grittiness that is comparatively absent in the audiovisual style of the film. Similar to *Kids*, the bodily grotesque in *Bully* is often manifest through Clark's graphic and explicit depiction of paraphilias and sexual transgressions, as well as with its moments of latent violence that explodes to the surface[3], contributing to the establishment of a grotesque aesthetic.

The corporeality of the sexual, copulating body is pervasive throughout *Bully*.

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[3] This is something that will be addressed more fully in its own right in the chapter to follow.

The scenes emphasize the often primal and sometimes awkward act, which only goes further to reinforce the grotesque body and its acts. The majority of the sexual transgressions in the diegetic world of *Bully* principally revolve around scenes, implicit and explicit, of rape. While there are some paraphilias evident within the film, Clark again turns the table on the spectator. Clark again implicates the spectator with his unrelenting barrage of imagery that explicitly showing emotionless, hedonistic sex between young people. The youthfulness of the characters, the illicit acts in which they are engaged, and the verité-style of the imagery fosters a litany of formal cues that raise questions of the fictional status of the film, which in turn raises questions regarding the legal implications of the viewer for watching it. The way in which the camera gazes upon the fully nude bodies in *Bully* is far more intimate and even arguably more voyeuristic than in *Kids*.

As with *Kids*, the first scene of Bully sets the tone of the film. Somewhat humorously juxtaposed with the illusory wholesome family life in the suburbs, the first scene in the film is an extreme close-up of Marty on the phone saying, "I want you to suck my big dick". This is followed by his mother's voice offscreen yelling up to him that dinner is ready. After a brief pause, Marty continues to speak into the phone saying, "I want you to lick my balls". This crosscut editing technique furnishes a parallelism that illustrates the clandestinely perverse violation of the family space. The grotesque is garnered by an adolescent boy having phone sex in his bedroom while his respectable middle-class family prepares for dinner only a shout away.

The intimate close-ups of the opening scenes are followed by a few high speed dolly shots in medium shot, lit naturalistically, as if being filmed by someone leaning out of the window of a moving vehicle, surveying the suburban landscape. This is immediately followed by a cut shot to Ali and Lisa pulling into a parking lot in a car in medium-long shot with a handheld camera, resembling the observational verité approach of *Kids*. Ali is in the midst of telling a story of one of her recent forays, entering the conversation *in media res* with her saying "…his cock was beautiful, and he ate me out for, like, an hour". Getting out of the car, Ali is dressed in jean cut-off shorts

that ride up into her crotch and a tube top that reveals the lower quarter of her breasts peeping out below with nipples apparent though the skin tight fabric. The grotesque imagery here emanates from the explicit sexual dialogue that revolves around the body, which is accompanied by Ali's own sexualized grotesque body, highlighted by her suggestive dress. The composition of the film remains naturalistic and the naturalistic mise-en-scene – setting, costume, acting, and lighting – combined with the observational technique of the slightly shaky handheld cinematography results in an eyewitness capturing of the audiovisual imagery, thus reinforcing the impressions of authenticity and the aesthetic strategies of verisimilitude and resultantly the realist aesthetic of Clark's expressive approach.

The first of many sex scenes takes place in a parking lot with Ali, Bobby, Marty, and Lisa all and Bobby's in a car after a night of drinking. While the mise-en-scene, especially the low contrast nighttime lighting, reinforces the impressions of authenticity regarding the composition of the film's diegetic space, the nonfictional façade is penetrated by the more classical structuring of the space. The scene vacillates between omniscient medium close-up shots and close-ups from various perspectives of the characters involved. Ali leans down to perform oral sex on Bobby while Lisa slides down onto her back, allowing Marty to mount her in the backseat. The bodily grotesque, aside from being demonstrated through the act of copulation itself, is the way in which Lisa's body is contorted as she receives Marty, which is similar to Casper's rape of Jennie in *Kids*. Lisa's legs are in a wishbone position, raised above her head, one foot on the driver side headrest, the other wedged between the rear windshield and the surface that encases the rear speakers. Moaning in pleasure, her head and legs are framed to appear as if they are detached from the rest of her body.

The grotesque manipulation of Lisa's body is contrasted with the following scene that depicts the morning after the night before. Lisa stares at idealized pictures of semi-clad male bodies hanging on her wall as she lies in bed naked, her breasts and pubic area fully exposed. The medium diagonal shot captures her brightly sunlit body from a broad beam of light through her bedroom window. The visual style of the composition matches Lisa's emotional disposition and mood which is eventually

communicated to her mother in the following scene upon entering the kitchen. This more classical representation of Lisa's closed naked body provides a counter to the bodily grotesque acts of the previous scene and the next. The following scene provides another parallelism which contrasts the closed classical body with the open and gyrating grotesque body. It parodies the posters of idealized masculinity that fill Lisa's bedroom wall and contravenes normative ideals of sex and sexiness. It is shot almost entirely using classical narrative structure.   Starting with a high angle indoor establishing shot of a male strip club, there is then a cut to a line of adolescent males gyrating on stage to electronic music followed by a medium shot of Bobby and Marty looking on while leaning on the bar next to two middle-aged men. The mise-en-scene maintains a seemingly unstylized, naturalistic approach. Bobby, acting as a pimp, forces Marty to strip down to his boxer-briefs and join the dancing line of boys on stage after one of the men voices his interest. Marty's dancing is a ridiculous mixture of hip-hop and disco that appears as if he knows what he should do but is unable to execute the moves. The dancing, coupled with the sexual overtones of the act, not only demonstrates the bodily grotesque but also the comical dimension that the grotesque body can exhibit.[4] While the surface texture of the imagery is crisper and the editing regime is structured using more conventionalized techniques of narrative spatiotemporal cohesion and storytelling than *Kids*, the explicitness and graphic nature of the imagery reinforces the verisimilitude and prevailingly realist aesthetic of the grotesque content. The realism, however, is reminiscent of what has become considered more of a classical notion of realism, indicative of traditions from which Clark claims inspiration, such as Alan Clarke's film, *Scum*. Although the scene conventionally adheres to what amounts to being a classical narrative structure, on the one hand, Clark still manages institute a prevailingly realist aesthetic to confront the viewer regarding certain cultural ideals revolving around the suburban home, family, and the classic image of a sexually alluring body. He achieves this by juxtaposing these motifs with antithetical bodies and behaviors of his characters. The resultant parallelisms serve to contrast Clark's representation of shocking incongruities of what is seen and what is said.

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[4] Op. Cit. Paul.

The remaining scenes, which demonstrate the corporeality of the material body through acts of copulation, overlap with other grotesque themes, whether it is paraphilias and sexual transgressions, nascent violence, or both. One such scene shows Lisa and Marty in the midst of sex. Persisting with the naturalistic mise-en-scene, Lisa is shot from a slight low angle from behind the head of Marty. She is on top of Marty, chest fully exposed and her face indicating orgasmic bliss when Bobby enters the room, naked and wielding a weightlifting belt. The violent act enacted by Bobby is motivated by a crosscut shot that foreshadows his action.[5] This sequence of contiguous events balances a verité audiovisual style with classical continuity editing techniques. The verité stylization is apparent in terms of the balanced composition of naturalistic mise-en-scene and the handheld observational perspective of the cinematography, but the rhythm of the cuts follow the intensity of the action and is structured by a series of shots and counter reaction shots, initially of Marty and Lisa engaged in sex and eventually of Bobby storming in and whacking Lisa on the back before forcing himself on one or both of them. It is never disclosed who. The impression of authenticity is principally maintained by the graphic acts of sex and nudity. The grotesque is similarly secured by the subject matter and content of the bodily grotesque as well as the jolting effects of morally incongruent acts of the characters. This is accentuated further by the ambiguous sexual relationship between Bobby and Marty maintained throughout the film. The jolt of violence overlaps with the bodily grotesque expressed through the initial sexual act and Bobby's sadism.[6]

Another scene provides a layering of sexually orientated imagery of the bodily grotesques. Ali and Donny are in the midst of sex and are shot in a medium slightly low angled, darkly contrasted candle lit shot in a bedroom in the midst of sex after some fetishistic hot wax play. After a good few seconds Ali takes a call from Lisa, but she does not stop her session with Donny. Through a series of classical narrative style crosscuts, Lisa relays Bobby's interest in sexually experimenting with in which Ali affirms her interest – which results in her rape – confirming another sexual encounter

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[5] This scene is addressed in more detail in the following chapter on violence.

[6] Similarly, in another scene, an initially consensual sexual encounter between Bobby and Ali quickly deteriorates into Bobby sadistically raping Ali. This scene of the bodily grotesque also overlaps with the following chapter on violence.

to be had while already in the midst of one. Again, the grotesque is principally conveyed through the moral incongruity and perversion of standing – dominant and normative – concepts of sex according to the official culture of the suburban middle class. Likewise, the verisimilitude remains manifest through the graphic sexual bodily acts of the characters. Aside from the naturalistic mise-en-scene, which secures the verisimilitude of the sequence, the visual style remains more indicative of an older, now classical, form of of social realism. Moreover, the scene adheres much more stringently to the classical narrative structure in terms of its coherence of space by anchoring the telephone dialogue of Lisa and Ali through crosscuts. But the density of the image nevertheless remains far more gritty and raw than most conventional mainstream narrative films, but in this particular instance there is less of a synthesis of the grotesque and realist aesthetics. While both are present they are more independent, less reliant, of one another.

Possibly two of the most grotesque moments of the film involving the material body are scenes involving the conspiring youth discussing the plan to execute Bobby and the fallout after they execute their murderous plan. The scenes incongruently combine dialogue regarding the brutalization of Bobby's body, which verbally invokes grotesque imagery, juxtaposed with the grotesque visual imagery of Marty's and Lisa's naked sexually engaged bodies. In the first instance there is a cut to a medium shot of a fully nude Lisa lying between the naked legs of Marty who is sitting against the wall in bed. Again, the composition of the shot is balanced in such a way to achieve a realistic impression of authenticity and verisimilitude – the appearance of natural lighting, acting, costume, and setting. The shot is from the feet of Lisa. Her slightly out of focus pubic area and vagina are the central focal point. The closed naked body is distorted through the optical devices of the camera focus which functions to grotesquely distort the body. Lisa is brainstorming about how they can rid themselves of Bobby, discussing ways of killing him, which provides a verbal counterpoint that conjures imagery of the open grotesque body from an abject, non-sexual standpoint. This scene again reinforces Clark's prevailing grotesque aesthetic by fostering ambivalence between what is seen and heard. The other similar instance, mentioned in CHAPTER 2, is when Lisa and Marty are discussing

the murder *ex post facto* while having sex. At one point, still engaged, they even laugh about how "gross" Bobby's face was when it was bashed in with an aluminum baseball bat. This incongruity of naked, youthful grotesque bodies copulating while discussing the heinous crime that they committed through a sort of satirizing mockery, contributes to the grotesque aesthetic of this scene. In all instances, these scenes are intensified by the often full frontal nudity, as well as the youthful appearances of the kids involved. This adds to the extremeness, *the excess* of these scenes, which is an unequivocal hallmark of the grotesque aesthetic across the history of art. Yet again, though, the verisimilitude of the visual style and the grotesque subject matter and content are mutually exclusive in this instance. There is a co-presence, to borrow from Thomson's notion of the grotesque, but the realist and grotesque aesthetics are not inter-reliant on one another.

KEN PARK

Similar to *Bully, Ken Park* represents fully nude, sexually engaged adolescent youth; however, this film also depicts acts of non-simulated sex, Clark's most explicit depiction of the bodily grotesque, in which he again implicates the viewer as voyeur. He does this by reinstituting a verité and neorealist style of audiovisual production, one that is stronger than *Bully* yet weaker than *Kids*, which continues to extol a strong sense of realism through verisimilitude. Clark also persists with his explicit depictions of youthful looking adolescents who are nude and engaged in sexual acts, but his depiction of them in such graphic ways also poses questions to the audience regarding whether they are now watching pornography of barely legal kids or, as it will be discussed below, legally questionable aged kids engaged in explicit sexual acts with adults.

One scene of significant note depicts Tate masturbating to ejaculation while auto-asphyxiating himself and watching women's tennis. The protracted scene is perversely contrasted by a bookended sequence showing Tate's elderly grandparents, who are his caregivers, playing tennis outside followed by shots of them embracing,

congratulating each other for a good game as they hold-hands, kiss, and even espouse their love for one another. The mise-en-scene remains naturalistic in all respects, which results in a composition that has a somewhat grainy documentary texture. Similarly, the camerawork is either shot on a steadicam or is handheld, resulting in somewhat shaky and sometimes erratic camera movements.

The contemplative and intimate details captured by Clark compounds the perversity and the grotesque realism of the sequence. The scene begins with a slightly raised diagonal medium shot of Tate lying down under the covers in his racecar bed as he watches women's tennis on the television. On the T.V., the women grunt and groan as they hit the ball. Tate slowly moves his hand from behind his head down to his groin as he rubs himself above the covers. Tate soon gets out from underneath the covers and sits at the end of his bed. He is wearing a t-shirt, white briefs, and white gym socks as he looks at the T.V. After a brief pause he then curiously pulls his gym socks up to his knees before he rises from his bed. In a single take, he is tracked in medium shot walking through the hallway and into the bathroom where he removes the belt from a bathrobe that is hanging on the back of the bathroom door. After, in a beguilingly mundane moment, he tightens the dripping tap of the bathroom basin, he marches back into his room where the groans of the tennis players still resonate. He first ties the belt around his throat like a noose and pulls an exaggerated face of someone being hung – his head tilted to one side, tongue sticking out of his mouth, and his eyes widened as if bulging out of his head – in front of his dresser mirror. The deliberate yet banal actions of Tate thus far are indicative of the 'unessential details' that Jakobson observes are indicative of the verisimilitude that contributes to realist art.[7]

After this brief moment of make-believe, Tate walks over to the closed door to his room and ties the belt to the doorknob. He lays a pillow on the floor, takes off his underwear, and sits down on the pillow. He then wraps the untied end of the robe belt around his neck while intently watching the tennis. He turns the T.V. volume

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[7] Op. Cit. Jakobson

up very loud as the shot cuts to a medium close-up of Tate's face watching the tennis as his head begins to slightly bob ad gyrate. While his flaccid penis has already been exposed, and the viewer has been prepped for what he is about to do, at this point the act itself is still implied offscreen. However, while the camera rests on Tate's face, he leans his head up against the door and closes his eyes as the camera pans down to expose him masturbating, which then cuts to a medium shot showing his other hand tightening the belt around his throat. The only sounds are those of the groans emanating from the tennis players on T.V with the occasional cheer from the crowd which, in a sick twist of grotesque humor, corresponds with Tate's masturbation, making it seem that the applause is for him. The cuts alternate between close-ups of his face, close-ups of his midsection of him masturbating, medium shots showing a more holistic view of his auto-asphyxiation, as well as periodic cuts back to the tennis on the T.V. The shot frequency progressively increases in rapidity to mirror Tate's impending climax. His face steadily reddens as he increases the tightness of the belt around his neck and sticky phlegm begins to bubble from his mouth and foam at his lips, which reinforces the organic messiness of the bodily grotesque. Finally after more than a minute of masturbation in the film, he is shown ejaculating in medium shot as the crowd on the T.V. applaud, again adding to the grotesque humor of Tate's paraphilic self-pleasuring.

Tate's seemingly superfluous mannerisms of Tate leading up to his masturbation session highlights what Jakobson identifies as being quite significant to expressions and representations striving for verisimilitude. However, it is the neorealist and verité style cinematography – handheld shooting, mobile framing, tracking shots combined with the somewhat grainy texture of the imagery – and the naturalistic mise-en-scene which reinforces the prevailingly realist aesthetic and subsequently the authenticity of the grotesque. Indeed the actual act of masturbation and ejaculation transcends representation. Clark is expressively presenting the real in a fictionalized context. Through the unsimulated documentary realist depiction of the morally incongruent perversion and Tate's violation of sexual norms elicits the same presumptive assertion that Carroll suggests accompanies nonfictional audiovisual media.

The mundane motif of tennis highlights the sentimentality between Tate's grandparents while also serving as a parallelism to illustrate Tate's adolescent carnal desires. This discordant sentiment unified by the same motif fosters the corporeal, material, bodily grotesque through excess. It also strongly corroborates the overwhelming realist and grotesque aesthetic of the film as a whole due to the minimalistic approach of his prevailing neorealist and verité style. The unsimulated act of masturbation combined with the handheld camerawork and the mobile framing reinforces the impression of authenticity and the presumptive assertion that elicits not only an ambivalent sense of astonishment and fascination, but introspective questions regarding the fictional/nonfictional status of the film. Through the employment of audiovisual techniques typically associated with documentary filmmaking, explicitly rendered scenes of Tate's deviant sexual activities, and the prolonged contemplative shots Tate's self-pleasuring, Clark again implicates the viewer by drawing them into an act of transgression by voyeuristically situating us in intimate proximity with Tate's paraphilia. More like *Kids*, the visually realist style of this scene is intricately linked to bodily grotesque sexual perversions and moral violations of sexual norms. The documentary style authenticates the aesthetic rendering of the grotesque content and subject matter as something between fictional representation and nonfictional re-presentation.

The first scene in the film involving sexual acts of the bodily grotesque comes shortly after an introductory expositional sequence, which is an extraordinarily graphic scene portraying hebephilia. At his girlfriend's house with only his girlfriend's mother and toddler sister at home, sixteen year old Shawn ventures upstairs where his girlfriend's mother, Rhonda (Maeve Quinlan)[8], is folding clothes. After sitting down on the bed and exchanging a bit of small talk, Shawn asks bluntly, "Can I eat you out?" She calmly replies that she is too busy with laundry. The moral violation of a young teenage boy asking such a question of an adult married woman who is the mother of his girlfriend is the first instance of the grotesque in this scene. The suddenness as well as the frankness of the question and reply, its nonchalance, enhances the

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[8] Ironically, with reference to the scene with Tate aforementioned above, Quinlan is a retired professional tennis player.

grotesque effect and the affective elicitation of astonishment and surprise. Yet after a number of intercuts introducing the other principal characters and their narrative trajectories, we return to Shawn sitting at the end of the bed. Shawn slides his trousers down and after a close-up revealing his semi-erect penis under his white briefs, a cut to a medium shot shows Rhonda kneeling between his legs. After taking off her shoes and caressing his cheek, she begins kissing Shawn's midsection. Shawn, like a child, begins to giggle. This reaction to Rhonda's foreplay reinforces the act of the bodily grotesque which is intensified by the incongruity of their age gap, let alone the fact that Shawn is a minor. He is exposed for the un-experienced adolescent that he is which highlights the taboo nature of the sexual encounter all the more.

After Rhonda's initial refusal and change of heart detailed above, the viewer gets no reprieve. Their transgressive relationship clearly defies convention. It embraces hedonistic pleasures, and while it is a flagrant disregard for the sanctity of family, monogamy, and marriage. But to define it as transgressive alone would be a true oversimplification. Clark instills these themes with an undeniable ambivalence. Unsimulated sex acts are disarmingly punctuated with intimate and frank conversations and their candid sense of honesty with one another, all of which unrepentantly assault the spectator. The spectator is constantly confronted with Shawn's youth, Rhonda's age and marriage, and Shawn's relationship with Rhonda's daughter without ever really breaking the intimacy that is fostered throughout the sequences.

Many of the unsimulated sex acts are unapologetically shown in close-up. The two kiss, open- mouthed, Rhonda strokes Shawn's genitalia to obvious arousal, emphasized by a close- up shot of his midsection. Later in the same scene, Shawn rubs her through her panties in close-up. With the close-up shot already abstracting and amplifying the grotesque bodily act, she instructs him to take her panties off, which he does to reveal her sculpted pubic hair. He then slides between her legs and commences cunnilingus, nose poking above her *mons pubis*, eyes gazing toward her face. The scene then cuts to a close-up of Shawn complying with her instructions to slow down. At this point the magnified and unsimulated act of oral sex is the only

image in frame, inescapable for the spectator This image is accompanied by the audible signifiers of Shawn slurping which reinforces the visual depiction of the grotesque bodily act. Once again the impression of authenticity of both the realist and grotesque are mutually inclusive of the verisimilitude that Clark achieves particularly through his visualization of the grotesque subject matter and content. The naturalistic mise-en-scene, especially the graphically explicit acts of sex, Shawn's awkwardness and Rhonda's instructive insistence imitates the gonzo porn subgenre prevalent within the adult film industry since the 1990s. The visual strategies of handheld filming and the grainy texture of the surface image authenticate the perverse moral violation of sexual and familial norms facilitate the presumptive assertions that accompany nonfictional modes of audiovisual production. Likewise, the verisimilitude of the audiovisual style enhances the authenticity of the grotesque content and subject matter and heightens the ambivalence of the titillating sense of fascination and sense of disbelief which is elicited.

The oral sex scene is an ambivalent moment of the grotesque humor, allure, and disbelief. Shawn performing cunnilingus on his girlfriend's mother is itself exemplary of the material bodily grotesque in its own right. The verité visual style and the mundane moments of sexual titillation combined with a dark humor intensify the oral sex scene, which is emblematic of the bodily grotesque as well as Clark's realist imperative. The combination of moments of humor – such as the hallmark white socks that Shawn is still wearing and him stopping mid-orgasm to ask her if it feels good – with unrelenting moments of moral uncertainty, graphic nudity, and unsimulated sexual play makes the already transgressive subject matter even more explicit. These ingredients, especially taken together, all contribute to Clark's recipe for a realist and grotesque aesthetic. But the overall grotesque aesthetic is secured through the nonchalant way in which Clark depicts this sexual taboo and paraphilia. After orgasm, Rhonda brings the confused and unsure Shawn gently into her bosom with a reassurance that is interstitially between the embrace of a mother and the embrace of a lover as he closes his eyes. This added incongruity elicits a disconcerting ambivalence to the already unorthodox coupling as Rhonda's role seems

to change from lover to parent and then back again, as the final shot of the scene shows the two naked and intertwined in bed. Clark's verité approach in relation to the subject matter typifies his implementation of the 'unexpected image'.

Shawn and Rhonda are a complex construction of contradictions that broach and transgress several moral and emotional issues that resist simplification. In another scene that switches back and forth between mother and child and two lovers the grotesque is largely invoked through dialogue This is subtly reinforced through visuals of the characters' countenance and other more symbolic parallelisms that corroborate the dialogue. As a conversation between lovers, Shawn asks whether Rhonda loves him and whether he thinks about him while having sex with her husband. Shawn's confusion about love and sex and his lack of reflection on his own role as an adulterer exposes his youth. The grotesque here is a consequence of a co-presence of what Thomson refers to as a cultural "unresolved clash of incompatibles" resulting in the "ambivalently abnormal".[9] Shawn distortedly engenders notions of both an adolescent mind and that of an experienced adult with regards to his externalizations of intimacy, sex, and relationships. Within the same conversation, he reveals that he sometimes envisions storming in to attack Rhonda's husband to then sweep her away back to his house, which is actually his mom's house, an unsettling idea that also further reinforces his naïve youth as well as the ambivalence of their relationship. This exchange is crosscut with a shot of Rhonda's little daughter downstairs playing with her doll at a child's table in front of a large screen television with girls in bikinis on the beach on the screen. This crosscut functions to visually reinforce a sense of unease. Not only does this remind us of her presence in the house, it also demonstrates her early indoctrination into the world of the sexualized body. It also functions to provoke a moral response by reminding the viewer of her unattended presence in the house while Shawn and Rhonda are cavorting upstairs. Clark's grotesque aesthetic is reinforced through a moral incongruity of what Carroll refers to as a violation of standing social norms.[10] Importantly, Clark avoids a judgmental tone, be it critical *or* endorsing. Clark's verité-style – his handheld fly-on-the-wall approach, the less than crisp texture of the

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[9] Op. Cit., Thomson 27.
[10] Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today".

imagery, the limited editing, and the seemingly natural dialogue all enhance his understated portrayal of such transgressive subject matter and explicit content. It is presented in a normalized fashion. This, in turn, normalizes the grotesque content of his subject matter, adding to the ambivalence and unease that he attempts to elicit. The scene is irreducible to a single moral standpoint which is itself a quality common of grotesque art, especially realist grotesque art.

Further along in their conversation we are joltingly reminded that Shawn is, after all, the boyfriend of Rhonda's daughter, Hannah. Sitting in bed, centrally shot almost entirely in medium and medium close-ups, Shawn first explains that when he is having sex with Hannah, her daughter, sometimes he envisions Rhonda's face instead of Hannah's. After a long pause in the conversation, Rhonda continues the discussion, later asserting about Hannah, "she loves you, it's easy to tell", to which Shawn responds, "I love her too." If this was not awkward enough, adding to the grotesque enhancing ambivalence, Rhonda affirms that the two make a cute couple. The discomfort and unease of the candidness and graphicness of their improprieties, already elevated, Rhonda lies back into Shawn's arms as he tells her that she and her daughter make the same noises in bed. Rhonda encourages Shawn by asking him what other similarities they share and Shawn responds accordingly, explaining that both she and Hannah enjoy similar sexual techniques and "have the same pussy smell", but that Rhonda is better in bed. While goading the conversation, Rhonda becomes visibly disturbed, noticeably welling-up with tears as she lightly responds to Shawn's statements, "We do?", "I am". She collects herself and switches into mom/wife mode again and in a contained hysteria asks Shawn to ask his mom what time she is supposed to pick his little brother up for carpool. This reversion again prompts a sense of ambivalent unease, and Rhonda's confliction only adds to the weight of the incongruous actions, behaviors, and corroborating imagery of her and Shawn's sexual and emotional relationship. Noticeably shaken, Rhonda starts rambling like she says her daughter does. However, the conversation again turns to sex. Shawn asks Rhonda whether his penis is bigger than her husband's. The vacillation between emotional intimacy and raw sexual attraction, between what is already by its very nature an

incongruent couple, only adds to the grotesque.   The verisimilitude and the authenticity of the grotesque in this scene is principally achieved through the emotional tenseness of Rhonda combined with the naïve honesty of Shawn. The naturalistic acting, the moments of pause and the awkward glances the shot captures of Rhonda and her increasingly apparent confliction and Shawn's inability to see it, captures is a pathetic grotesque moment of emotional human suffering on the one hand and brutishness of lusty youthful exuberance. The tenderly painful expression of this moment only fuels the ambivalence of the moral violation that the couple represents in such explicitly graphic detail by Clark.

One of the most critically discussed sequences in Ken Park is the semi-lyrical threesome that takes place between Shawn, Peaches, and Claude. The three are shown fully nude as they engage in extremely realistic scenes of simulated sex as well as unsimulated scenes of oral and manual sex. It is most memorably punctuated by the second ejaculation scene of the film, which shows Claude ejaculating as Peaches masturbates him. Much of this is shot in slow motion, which consequently also provides a moment of pause and doubt regarding the realist imperative that I argue structures Clark's audiovisual style. This aberrance, however, does not undo the realist lens from which this film's grotesque aesthetic is best appreciated inasmuch as it validates the complexity of his seemingly stripped down aesthetic approach. The sequence has an added sense of sentimentality and sensitivity as the graphic sex scenes are intercut with the three talking about life, their dreams, their fantasies, and even playing parlor guessing games. The entire sequence is about escaping. Sex provides a sensuous escape from the pains of adolescence while their intimate disclosure of their dreams is an imaginary escape.

The difficulty in this scene is once again the explicit depiction of young naked bodies engaging in unabated acts of sex, but the grotesque emerges beyond the bodily domain in the way that Clark again fosters a sense of incongruity and ambivalence. The incongruity is partially based on the moral violation of the represented age and appearance of these characters, the innocence lost, but also in the naïve innocence

that still remains. Ambivalence is also generated by the excess of these images. They fascinate but also implicate the viewer for continuing to watch by depicting the said subject matter and content. The scene combines non-actors or seemingly non-scripted or impromptu dialogue, and natural or naturalistic lighting, and the use handheld or steadicam cinematography and videography accompanied with lower-grade stocks that often appear degraded or pixilated which facilitates the non-fictional, documentary feel. Subsequently, the imperfect perceptual recording of these events, especially the unsimulated sexual acts, enhances the impressions of authenticity and immediacy and hence the verisimilitude of the scene, arguably even prompting the presumptive assertion that accompanies nonfictional films.

Again, the domain of representation is transcended. Clark is expressively re-presenting the real in a fictionalized context. This is something that both Clark and Korine seem to play on in all of their films. What seems to visually overwhelm the aesthetic experience, though, is the bodily grotesque. The grotesque bodies of the characters are constantly reinforced through abstracted close-up shots of the genitalia and sexual organs of the characters, which reinforce the presence of the grotesque body engaged in material bodily acts of the grotesque. Unlike in Stam's distinction between pornography and eroticism, the festive and emancipatory nature of Clark's imagery affirms the way in which the sex and the grotesque aesthetically function as a means of resistance. Resistance is not only embodied by the actions of the characters within the diegetic space; it is also engendered by Clark's position as a film artist in relation to the conventions of popular narrative cinema, both stylistically, in terms of his audiovisual approach, as well as the way in which he transgresses the politics of taste and decorum of official culture and polite society.

ADDENDUM: THE SCATOLOGICAL GROTESQUE IN CLARK'S FILMS

There are other dimensions of the material and bodily grotesque throughout Clark's films which align more with the scatological grotesque as discussed by Paul,

Lavery, and Naremore. Clark's fascination with the scatological punctuates the hedonistic and deplorable behavior of the youths in his films. There are several passing scenes that constitute not only the bodily grotesque, such as a scene showing Telly's mum, one of only a few scenes showing adults in *Kids*, breastfeeding Telly's baby brother while smoking a cigarette. This scene largely adheres to the verité/neorealist approach – naturalistic mise-en-scene, especially the darkly contrasted, naturalistically lit, somewhat grungy apartment and the seemingly unscripted dialogue – and the grittily textured surface imagery of the handheld camerawork. However, the scatological is punctuated through the incorporation of more conventional narrative techniques, namely the reaction shots of Casper being shown unable to avert his eyes as he stares at her, even commenting on Telly's mum's "titties" after they go into Telly's bedroom for a few moments. This scene of the bodily grotesque illustrates the regenerative process of a mother's milk providing sustenance for her baby while simultaneously illustrating the degenerative aspects of the bodily grotesque as the mother poisons herself and the milk that feeds the baby.[11] The verisimilitude ties the authentic impressions of Clark's verité approach directly and inextricably with the grotesque subject matter and content thus authenticating the veracity of the grotesque.

The extended notion of Bakhtin's conception to the material grotesque, one which is more closely married to Kristeva's notion of the abject, is shown in *Kids* as the camera scans the party flat the day after the party. The composition of the diegetic space maintains the imperfect visual array of naturalistic lighting and setting, performances that are so naturalistic that it is questionable whether they are performances at all or unstaged documented acts caught on camera. The authenticity of the composition is reinforced by the grainy texture of the imagery and the erratic handheld camera movements that imitate observational, fly-on-the-wall styles of documentary filmmaking. One of the shots momentarily rests on a plate that has a combination of uneaten and partially chewed food, cigarette butts, and ash. This scene signifies the discarded, used-up waste of the material world that these kids mine.

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[11] Intriguingly, Kristeva refers to breast milk as "acrid" in her conceptual elaboration of the *abject*.

The notion of the abject bodily grotesque is more poignantly represented in scenes showing Clark's characters expelling waste or excreting their internal bodily fluids upon the world. Bathrooms, namely toilets, seem to be a recurring feature in Clark's films. This is a motif that is also present in his photography. In *Kids*, there is one scene in which one of the kids at the party is shot from a medium height slightly low angle, sitting on the bathroom floor with his head in toilet as he heaves, throwing-up, as the camera rests on him suffering his over-intoxication. The toilet motif is extended beyond the kid's puking when, after he has passed-out next to the toilet, another one of the partygoers is shown in a medium low shot walking up to the toilet and then commences peeing. Casper, also present, is in the shallow background, sitting in the empty bathtub, drunk and giggling, as the stream of urine passes by the unconscious kid wedged between the tub and the toilet. Another motif illustrating bodily waste is present near the beginning of the film as Telly and Casper stroll down the street discussing Telly's latest deflowering. Casper pulls over on the sidewalk and pisses on a wall in broad daylight around a busy intersection. Likewise, in *Bully*, Lisa is shown in one transitional scene sitting on the toilet completely nude in a brightly lit bathroom from a medium long shot from the darkened adjacent room. She is shown taking a pregnancy test, wiping, and then standing-up to flush the toilet. The voyeuristic shot resembles another one of the scandalous caught-on-camera incidents in which Lisa is unwittingly being filmed by a surreptitious onlooker.

Another recurring motif in Clark's films is spit and phlegm. There are two scenes in *Kids* alone that shows spit as a bodily secretion of degradation. The first instance tracks Telly via a handheld shot after he comes out of the girl's bedroom that he just deflowered at the beginning of the film. In medium shot we see Telly stop, pause, and lean over the banister of the second floor of the apartment and spit onto the dining room table that rests below. The second instance, also coming from Telly, shows him hocking-up a 'lugy' and spitting it onto the unconscious battered face of a post-adolescent that Telly and Casper's crew rollover in the park, a scene which will be addressed in greater detail in the chapter on violence to follow. In both cases the camera shows a protracted build-up to these acts as he summons the phlegm to his

lip before dripping it out of his mouth. In *Bully,* before going into the adjoining bedroom to interrupt his best friend, Marty, and his girlfriend, Lisa, having sex, Bobby, shown in an over-the-shoulder medium close-up shot, spits at his own mirror image before violently disrupting the couple. There is also a noteworthy scene with during a sex scene between Peaches and her boyfriend, Peaches spits into the mouth of her boyfriend, but in that instance, it is shown as an enjoyable, deviant sexual act rather than as an act of degradation. Similarly recall the scene showing Tate masturbating in *Ken Park* in which a close-up of his face is shown with spit foaming and bubbling out of the corner of his mouth prior to him climaxing. The naturalistic mise-en-scene and protracted, contemplative capturing of these shot enunciate the verisimilitude of these bodily grotesque acts of secretion. Not only are these scenes depicted using naturalistic techniques but the act itself transcends fictional representation and is instead expressive nonfictional presentation conveyed in a fictional context. This is a dynamic that is even more pervasive in the work of Korine.

KORINE REVISITED

The bodily grotesques in Korine's films have a more diverse presence than those in Clark's. McRoy and Crucianelli make a noteworthy comparison between the characters of *Gummo* to that of *Freaks*.[12] But the freak moniker, with its reference to the presentational mode of those with unusual physical anomalies or abilities, would seem as outmoded as the once polite classification of 'negro'. While McRoy and Crucianelli address both the physical ontology of Korine's characters when referring to them as freaks, they are also considering their status as sideshow exhibitions. The 'freaks' in Korine's films are indeed demonstrative of the bodily grotesque that Bakhtin noted from an ontological perspective, in the sense that their bodies are anomalously strange, unusual, and abnormal from a normative standpoint, but Korine does not present these characters using the same evaluative baggage that the freak classification carries.

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[12] Op. Cit., McRoy and Crucianelli 257-272.

Unlike the rarified status of freaks that are exhibited in carnival sideshows, the physical anomalies and oddities in Korine's movies (and Clark's films for that matter) are integrated, participating members of society. They are extraordinarily different people shown in everyday settings. They are the inverse of the typical aggrandized presentation of people doing everyday things on stage on which the freak show thrived.[13] If this is the case, then are the everyday grotesques, the human oddities in Korine's films, grotesque at all? Thomas Browne asserted that there are no grotesques in nature, but this is based on his beliefs that the natural order is something to be treated in awe as part of God's design.[14] Conversely, Harpham makes no distinction between that which is aesthetically grotesque and that which is grotesque in the physical, existential world of the everyday.[15] Bakhtin's and Hugo's notion of the grotesque seems appropriate here. Bakhtin's ontological conception of the grotesque was nonjudgmental. He classified the bodily grotesque in contrast to established views of bodily norms. Hugo maintained that the grotesque resides in nature and society, and that the ugliness and deformity that emblematizes the grotesque can itself be seen as beautiful through aesthetic mediation.[16] While both acknowledge the dissonance – the disruptive and jolting affect – that the unusualness of the grotesque can generate, their main goal is to highlight the epistemological gaps that cultural norms can foster, and to illustrate how weird, how bizarre, and how grotesque the banal, mundane, everyday world can be if you look close enough, but also how fascinating it can be.

Although Korine employs an even more 'experimental' approach through his voluminous use of multimedia devices – film, video, still photography – Korine's film is still underpinned by an aesthetic realism. However, while his aesthetic is still non-fictional in its points of reference, it differs from Clark's more cohesive and causally based narrative, verité style. In Torben Grodal's delineation of the various faces of aesthetic realism, he argues that in some cases the aesthetic is motivated through non-

[13] Robert Bogdan, "*Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 94-115).

[14] Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1645). Available: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/relmed/relmed.html. Retrieved: 29 August 2008.

[15] Op. Cit., Harpham.

[16] Op. Cit., Hugo.

narrative formal organization and structuring, namely categorical rather than narrative form. In films like these, the intent is "not to provide a vivid portrayal of concrete situations and experiences, but on the contrary, to extract a more abstract understanding out of concrete examples", which are unified by "a common 'theme'".[17] The different persons and locations convey "a very concrete and unique 'realistic' specificity."[18] Expositional sequences that establish the mood, setting, and types of characters are exemplary of this in much commercial mainstream narrative cinema. However, it tends to be more common in both experimental non-narrative filmmaking and non- fictional modes of filmmaking.[19] More importantly, these formal strategies are commonplace in Korine's films. Indeed this is synonymous with his photo-album/collage approach and contributes to his unique twist on a documentary realist style filmmaking that not only challenges the standards of narrative but also the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction.

GUMMO

Key to Korine's grotesque and realist aesthetic is his ability to capture the milieu of the worlds that he encounters and then renders audiovisually. If we consider the milieu of something to refer not only to a location of a given place at a given time, but also the social and cultural environment of that time and place and the mood in which that setting evokes in terms of a particular essence, then *Gummo*, for Korine, captures the zeitgeist milieu of what he describes as middle America, something he says that should not be conflated with the coastal existences of New York and Los Angeles.[20] The America of *Gummo* is exemplified by the conurbation of a subtopian rurally inflected suburban landscape that comprises the majority of the populated regions of

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[17] Op. Cit., Grodal 80.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Dramatic narrative realism has been the subject of scrutiny for some time, most notably by the Screen theorists named above. According to this position, the impression of realism here is facilitated by the 'seamless', 'invisible' and often seemingly teleological classical narration on the one hand "where everything seems to happen by necessity, as if it could not be otherwise" (Langkjær, 2002: 19). However, according to those who propound a more cognitive-perceptual orientated paradigm, the impression of realism is more accurately achieved "through the use if loose narratives, unexplained accidental happenings and open endings" (Langkjær, 2002: 20).

[20] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*.

the United States. In short, his milieu is a combination of the ecological and cultural dimensions of an environment. Nevertheless, what surrounds the inhabitants of his world still hinges on the materiality of the corporeal grotesque presence of the inhabitants themselves, and quite often the moral incongruities and perversions in which they are shown engaging. And while his audiovisual techniques sometimes mirror those of Clark's, they tend to only do so in part, as the verisimilitude of Korine's films are as much to do with his formal structuring as it is his stylistic rendering of the grotesque subject matter and content.

The strange and unusual inhabitants that populate the world of *Gummo*'s Xenia have been well documented; however, the register of bizarre-looking and acting people in the film have not been afforded conceptual contemplation other than within McRoy and Crucianelli's work, which is the best existing elucidation of the inhabitants of Korine's rural-suburban, Midwestern Appalachian wasteland. Korine's description of *Gummo* as a photo-album and a collage is quite apt when taking stock of the various inhabitants in his representation of Xenia, Ohio. His depiction of grotesque bodies is varied. Some characters have clear physical anomalies; whereas others are only somewhat odd or strange looking whose physicality is at least medically normative, but their odd physical attributes are emphasized by their erratic or contradictory behavior. Yet others both appear physically unusual and are developmentally or psychologically disabled, which also enhances their status as bodily grotesques. Then, there are those characters that, while not grotesque in and of themselves, are consumed by the material and corporeal grotesque by either being nonconsensually violated by abject acts of the material bodily grotesque or environmentally consumed by the abject material grotesque in which they inhabit. Korine's poetic realist visual aesthetic only operates to intensify the grotesque effect of his gallery of grotesques.

One of the first characters to whom we are introduced about twenty-five minutes into the film is Ellen (Ellen M. Smith), a mentally retarded girl in her late teens. Ellen approaches Helen and Dot in a public park, naturalistically lit in a mobile handheld frontal medium shot. She is wearing a Krokus t-shirt (a hair metal band from the

1980s) carrying a baby doll while singing her ABCs. Ellen is unusual looking; she is overweight, has short black hair that almost resembles a cross between a bowl-cut and that of a Franciscan monk, very uneven teeth, and she has no eyebrows (on account of shaving them off). She recurs periodically throughout the film doing usual things. The grotesqueness of the scenes involving Ellen stems from both the physical and mental anomalies of Ellen, which seem to be tied together. The pathetic nature of the character combined with her inalienable comical nature also stimulates a sense of guilt that contributes to securing the grotesque aesthetic. The realism stems from the impressions if authenticity which is fostered by the naturalistic mise-en-scene, the verité style handheld camerawork, along with the gritty texture of the surface image. It is Ellen's unreconstituted anomalousness as a real bodily grotesque using what are typically documentary techniques of audiovisual production that invokes the presumptive assertion that tends to accompany nonfictional films. Similar to the unsimulated sex scenes in Clark's films, this prompts the viewer to question the status of this as a presentation that is situated in a fictionalized context rather than a fictional representation.

Ellen is encountered in another sequence as the camera follows her in one continuous and contiguous sequence over a couple of scenes. The first scene shows her in a medium straight shot using natural indoor lighting, which results in a darker overall compositional tonality, with her holding a baby doll speaking into the camera as if in a home movie testimonial. This is intercut with several scenes that capture Ellen in action. The first scene follows her as she earnestly performs an uncoordinated cheer with pompoms in what appears to be her living room. After her testimonial, Korine cuts to a scene of her shot using a diagonal handheld medium shot running back-and-forth between her house and garage (doing what appear to be 'suicides'). She speaks about needing to pray through a juxtaposed voiceover; however, it is not clear what it is that she prays for or about as she is often unintelligible. The sequence finally cuts to her in the bathroom, naturalistically lit by the fluorescent lighting in the bathroom resulting in a slight blue tinge. Ellen is shot from a slightly off shoulder shot in front of a mirror, capturing her reflection as well as her side and back, as she proceeds to re-shave her eyebrows while she banally narrates, giggles, and tries to keep the shaving foam from

spreading into her hair. In the scene when she speaks directly to the camera she introduces her baby doll and tells us that she breast feeds it. With this static shot we are able to get a studious look at her severe overbite, which seems to contribute to her speech impediment, an impediment that in no way interferes with her distinctive Appalachian twang. In between her semi-coherent mutterings is what seems to be a suppressed nervous laugh or giggle as she moves on to explain her care and love for her babies and then gives examples how she listens to her own mother, all the while still smiling, resembling Conrad Veidt as Gwynplaine from *The Man Who Laughs* (Leni, U.S.A., 1928), she says how she loves her babies. Again, the authenticity of the naturalistic mise-en-scene along with the verité style cinematography reinforces the impressions of authenticity and immediacy and hence verisimilitude of the anomalous behavior, physiological appearance, and mental condition of Ellen. However, it is her unreconstituted bodily grotesque status that is being seemingly presented rather than represented to us that aesthetically unifies the grotesque and realist qualities of this scene.

We encounter a second unreconstituted grotesque whose grotesque status is embellished through Korine's fictionalizing. The character is a girl who really has Down's syndrome. She is fictionally being prostituted by her brother who is her pimp. She, appearing like a prostitute caricature, is somewhat plump with bleach blonde hair. She is dressed-up like a nineteenth century porcelain doll, wearing a white nightgown fringed with lace and a large red bow in her hair. Her makeup is heavy – blue eye-shadow with thick rouge and red lipstick and her flirtatious clichés seem directly taken from a chapter of the *Dummies Guide to Prostitution* were one to exist. A more detailed evaluation of how she is *re-presented* and *represented* through both a realist and grotesque aesthetic will be discussed below.

Another character who recurrently appears is a little person (Bryant Crenshaw) who is an African-American man with disproportionate dwarfism. According to the scene in which he is introduced into the movie, he is also gay. Bryant is the excessively constructed embodiment of the minority figure. Later in the film he is even shown wearing a t-shirt supporting Israel and the Jewish religion which further emphasizes

another dimension of his minority status. In the kitchen arm wrestling scene described in CHAPTER 3, he arm-wrestles the largest of the attendees – a mountain of a man who is as hairy as he is large, and whose vocabulary seems limited to "goddamn", "fuck this shit", "get it, get it", and "got any more beer" in the common Appalachian twang – and wins. In his introductory scene, which is shot like a talking heads documentary – shot using a static, centrally framed, eye-line medium shot – he is shown rejecting the drunken sexual advances of Korine. Korine, who appears in a cameo role, actually drunk, who tells Bryant, "you're not gay" because he is not accepting Korine's drunken advances. While these scenes are as bizarre as they are mundane, the grotesque is enhanced by the presence of the "dwarf", who is an anatomical grotesque in Bakhtin's and Carroll's sense of the term. His inclusion amongst the odd redneck troupe that he surrounds himself teeters on the edge between the outlandishly surreal and the mundanely banal. It is here in which the realist grotesque of Korine's milieu and oeuvre thrives.

We also encounter an albino waitress (Donna Brewster). The shot is framed using a straight on eye-line match that is centrally framed in medium to medium long shot. The image is grainy and degraded as a consequence of the Hi-8 or some other form of VHS format used to record the sequence. Although her hair color is natural, she looks somewhat similar to the multitude of other bleach blondes in the film due to her mullet haircut. Her extremely fair skin has a slight pinkish or reddish tinge to it which is enhanced by her maroon apron and the amber-colored protective lenses that she wears. The scene is shot in the parking lot of the restaurant in which she works. It fluctuates between shots of her dancing in an awkward bump and grind style atop of or inside her purple car to Miami bass which reverberates out of the sound system and shots of her describing herself and her ideal man. This juxtaposition sequence, as Benjamin Halligan has noted, comes across like a dating profile for a public access cable T.V. channel.[21] Throughout the sequence there are alternating shots of her juxtaposed as she describes herself in voiceover or speaking directly into the camera. She describes her own physical appearance before describing her physical preferences in men, which starts with specific criteria with regards to hair and eye color before she

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[21] Op. Cit., Halligan 2002.

humorously includes *almost* all natural colors to her list of supposed criteria. Ultimately, as she says herself, she is not that picky. She does explain that she is looking for a man that will not 'hit on her' and that will 'love her for who she is'. She then goes on to tell us that Patrick Swayze and Pamela Anderson are her favorite movie stars, both of whom are characteristic of popular tastes of the lower classes in middle-America.[22] Lastly, she discloses that she was born without any toes on her feet and that she used to pick things up with the balls of her feet when she was young. This is a complete fabrication scripted by Korine. This is emblematic of his constant play with truth and farce, and the indistinguishable boundary that he cultivates between the two, which is fostered by his use of imperfect, low-fi perceptual technologies combined with his imitation of non-fictional platforms, such as a local-access television dating service advertisement, to facilitate impressions of authentically grotesque characters being documented rather than represented.

The albino girl's video single's ad is immediately followed by another set of characters using stock television footage of two adult identical twin men bathing together. One washes the other's back and then they rotate and the other reciprocates. On the screen there is subtitling that reads "Identical Twins; Xenia, Ohio; Died 1983". The scene is alienating and creepy as the two brothers move in perfect tandem, eyes transfixed in an empty forward gaze, appearing as if they are lifeless automatons in a catatonic state who have somehow remained animated. This stock video footage is even more degraded than the previous episodic installment of the albino girl. It is a video recording of a video recorded image which shows deterioration lines and green smudging across the plane of the image. These sort of parenthetical moments reinforce Korine's collage approach. While this highlights the constructedness of the film, it does not infringe on his realist imperative and the verisimilitude in which the film is structured. This fragmentary incorporation reflects a more categorical approach to documentary film structuring in which the episodes are unified by common themes. In this instance it provides a cohesive travelogue of Xenia's

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[22] Patrick Swayze is typically admired for his performance in *Dirty Dancing* (Ardolino, U.S.A., 1987) with women and for his performance in *Road House* (Herrington, U.S.A., 1989) with men. The character described here elaborates on how sexy she thinks Patrick Swayze is, and how she would "pay money" to touch him. Anderson is admired for her role in *Baywatch* (1992-1997) with both men and women.

Gummo – its inhabitants as well as its milieu.

Another instance in which there are literal bodily grotesques incorporated into a sequence motivated by one of the main narrative strands occurs in a bowling alley where Dot, Helen, and Darby are having corndogs for lunch. Behind them is a deaf couple having what appears to be a heated argument, histrionically signing to one another while sounding out their communications, which sound like a series of painful cries and howls. We enter the naturalistically staged scene through a medium-long shot that slowly and simultaneously zooms as it tracks. After a brief second of centrally framing the couple in a medium shot, the camera continues to track and pan into the service area of the bowling alley until it reveals the girls at the table adjacent to the arguing deaf couple. The shot rests on a diagonally framed medium shot. Darby attentively faces the back of her chair as she stares at the bickering couple. They are the only ones who are able to really 'hear' what the other one is saying, although all the patrons of the bowling alley can hear their vocalizations. The paradoxical incongruity of 'hearing' in this sequence is intensified by stylistic verisimilitude of the shot. The handheld verité shooting style, the location shooting, as well as the lighting all serve to facilitate impressions of authenticity and immediacy.

As a whole, this gallery of literal grotesques is indicative of extraordinarily unusual yet mundane inhabitants of *Gummo*'s Xenia. While *Gummo* includes many characters with highly distinctive physical anomalies, the other characters who demonstrate the bodily grotesque are often simply strange in appearance in a way that echoes Lavery's discussion of Fellini's gallery of grotesque characters. They are 'normal' in terms of their anatomical and biological status in relation to any perceptibly medicalized physiological anomaly. Yet they are still strange looking people, curiosities in their own right. What adds to the fascination of these characters is that their lifestyles and geography place them in a cultural vacuum that lags behind the rest of the connected world. And while they are unarguably cultivated, much of the grotesque emanates from the impression that these people are not trying to look odd or weird. They adopt and adapt styles and fashions that combine several disparate subcultural groups or appear oblivious to their antiquated styles. Others, such as Solomon, are

anatomically bizarre to such an extent that it is questionable whether they can truly qualify as anomalous as there is nothing medically abnormal about him, at least as far as the eye can see. This notion of normalcy and anomalousness is something that Korine seems to constantly pose to the spectator. Nevertheless, appearance alone does not secure the grotesque with these characters. What these characters say and do – their behavior and actions – is what takes them from bizarre to grotesque. This contributes to the manifestation of Korine's realist as well as his grotesque milieu.

The power of the milieu captured by Korine in *Gummo* largely rests on the authenticity of his location shooting and the details that he captures throughout using exploratory cinematographic techniques that are emblematic of neorealist and verité filmmaking – prolonged handheld takes, mobile framing and zooms instead of cutaways – contained within the various episodes of his collage structure. Because of the state of the locations of much of hi location shooting, he insists that there was very minimal art direction required. The shooting of *Gummo* was orchestrated by employing a 'found' or 'as is' aesthetic of both the characters within the film and the film's setting. His concern was to ensure that he captured what was already there. Korine tells one interviewer: "That was all part of the story: the things that were hanging on the walls, the toys on the floor".[23] This is one of the principal approaches that Korine took to secure aesthetic verisimilitude. This also ensures that his composition reflected an inextricable link between the grotesque and realist aesthetics that shape his film. Likewise, many of the themes and motifs of the film reflect local current events during the time of the shooting. For instance, Korine notes "a spate of cat killings by a gang of kids", a recurring motif in *Gummo*, which Korine declared unsurprising having lived and witnessed "the deeply entrenched poverty, boredom, and hopelessness of the area".[24] Although Korine focuses on the characters, he insists that the art direction is equally as important in expressing the general mood and milieu – the "tapestry", that *Gummo* is intended to portray.[25] Fellow filmmaker and co-producer of *Gummo*, Gus Van Sant describes the way in which Korine captures the nuances and expressivity of the milieu of the film:

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[23] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Op. Cit., "Mike Kelly Interviews Harmony Korine".

> Korine found Xenia in the details. During the months of pre-production, he took a video camera when he scouted for locations, filming whatever caught his eye. He rooted out unusual and distinctive homes and exteriors to shoot in, making as few changes to the locations as possible. The furniture stayed where it was; whatever was piled on the floors stayed piled on the floors.[26]

As his milieu is a temporal sense of the geo-cultural, it has as much to do with the inhabitants of a place as a place itself. Subsequently, the milieu of *Gummo* is generated through the ways in which the characters interact with their setting and environment and how they embrace, reject, and assimilate their local culture with that of the wider world. The wider world to Xenia inhabitants is generally depicted as encompassing aspects of American popular culture that is often manifest through music culture based personal style and fashion. His 'found' aesthetic extends to the appearance of the characters insisting that they too be 'as is', requesting they look and dress as they were when he encountered them.[27] Through this, he addresses the "cosmopolitan cultural influences or social codes that have trickled down to the suburbs".[28] Korine elucidates that in Middle America, especially in the more rural suburban and Southern influenced areas:

> …you'll see kids with rat-tail haircuts and Bone Thugs & Harmony T-shirts, but at the same time, they go home and their parents talk about how they hate blacks. The kids will be racists, but they will totally love Eazy-E or Too Short. That's the space *Gummo* exists in.[29]

This combination of seemingly contradictory elements of popular culture is endemic within places like Xenia, Ohio. To those who have never experienced areas like this it may appear hyperbolic. This is indeed a combination of seemingly incompatible elements which leads to the presence of the grotesque.[30] However, it is also a faithful depiction motivated by verisimilitude.

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[26] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Op. Cit., Jamie & Hainley.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Op. Cit. Thomson.

Skepticism over the veracity of *Gummo*'s depiction of the American rural suburban milieu seems to stem from Korine's experimental visual style, especially his play with form and structure. Some critics regard this aspect of Korine's portrayal as a kind of ironic postmodern pastiche or incriminatingly and unsympathetic freakshow exploitation. What those critics are missing is that much of Middle America shares this "Pop schizophrenia", as Korine puts it.[31] In opposition to trends in merging seemingly opposing forms of popular cultural styles,[32] the pop schizophrenia in Middle America is a consequence of cultural lag and the subsequent appropriation and cannibalization that follows.[33] I contend that this is not a nebulous ironic postmodern bricolage but that it is instead one of another of the key elements of the naturalistic mise-en-scene that Korine perceptively captures which, in turn, secures *Gummo*'s verisimilitude. He simultaneously highlights the perceived violations of standing cultural concepts and boundaries which results in what is further perceived to be incongruities produced by the combination of seemingly incompatible qualities. It is from this interrelationship that both the realist and grotesque dimensions of Korine's aesthetic emerges. The pop schizophrenia is most apparent via the recurring characters that anchor the film.

The sisters, Helen and Dot, are two bleach blonde mullet topped girls who shave off their eyebrows. Their look is inspired by Cherrie Currie, the lead singer of the seventies band The Runaways. The girls dress in a manner reminiscent of girls on the glam metal scene in the 1980s – tight fitting spandex, or high-cropped cutoff shorts, and shirts exhibiting the bands that they support or shoulder and belly baring shirts reminiscent of eighties aerobics instructors. Korine provides a detailed portrait of these girls, which contributes to their bodily grotesque status, and consequently the overall grotesque aesthetic that shapes the film. One scene of particular note shows Dot, Helen, and their youngest sister Darby hanging out in their bedroom. After scooping up their cat, Foot-Foot (named after a Shaggs song) on the front porch, and declaring she smells like a "dookie", Darby is tracked by a continuous handheld shot through a house cluttered with mess of outdated and unmatched furniture. There is a cut to an

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For a succinct explanation of 'cultural lag' see: Henry L. Tischler, "Introduction to Sociology" (Belmont, Wadsworth: 2007. 63).

open frame of Darby entering after she gets to a stairwell, which we soon discover leads to an upstairs attic space that has been converted into a bedroom for the three sisters. Still tracking Darby, Dot and Helen are eventually revealed chatting on their beds listening to West Coast gangster rap. The dim lighting naturalistically reflects the weakly luminescent lamps in the room. The low angular ceilings are white but yellowing from stains with a single poster pinned to it. The beds are all not only unmade but are without linens. The unmatched, outdated dressers are stockpiled with rubbish and objects, including lamps that are equally outdated, causing a further clash with the rest of the environment. The girls are not completely materially deprived, but much of what they possess appears to be an accumulation of piled-up, disused objects and waste. The floor is littered with clothes, stuffed animals, and other indecipherable objects, which contribute to what appears to be almost like a primordial blob of girly objects and belongings, contributing to its grotesqueness due to its perceptible feminine character as much as the disheveled heap of a mess does.

The unusualness of these girls, both in looks and behavior, revolves around their bodies and the things that they do to their bodies. In the midst of conversation about the cat, whom they believe "looks impregnated", the two older girls, Dot and Helen, focus their attention on a nipple enlarging beauty regime. They fastidiously tape their nipples then rip the tape off while looking into a full length mirror in a slight diagonal medium shot. Reflected in the background of the mirror, their youngest sister jumps up and down on the bed, repeatedly declaring, "pull it, Dot, pull it!" After counting down, Dot rips the tape off as both gaze into the mirror and inspect the results. Cutting to a medium close-up, Helen, smiling and twisting side to side in the mirror, says that they look bigger while Dot, who inspects Helen's nipples like a doctor inspecting a patient, says that they look a little bigger, affirming that they appear "wider". Helen asserts that they look redder, while Dot concludes that they are now better nipples. The fascinating way in which these girls look, in conjunction with their odd behaviors, is unorthodox and incongruent to conventions of style and fashion amongst more populated American conurbations. Both the realism and the grotesque emerge from the combined strangeness of the girls' appearance as well as their simultaneously

extraordinary and mundane activities. Through both the naturalistic mise-en-scene as well as the verité and neorealist cinematographic techniques – handheld tracking shots and mobile framing combined with the gritty surface texture of the low grade film stock – Korine masterfully captures the interconnectedness of the grotesque and aesthetic strategies of verisimilitude which he employs to convey the all-encompassing milieu of *Gummo*'s Xenia.

Likewise, Tummler and Solomon dress like metalheads from the eighties. Tummler wears either an open chest vest with no shirt or some one-hit wonder hair metal t-shirt paired with army fatigues or bicycle shorts and the trademark white puffy-topped Pony, Avia, or L.A. Gear high-tops. Solomon dresses much the same. The mishmash of dress styles and fashion signify the cultural lag pervasive in the poverty-stricken rural and rural-suburban social landscape of middle-America. Like it is with the three sisters above, it is not just the appearance of Tummler and Solomon that fosters the realistic grotesque aesthetic of *Gummo*, it is also their activities, their behaviors, and their mannerisms which garners ambivalence or in some instances a sense of dissonance.

Of all the films discussed in the thesis, *Gummo* is most rife with ambivalence generating moments, and Tummler and Solomon are at the center of both. The first shows the boys visiting a prostitute after collecting their payment from selling the cats that they have hunted. The twist is in the fact that the prostitute has Down's syndrome Cassidy (Bernadette Resha), who is pimped-out by her brother, Cole, from their family house. Maintaining an impression of authenticity and hence realism through the imperfect perceptual techniques of verité handheld cinematography and the degraded low quality film stock, the surface texture of the imagery maintains the same stylistic visual cues that prompt the presumptive assertions that accompany documentary filmmaking. This is supplemented with neorealist techniques of staging and rendering the mise-en-scene naturalistically – unstylized natural lighting, location shooting, unstaged dialogue, and authentic dress. Cole collects the money from Tummler and checks in on his sister, telling her to put her "nice robe" on

before ushering Tummler into the room. After instructing him to leave the light on, Cole closes the door behind him and places a chair up against the door for him to stand on so that he can look on through an airflow vent at the top of the door. Solomon, sitting on a mustard yellow burlap sofa up against a wooden paneled wall is watching Cole with curiosity as Cole squeezes one of his nipples while looking in on his sister and Tummler. Upon leaving the girl's room Cole asks Tummler if he is "good". The bashfully nodding Tummler reenters the common area of the house, shirtless and smoking a cigarette. When the young Solomon then enters the room, the camera follows him to document a lengthy exchange of idle chit-chat peppered with stale romantic overtones and slow conversational versions of vaudeville jokes and double entendres. It is the earnest but strained flirtations between the pubescent Solomon and the dolled-up Cassidey that furnish the grotesque here. Korine's grotesque aesthetic, a combination of seemingly incongruent elements, simultaneously elicits jaw-dropping fascination and discomfort. There is a girl with Down's syndrome being prostituted by her brother to an underage kid, there are the cringe-worthy attempts at charm and charisma by both Cassidey and Solomon, and there is the sincerity exhibited by both which offsets the otherwise unconscionable nature of the scene and draws out the ambivalence of the scenario. This combination makes the entire sequence fascinating and disturbing, humorous and contemptible, full of sentiment and practiced artificial emotionality all at the same time. The conflicting co-presence of all of these attributes cultivates the grotesque, all of which is precipitated through the characters' bodies, including the embodiment of their behavioral and psychological quirks, as much as their physical appearance, and the techniques used to render the imagery and scenarios inextricably ties the realist aesthetics with the grotesque.

Another memorable scene that invokes ambivalence involving Tummler and Solomon takes place when they break into the house of Jarrod (Daniel Martin), a competitor of theirs in the cat-killing racket in Xenia. The scene is both violent and merciful. It is in the uncertainty between the two in which the grotesque resides. The boys are shown in a series of handheld shots that alternate between medium and close-up shots rummaging through Jarrod's bedroom after crawling through his window. Up to this point the sequence of shots more closely resemble a conventional narrative film in

terms of the establishment and organization of time and space. However, the gritty surface texture and naturalistic mise-en-scene – unstylized naturalistic lighting, naturalistic setting, milieu specific costume, and the seemingly unstaged dialogue – reinforces the prevailing neorealist effect. After rummaging through Jarrod's house, they encounter his unconscious grandmother in bed and hooked-up to medical equipment. The two become quiet as they inspect her, Tummler sitting down on the bed next to her while Solomon remains standing at the foot of the bed in the tightly cramped and poorly lit room. Solomon breaks the silence by asking in a restrained but disconcerted voice whether she is dead. Tummler tells him that she is alive as long as she is hooked-up to the machine that assists her breathing.

In typical Korine fashion, there is a cut to Solomon declaring that "She stinks." While insensitive, there is an uncomfortable humor about his earnestness. Tummler is preoccupied with the woman. Solomon, clearly uncomfortable, insists in a somber quiet voice, "She smells like baked ham." Tummler declares her "Dead as hell" and instructs Solomon to shoot her in the foot with his BB gun. Solomon pauses for reassurance, but Tummler is adamant, with his gaze never leaving the old lady as he continues to gently caress her hair and her forehead. Solomon gives in as he nonchalantly cocks his air rifle, takes aim with one eye squinting down the sightline before firing a shot into the sole of the old woman's foot. The woman does not move. Cutting back to Tummler who is still caressing the woman's head, he asserts, "Told ya she's dead." Tummler then turns around and flips the switch to shut off the machine. The woman shows the first real signs of life as she twitches during the death rattle while both Tummler and Solomon speak in quiet platitudes about the woman's death.

The moment of sensitivity is disrupted through grotesque humor once more as Solomon, once again, inappropriately but in true earnestness reiterates "She sure stinks." The scene ends with an extreme close-up of her foot with a BB embedded between her toe and the sole of her foot. This too contributes to the mood and atmosphere of the film – the contradictions inherent in the film that fluctuates between a keen sense of humanity and a detached sense of apathy – by cultivating a prevailingly

grotesque tone or mood. The grotesque is not necessarily fostered by the contentious issue of euthanasia itself, but rather by who is performing it, the method used to do it, as well as the surprising eloquence of Tummler in advancing a coherent and sympathetic diatribe of folk existentialism prior to flipping the switch. The sort of humanistic complexity demonstrated by Tummler is at odds with the typically provincial attitudes and perceptions of white Appalachian culture. His incisive act of perceived kindness is itself a violation of standing concepts, largely because of his own status as a grotesque. The co-presence of apathetic yet naively honest humor that Solomon provides adds a dimension of humor that that also adds to the incongruity. The layers of incongruity and ambivalence are rendered through audiovisual techniques typically associated with an aesthetic verisimilitude – gritty or low-grade film stock, shaky handheld camerawork, mobile framing, and the naturalistic mise-en-scene, particularly the naturalistic lighting, setting, and seemingly unstaged dialogue exchange – again reaffirms both the grotesque and realist aesthetics which shape *Gummo.*

An array of other figurative grotesques is peppered throughout *Gummo* amongst the various juxtaposed scenes that comprise the photo-album collage Korine has created through his categorical formal structure. Indeed, Korine's recorded and collected mixed-media footage that show the peripheral characters interspersed throughout the film are essential in creating the encompassing realist grotesque milieu that *Gummo* sets out to portray. The milieu is reinforced through a compilation of imagery that composes the landscape that is *Gummo*'s, Xenia. These episodic sequences are sometimes comprised of a single scene and sometimes multiple scenes. One multi-scene sequence includes imagery of two 'meathead' brothers. Shot on what looks to be a form of low-grade handheld VHS recorder, two white skinhead teenage jock males are shown lifting weights before a cut to them standing in their kitchen where they briefly talk about their sneakers before they commence playfully, but actually, punching each other in the face to demonstrate their toughness. This home video sequence resembles just that, a home video, or an appropriated home video that would be seen as an insert sequence in a television magazine news program. In another sequence, still imagery of a local cocaine-dealing swinger in crinkled, worn-out instant

photographs portray the dealer with girls who are shown flashing their breasts to the camera. The stills are accompanied by a narrative voiceover that provides meaningful context to the imagery. The sequence resembles inserted sequences from a tabloid real crime television program. Other sequences intercut throughout the film resemble found footage from people's private home movies. This includes a Hi-8 home video testimony of: a depressive who contemplates suicide after disclosing how he was unable to find work anywhere; an impoverished and unhealthy-looking family of five who are videotaped in their home, appearing uncomfortable with passionless eyes, almost entranced as they stand in front of the camera; and a home video disclosure of a man with his face obscured by pixilation through post-production editing, talking into the camera about his female exploits while his friend, who has a speech impediment, confirms that his buddy is a "ladies man". These video sequences are degraded to such an extent that the surface imagery has noticeable blurring, pixilation, and streaking. The imperfect fidelity imbues the footage with a sense of authenticity and immediacy to Korine's multimodal aesthetic approach. This assists Korine's success in securing the verisimilitude that Korine employs to structure his vision of *Gummo*'s Xenia. Thus the grotesquely anomalous characters and the grotesque milieu that Korine methodically unfolds are instilled with the same presumptive assertion and elicit that same schemata affiliated with nonfictional, documentary, modes of audiovisual production due to the imperfect perceptual devices used to render the subject matter and content.

One of the more extended sequences that enhance the grotesque milieu through the nonfictional home movie stylistics above shows a group of four adolescent youths – three boys and one girl – who are sitting on the stoop of a stationary trailer home discussing their juvenile criminal exploits. What they discuss and the how they look and sound while talking contributes to the grotesque. The teens are introduced through voiceover during a sound bridge of their discussion which is juxtaposed over degraded VHS imagery of a hovering handheld slightly high angled shot in extreme close-up of a cat corpse covered in flies. The imagery of the abject material grotesque rendered and displayed through low-fi imperfect perceptual imagery functions to facilitate an impression of authenticity. It achieves this through its affiliations of

nonfictional verisimilitude and parallels their discussion of the feral cat problem. The sound bridge linking the image of the cat with a cat that one of the adolescents – the only girl in the group – encountered covered in maggots. This reprisal of the recurring cat motif throughout the film bridges visual imagery of corporeal grotesque – the fly covered cat corpse – to verbal imagery of the corporeal grotesque – the girl's narration of a maggot covered cat corpse. The shot eventually cuts to the youths who continue to discuss how they deal with the stray cat problem. One of the guys – gaunt cheeked, gap-toothed, with a hairstyle like a toupee on top of a military crew cut, donning a full mustache, and wearing a biker style t-shirt depicting an American flag in the background – details how a friend violently rid himself of a problem cat. He explains that his 'buddy' poured gasoline down the cat's throat and then lit it. The other members of the group laugh as the conversation eventually shifts to their stories about spending time in "juvy".[34]

One guy, shirtless and pigeon-chested wearing an extra tight baseball cap backwards with a scratchy tattoo on his shoulder, explains earnestly that the worst thing about juvy "was the niggers". As he continues his tirade, his uneven and malformed teeth result in his face appearing more and more like a skull with skin elastically stretched over it. Unrelenting he says, "I hate the motherfuckers, I just don't like them" as he pulls a face as if he was just talking about his disgust for broccoli. Clearly of the opinion he is the wise man dispensing knowledge, he nods ever so knowingly as he proclaims in cliché, "if you've met one, you've met 'em all". The girl, in an oddly defensive manner, pipes-in: "Unless you've got good nigger buddies, I had some good nigger buddies at Pearl".[35] The entire sequence is shot in a low-grade video stock. The degraded surface texture of the imagery combined with the shaky handheld mobile framing and the naturalistic mise-en-scene – namely the location shooting, nonprofessional actors engaged in unscripted and unstaged dialogue, and natural lighting – all combine to reinforce the verisimilitude and presumptive assertion that such image rendering techniques and devices hold through its associations with the home movies.

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[34] 'Juvy' is slang for juvenile detention center, which is effectively a jail for children not terribly unlike the borstals that used to be in the U.K..
[35] "Pearl" is the name of the juvenile detention center in which she spent time.

This establishes an inextricable link between the realist aesthetic used to render the grotesque imagery and the grotesque imagery itself. The impressions of authenticity and immediacy of Korine's stylistic approach coincide with the impressions of authenticity regarding the grotesque subject matter and content of the scene. The resulting effect is tantamount to his imagery being perceived and contemplated as a presentation rather than representation of Xenia.

This is one of the hallmarks of *Gummo*, its ambivalent moments of contradictory logic, which also tends to capture the humanity of his participants-cum-characters, even if that humanity is itself contradictory. The characters are somewhat bizarre looking, even ugly, and so are their perceptual and cognitive understandings of the world. However, what transforms the ugly into the grotesque is the mishmash of their self-presentation. Besides their physical appearance, their shocking unbridled racism, and the humor they find in the mistreatment of animals, what puts this scene over the top is that while the adolescents speak with an Appalachian hillbilly twang, it is intermixed with an urban hip-hop intonation and cadence, which was typically associated with urban African-American speech. This is yet another dimension of the pop schizophrenia and verisimilitude of Korine's expressive vision of the rural-suburban milieu of middle-America. The dissonance that the incongruity of these disjunctive elements again reinforces the aesthetic cross-fertilization and interconnectedness of both the grotesque and realist dimensions of the film.

In another scene, one that also exhibits the abject poverty as well as a sense of filth and the profane that pervades *Gummo*, the Bunny Boy character treks through what looks to be a junkyard in which two kids smudged all over in dirt between the ages of around seven and ten are playing cowboys. The boys are shirtless, wearing swimming trunks, beat-up sneakers without socks, cowboy hats, and toy holsters with cap pistols. One is also wearing a vest with sheriff star embroidered on the chest. The giant dirt lot does not have a blade of grass in sight and there are two pieces of heavy machinery surrounded by various junked automotive parts on the lot. These kids also demonstrate a metaphorical dirtiness in their language. Throughout the scene these young kids speak using extreme profanity that largely revolves around the scatological

grotesque body, namely genitalia and bodily waste. The sequence opens with a centrally framed slightly shaky handheld medium shot of the boys stomping around, throwing, and breaking objects in the junkyard saying things like "fuck the cops", "the cops can kiss my ass", "all they are is assholes", "they just mad 'cause we get more pussy than they do", and "you smell like fucking piss" as the scene opens. After a cutaway to a centrally framed handheld medium long shot of Bunny Boy walking from the background to the foreground, the little boys are altered to his presence through a sound bridge of their tirade of abuse toward him before the space is reestablished with all three boys. This is done with a a centrally framed handheld medium shot of their unrelenting tirade about how rabbits are all queer and "that they shit on themselves". They continue to shout at Bunny Boy, telling him that he "smells like an asshole...a wetback dick…[and] a pile of bullshit". While the organizational structure and form most resembles a classically plotted narrative structure, the handheld cinematography combined with the rawness of the image furnished by the lower grade film stock and the naturalistic mise-en-scene override the structural prominence of the form and maintains the impression of authenticity and verisimilitude that the imperfect perceptual techniques and devices instill. This, combined with the moral incongruity of very young kids playing make- believe while cussing so effectively, fosters the inextricable link that the film style has with the grotesque content and subject matter. It elicits a grotesque sense of jaw-dropping astonishment which elicits a sense of ambivalence that is fascinating, humorous, as well as disconcerting. Added to this is the literal dirtiness of these two kids. They are covered in dirt as they play in a place where refuse and waste is dumped. The materiality of the grotesque is manifest here through the bodies of the kids themselves, their environment, as well as their language. They invoke notions of a trailer trash methamphetamine rendition of *Lord of the Flies*. Like the cats in *Gummo*, these kids are feral and as they multiply and grow-up they become the adolescents on the stoop. Just like the cats, they are a continuation of the cycle of the grotesque population which persists unabated from one generation to the next.

One of the most didactic scenes of the grotesque occurs near the end of the film.

An upper-middle aged man approaches the three girls from the background in the bowling alley as they stop for lunch in the search for their missing cat with one of their homemade fliers in hand. The man enters the medium shot framing the girls at the table shortly after Dot explains to Darby that the couple sitting behind them sounds the way they do because they are deaf. The man is well dressed and he speaks in what sounds to be a more educated cadence. He is the only character without some sort of twang or dialect that reflects either a lower socioeconomic existence or a lack of education. In other words he is, at least on the surface, the normativity to which *Gummo* challenges throughout in its chronicle of the rural-suburban Midwest. After the man inquires as to whether the cat on the flier belongs to the girls, the scene cuts to the girls in the man's car. The majority of the shots are in close-up as he drives them, purportedly to where he saw their lost cat, through one of the built-up commercial districts. Shot from various points and angles in the car, this scene, like the Bunny Boy junkyard scene above, is spatially cohered and organized using classical narrative structuring. The scene vacillates between diagonal close-up shots of the man from the perspective of the backseat while he drives and those of the girls in the passenger and middle seats in the front. There are also periodic close-ups of Darby centrally framed in the backseat and shots of the setting outside that the characters in the car are traversing interspersed as well. The opening shot shows the man telling the girls that he is a gossip columnist for a newspaper in the diagonal close-up, to which Helen, sitting in the front middle seat, shown in a reaction shot with Dot to her right, enquires, "What are gossip?" He then proceeds to enumerate a variety of examples to explain:

> Tupac Shakur stuttered, Warren Oates swallowed his chewing tobacco spittle, Placido Domingo loved sherbet ice-cream, Adolf Hitler had one testicle, P.T. Barnum had an ulcer the size of a small oyster, Henry Winkler is allergic to Papaya, Satchel Paige shot heroin down in Cuba, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer drank denatured alcohol.[36]

In doing this a correlation is drawn between the odd and the scandalous gallery of grotesques that comprise celebrity gossip and the odd and scandalous reality of the banal and mundane everydayness of the gallery of grotesques that inhabit *Gummo*'s

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[36] Op. Cit. *Gummo* (1:15:53-1:16:20)

Xenia.

After pulling into the parking lot of what appears to be storage units for rent, the man eventually reveals his true reason for getting the girls in the car when he is shown in the shallow background of a straight shot from outside the passenger side window, leaning over and feigning a search for a map, as he puts his hand between Helen's legs. The girls respond angrily, slapping him repeatedly. Unrepentant and still being smacked, he pleads, "Come, on just give me a little." He berates them once they jump out of the car, ironically calling them "hos" and reprises, "Nothing new for trash like you", in a sing-song manner omnisciently shot from the backseat as he is shown driving away with the girls circling the car as they shout back profanities at him. This is an example of the ways in which the environmental conditions of *Gummo*'s Xenia are shown to consume and violate its inhabitants. The bodily grotesque here, similar to much of Clark's work, is manifest through an invasive attempt of one body to violate another. What is intriguing by this scene is the inversion that the grotesque takes with regards to the perceptions of normalcy. The cultivated grotesques that are Helen and Dot are almost neutralized by the actions of the only professional, middle class character that we encounter in the film. A character who, while superficially is antithetical to the grotesque, is no less an agent of defilement and transgression as any of the physical grotesques, whether anatomical or cultivated, that have been encountered and populate *Gummo*'s Xenia. And while the formal organization of this sequence of shots and scenes are indicative of conventional narrative film structure, the other neorealist and verité elements – naturalistic mise-en-scene, the tonality and texture of the surface imagery – overrides the conventionality of the sequence without undermining the aesthetic verisimilitude which still remains intact. However, in this scene, the grotesque and realist aesthetics while co-present are more indicative of Clark's aesthetic whereby the two aesthetic tropes are not as interdependent on one another.

As interposed throughout, and just recently above, the physical grotesque – bodily, corporeal, and material – is also an environmental characteristic that consumes and violates those who inhabit *Gummo*'s Xenia. The former is articulated best by

Werner Herzog in an interview that he conducts with Korine. Herzog applauds Korine's art direction for the "sense of dirt" that he was able express and convey throughout the film.[37] This is part of Korine's 'found' aesthetic. Korine attests that some people in Nashville live like "pack rats", to such an abject extent that he recalls in one of the houses, he discovered a "chunk" of the habitant's shoulder in a pillowcase during one of his location scouting missions.[38] This sense of filth not only contributes to the milieu of *Gummo*, it also contributes to the materiality and corporeality of Korine's expression of the grotesque environment of the rural-suburban Midwestern United States.

One house in particular that became known as "The Bug House" simultaneously demonstrates the abject filth and the poverty of the realistic and grotesque milieu being conveyed. The Bug House is a small home that reputedly housed around fifteen people, which was heavily infested with cockroaches. The bugs were crawling up and down the walls throughout the house.[39] This is captured in a scene that opens with a medium straight shot of a young boy standing on a piece of furniture sliding over a family portrait that is hanging on a filth stained wall. The picture covers a hole in the wall from which an army of ants and cockroaches come spilling out upon being disturbed by the boy. After a momentary startle and a slight whimper and some mumbling, the boy quickly attempts to replace the portrait. A panning shot then shows him scurrying back to a tired looking, yellowy discolored floral patterned sofa on which Tummler, Solomon, and a girl are huffing compressed aerosol fumes to get high in a slight diagonal medium shot.

The stain-walled room is encased with piles of boxes, papers, and mounds of other objects and discarded pieces of rubbish which seems to meld together into yet another primordial heap of waste within which the dwellers nest. After the boy flops himself onto the lap of the catatonic looking girl there is a cut and slow pan of an extreme close-up of the boy's bare legs which show insect bites and scabs that have

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[37] Op. Cit., Herzog.
[38] Ibid. Also see: Op. Cit., "Mike Kelly Interviews Harmony Korine".
[39] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*. Also see: Ibid., "Mike Kelly Interviews Harmony Korine".

the patterned appearance of scabies. The shot pans slowly up the young boy's body before capturing his yawning, partially toothless, face gazing upward in comforted assuredness at the girl deeply inhaling the fumes of an aerosol canister. Throughout this scene the somber Prelude of Bach's "Suite No.2 for Solo Cello in D Minor" is diegetically juxtaposed, creating a hauntingly morose and bleak mood that nevertheless fosters a poetic beauty from that grim ugliness that Hugo so aptly refers to as fostering the grotesque.[40] Once again, while the spatiotemporal organization of this episodic sequence is indicative of conventional narrative decoupage, the cinematographic techniques and the naturalistic mise-en-scene – location shooting and unstylized lighting – enhance and even intensify the grotesque subject matter and content by augmenting the impression of authenticity that the scene attempts to instill through the aesthetic verisimilitude in which the imagery is audiovisually rendered.

Solomon's house, while not perceptibly infested with insects, is similarly a cluttered mess which conveys a packrat mentality as well as a sense of impoverishment. Through a combination of medium and close-up shots, while maintaining the naturalistic mise-en-scene, Solomon searches for flatware in a kitchen drawer. In close-up we see him bundle and tape them together to create makeshift dumbbells. He curls the bundled flatware to test his homemade weights. Before that, however, we see Solomon in a centrally framed medium shot at the drawer in the middle-ground. This provides a better perspective and array of his kitchen, which is less squalid than other places in Xenia, but the interior still has an extremely outmoded with a barren feel to it. The curtain hanging on an exterior leading door has a 70s Panton mushroom pattern. The walls, like the walls of other interiors, are faded, chipping, and discolored from smoke staining, grime accumulation, and years of wear. The drawer that is pulled-out is similarly in a state of wear bordering on disrepair. This is emphasized by the natural lighting which casts a yellowish tone on the space, highlighting the dinginess of the walls and cabinetry. The view of the kitchen is immediately followed by a cut to a darkened empty frame. Shortly after the sound of a door opening and the click of a light is heard offscreen as the darkened room is illuminated. A basement that suffers from the same

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[40] Op. Cit., Hugo.

compulsive hoarding that was encountered in "The Bug House" is revealed. Up against the wall is a four foot high heap of disused objects and rubbish spilling out onto the floor space more than three feet deep. Discernible objects in the heap include numerous paper products and empty boxes, but there is also a cinderblock, a sleeping bag, a few crates, lawn chairs, a load of old toys, and a disused toilet. Solomon enters the diagonally framed, naturally lit medium shot as he makes his way from the top of the stairs in the upper left hand corner of the screen down to the slightly off-centered middleground of the basement. The camera pans as it follows him walk into what looks like a random spot in the heap of discarded objects as he leans in to it and flips on a cassette deck which plays Madonna's "Like a Prayer", another moment of pop schizophrenia. Solomon then walks toward the foreground as the camera pans and zooms out a bit revealing a full wall dance studio mirror as he begins doing aerobicize arm curls with his makeshift flatware dumbbells. He is shirtless, wearing rolled-up jeans, and house slippers. The reflection in the mirror reveals that the heap of discarded objects and rubbish encases the entire perimeter of the large basement aside from the full wall mirror. The pop schizophrenia as well as the filth conveyed here stresses the grotesque milieu that Korine fosters throughout while his naturalistic mise-en-scene and neorealist stylistic techniques reinforces not only the verisimilitude of the subject matter and content once again but it also authenticates the grotesque as realist.

The filth is also ironically portrayed in another scene where Solomon takes a bath to cleanse himself of his accumulated grime. After a series of various disparate still images of Solomon accompanied by the sound of spattering water juxtaposed over the series of images, there is a close-up of Solomon in the bathtub lathering himself-up in a slightly distorted looking, centrally framed slightly high angled close-up. The vivid blue bathroom wall tile and the ivory white bathtub is itself in a disgusting state of griminess and disrepair. The painted royal blue tiling is corroding and flaking throughout, but the bathwater is what is most striking – it is a greenish brown color that looks as if it is blackening the longer Solomon sits in it. Solomon here dwells in the very grotesque bodily grime that he is attempting to cleanse. The grime that he is washing off of himself is so saturated that the water looks almost septic. After a series of close-ups of Solomon washing various parts of himself with the bar of

soap, there is a brief extreme close-up of his hand rubbing he soap on the corroded bath tile followed by a slight diagonal close-up of him fully submerged in the brownish-green water on his belly or all fours with only his head from his nose up peeking above the waterline. He looks like a frog. After a refocus of this shot in close-up to reframe his face there is a brief close-up in rack focus of him spewing some the bathwater through his prune wrinkled fingers.

There is then a cutaway shot to the hallway, which shows other rooms as well, that has its walls lined with discarded items from the floor almost to the ceiling. From the background, Solomon's mother enters the frame and walks toward the foreground and into the bathroom carrying a grease-stained baking tray with a plate of spaghetti and a glass of milk that she gives to Solomon to eat while in the bath. Through the cut of a medium close-up of Solomon in the bath to reestablish the space more details of the bathroom are captured. There are some nude Barbie dolls and dismembered doll parts hang from a rack affixed to the wall. The tiling surrounding the fixtures of the bathtub is shown in sharp focus, capturing the eroded tiling and the black mold that is climbing the walls and haloing the fixtures. After a cut to Solomon's mother giving him some toilet paper for a napkin she starts washing his hair as he gulps down the spaghetti. Framed within this shot is a piece of bacon that is taped to the wall next to Solomon in the tub. The sense of dirt even penetrates the act of self-cleansing and renders it futile. The filth cannot be washed away. This is punctuated when Solomon's mother returns to the bathroom after a momentary departure after answering a knock at the door. She returns to the bathroom with a chocolate bar that she bought from two brothers running a charity scam. In his haste to unwrap the bar, he drops it into the dirty bathwater. Undeterred, he quickly fishes it out and in a straight-on deep focus shot we see him cram it into his spaghetti sauced mouth with such force that the caramel in the bar squirts out, adhering to his face on top of the already present sauce.

If Solomon's heathenism does not adequately convey an irrevocable sense of filth that is unable to be ever be cleansed, the scene continues and Korine further reinforces a sense of 'toxicity', to borrow a term from Carroll's conception of the

grotesque. With shampoo still in his hair, and a curl sculpted atop his head from the shampoo which was shaped by his mom – resembling the *Our Gang* character Alfalfa or Ed Grimley, a character played by Martin Short on *Saturday Night Live*[41] – he remains sitting in his filthy bathwater cramming his candy bar down his throat as a fly comes swirling around his face that he shakes off like a barnyard animal. Nearly choking the chocolate down, accompanied by smacking sounds, he takes a gulp of milk, which trickles down his already food-encrusted face until he realizes that he still has spaghetti, which he recommences eating. This sequence elicits an ambivalence that combines comedic disbelief with an astonishing disgust. Moreover, this scene is yet another instance of what is conventional narrative structuring in terms of the organization of space, the texture and tonality of the image as a consequence of the grittiness of the film stock, the still contemplative shots, and the naturalistic mise-en-scene – especially the understated and minimalistic dialogue, setting, and unstylized lighting – fosters a neorealist aesthetic that continues to reinforce the prevailing verisimilitude of the film. Like most of the scenes involving one of the recurring narrative and character strands, yet unlike the incorporated episodic sequences of the non-recurring inhabitants of *Gummo*'s Xenia, while the grotesque and realist aesthetics are co-present, they are not interdependent. That is to say that the grotesque imagery is not contingent upon realist aesthetics. Yet due to their co-presence they are experienced holistically, thus enhancing and intensifying the effect of the other.

The milieu of filth and disgust in which Xenia is ensconced stretches beyond the topographical domain of the physical environment to the way to the way in which the social environment of the abject material grotesque consumes and affects some of its inhabitants through violation. A degraded, shaky handheld Hi-8 video image shows a little girl, who is aged anywhere between eight to eleven, crouching down outdoors in a yard with an unfinished foundation that has become a mud pit. The pit contains overturned bikes and tricycles amongst other large item debris. This is accompanied with a disturbing voiceover of a little girl explaining how she has been repeatedly sexually molested by her father. The girl stirs a puddle of water with a stick

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[41] *Our Gang* is also known as *The Little Rascals*. Martin Short's, Ed Grimley character appeared on the variety show, *Saturday Night Live*, during the late 1980s.

and then tosses stones into the puddles as she describes, step-by-step, her memory of when her father first raped her. While the girl continues to explain how her father raped her and the way in which he got the girl to acquiesce, the scene then cuts to similarly degraded handheld video imagery of a gaunt, wiry bearded, partially toothless man in medium close-up, who can presumably only be her dad sitting on a lawn chair next to an equally gaunt, somewhat bug-eyed, rabbit-toothed blonde haired woman, presumably her mother, on a distressed porch that looks as if it extends off of a stationary trailer home. The sense of dirt and filth here is literal and figurative. The intensity of the scene is accentuated even further by the personalization afforded by the texture of the imagery of the appearance that this is authentic home movie footage. The verisimilitude that this imperfect perceptual imagery facilitates functions to elicit a sense of presumptive assertion with regards to the veracity of the audiovisual content. In this instance we once again see the way in which Korine establishes a link between the grotesque subject matter and content and the nonfictional techniques that he employs which results in affirming the impression of authenticity of the grotesque.

The milieu of *Gummo* unifies Korine's tapestry of controlled chaos. His dynamic aesthetic approach to the gritty social realities of impoverishment and depravity shares similarities with other films that innovatively chart poverty in film history, ranging from the Surrealist and absurd anthropological travelogue of Luis Buñuel's, *Land Without Bread* (Mexico, 1933) to Edgar Antsey and Arthur Elton's grittily sober documentary, *Housing Problems* (U.K., 1935). And while he uses the suburbs of Nashville as a substitute for the sprawling semi-rural suburban landscape of Xenia, Korine's slightly modified take on the homogenous nature of the suburbs retains the fundamental attribution of the generic somewhere-anywhere-nowhere anonymity that is often attributed to the suburbs of the U.S., and his indistinguishable use of the suburbs of Nashville and its people for Xenia is testament to that. What Korine expertly manages to capture through his kaleidoscope of styles is what van Sant describes as the film's "realistic portrait of poverty and class division in "suburban" America."[42]

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[42] Op. Cit., *Official Website for Gummo*.

One of the intriguingly apparent aspects of Gummo is that neither the poverty nor the purposeful incongruent mixing of styles is ever directly addressed by the director through a distinctive narrational position, nor is it ruminated upon by any of the characters. It is natural. It is reality. These people may struggle to get by, but there is no indication that they reflect upon their actions or their style in this way. It does not even occur after the only middle class character in the film is smacked and berated by all three sisters after molesting Helen as he taunts the girls in a sing-song denigration of his own: "Nothin' new for trash like you". Even then, there is no sense of awareness or identification by the girls in reference to being called 'trash'.

Korine intentionally garners an ambiguousness and ambivalence in *Gummo* in order to maintain his attempt to show these people as extraordinary, on the one hand, and mundane and banal, on the other. He includes people who are not anatomical anomalies in any medical sense but who are anomalous by virtue of their strange appearance, whether physiologically or by their own self-cultivation (it is often a combination of the two). Nevertheless, he portrays these characters as being equally grotesque but also as being mundanely humdrum and banal, particularly those who are anatomically grotesque. To him, they are all just simply people. This also fosters ambivalence towards the characters. They are fascinating visually, they express empathy, but many of them also engage in deplorable acts. Korine's use of a variety of non-fictional techniques, strategies, and corresponding audiovisual devices edify both his grotesque imagery and his realist aesthetic approach to that imagery. While presented as dissonantly incongruent on the one hand, Korine ably conveys how, within the world he is rendering, his characters are indicative of a normalcy defined by its very eclecticism. Much of the grotesque stems from his ability to garner this sense of estranging and alienating difference while maintaining a semblance of familiarity in a world that will presumably not be familiar to many viewers. What is made apparent is that, while Korine definitely plays on these characters embodying traits associated with the bodily grotesque, the designation is somewhat oxymoronic insofar that these everyday grotesques are themselves representative of the norm in *Gummo*'s Xenia. Thus he seems to adhere to Brown's assertion that there are no grotesques in nature. In Korine's case, there are no grotesques in *Gummo*.

**JULIEN DONKEY-BOY**

julien appears to synthesize Clark's and Korine's subject matter and visual style. It is still unmistakably a Korine film, but its themes and motifs and slightly more consistent approach to the visual texturing and shooting style of the imagery instill a consistency, this approach is more commensurate with Clark's films. One thing that contributes to this consistency is that, while Korine uses a plethora of cameras to capture his imagery, it is all video imagery. Even the still imagery is frozen digital video imagery. So while the spectrum of the quality and clarity of the image varies from a grainy to pixilated resolution, the density of the image remains consistent in a way that his combination of multiple mediums in *Gummo* did not. In saying that, while more visually consistent on the one hand, it is arguably more expressively and stylistically baroque on the other. The colors are oversaturated, almost washed out, and in some ways the appearance of the imagery somewhat mimics the pictorial representational strategies of Impressionist painting or as Geoff King observes, Pointillism.[43] The overall effect nevertheless maintains a prevailingly nonfictional aesthetic sense. However, the nonfictional, documentary styles and modes that *julien* imitate more closely resemble the home video, surveillance footage, captured eyewitness footage more than verité proper. Structurally, while *julien* is more focused in narrative progression and trajectory than *Gummo*, it still employs his collage approach. However, whereas *Gummo* was a chronicle of an entire city, *julien* is a more intimate chronicle of a single family and its dysfunctions and dynamics. In typical Korine-like fashion, he incorporates both literal, physical grotesques as well as cultivated cultural, figurative grotesques. The twist in the film, the incestuous relationship between Julien and his sister Pearl, and her subsequent pregnancy from this incestuous relationship, remains the overshadowing grotesque element throughout, albeit connotatively for the majority of the movie until it is denotatively corroborated at the end.

There is more balance between the literal, corporeal grotesques, and the cultivated, figuratively extended bodily grotesques in *julien*. Although the latter still

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[43] Op. Cit. King 119.

comprises the majority of the gallery of grotesques, because of the more focused narrative trajectory and more limited number of character encounters, there is a more proportionate number of anatomical and cultivated grotesques in Korine's vision of the suburbs of Yonkers, New York. These encounters almost always tend to include Julien himself who, diegetically, is a semi-cultivated physical grotesque but an uncultivated and un-reconstituted psychological grotesque.

While Bremner's performance as Julien is essentially an artificial construct of a literal grotesque, he nevertheless remains the principal focal point and human grotesque in the film. Julien's appearance, while artificially cultivated, is partially a product of his schizophrenia. Thus, it is explicitly linked to his mentally grotesque status, which is anatomical in origin. His hair is almost a bowl cut, but his mess of curly locks resists any absolute shape. He has a bit of an overbite, which is partially due to the set of gold-caps that he wears, a fashion accessory more prominently associated within the Rap community in the mid to late nineties. Part of his physical unusualness, like Solomon in *Gummo*, is simply a consequence of the peculiar looking face of the actor himself. Julien speaks in a rambling, often muffled sort of way, and his voice mostly resonates in a somewhat robotic and mono-rhythmic cadence although his volume and tone tends to shift the more excited or aggravated he gets. He often speaks to himself even while he speaks to others, going off on internalized tangents that he expresses aloud.

Although there are certain physical qualities that are inherent to Julien based on his strange anatomical appearance, similar to the mentally challenged characters encountered in *Gummo*, other parts of his grotesque presence are cultivated and even embellished because of his dress and behaviorisms. The major difference here is that Julien's grotesque mind is wholly a theatrical performance by Bremner. Korine demonstrates his persistent keenness for the bodily grotesque when Julien is shown in a panicked state after murdering a little boy.[44] Shot from what would be a point-of-

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[44] This scene is assessed in more detail in the chapter to follow on the sudden and explosive eruption of nascent violence.

view perspective were the boy still alive, Julien is shown incoherently rambling over the top of the corpse of the boy that he has just murdered in a shaky handheld close-up. He maniacally recites prayers from the bible in a semi-coherent and semi-accurate way. It is as if he is performing the last rites of the boy. Korine's predilection for the bodily grotesque is once again driven home in the way that he captures Julien. The angle enhances the anomalousness of Julien both physically and mentally. It magnifies his large forehead and brow, his beaklike nose, his flared nostrils; and it amplifies the spit that foams at the corner of his mouth as he incessantly and maniacally mumbles distorted prayers while snot drips from his nose and the phlegm collects in globules on his chin. The verisimilitude of this shot derives from the shaky handheld camerawork and the grainy surface texture of the image, which prompts associations with a caught-on-camera incident that eventually makes the rounds on the six o'clock news and eventually a site like YouTube, combined with the naturalistic mise-en-scene such as the dialogue, location shooting, and lighting. The imperfect perceptual array of the video garners an impression of authenticity of the grotesque, which is here embodied and engendered by Julien.

Religion and religious rituals is a recurring theme and motif throughout the film. It is something that compels Julien and it seems to be a source of both calm and anguish for him. In one contiguous sequence of jump-cuts, all centrally framed, and shot in close-up is of Julien praying in the bath. He is shown with his hands clasped together in prayer while repeatedly mumbling semi-coherent self-encouragements and interjecting things like "all the people in the bible" and generic clichéd televangelist style sermons. In one of the shots during this scene, something agitates him and he repeatedly smacks himself in the face, hits himself in the head, and even double-handedly grabs his mouth as if he is about to pry his jaw completely apart as a kind of self-punishment. While the jump-cuts result in a jagged rhythm, because of the imperfect perceptual effects of the grainy video imagery, the result is that the sequence has a similar nonfictional association to observational footage spliced together from a controlled medical experiment.

Another scene conveying Julien's confliction with religion and religious ritual shows him attending confession in a Catholic church. A shaky long take shot entirely in extreme close-up using either a handheld camera or a camera attached to Julien shows what is ultimately just the whicker meshed screen of the confessional booth. The naturalistic lighting results in almost the entire frame appearing black except for a partial bit of the screen that is illuminated. There, in almost stark clarity, Julien discloses to the priest, "Jesus looks upon me with disgust" and is of the belief that he should be excommunicated from the church. The priest recognizes Julien's instability and gives him phone numbers of people he can call while also reassuring him that this is the role of God and that God does not cast out the devoted. The dialogue from the priest sounds as if it is unscripted and unstaged. It prompted questions regarding the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction based on the uncertainty as to whether the priest knew that he was partaking in a staged event or that he was even being recorded. This, combined with the other naturalistic elements of the mise-en-scene and the hidden camera videography, facilitates the impression of authenticity that this scene conveys and reinforces the film's aesthetic verisimilitude. Indeed, while Julien, the embodiment of the grotesque, is not reliant on the co-present realist audiovisual style of the scene, the questions revolving around whether the scene is scripted or a documentation of an unstaged event enhances the unease of the events transpiring, which is largely contingent on the aesthetic characterization of Julien as a grotesque.

Near the end of the movie there is another sequence in which Julien and his family is shown attending a Black Baptist church service. While his father, brother, and sister are seated in the pews listening to the sermon, Julien, like many of the other congregates is standing, clapping, and gyrating in a celebratory manner. The minister preaches about the ingestion of the blood of Christ and the cleansing process that this has on sin, a bodily grotesque motif identified by Bakhtin. Julien is clearly moved. The aesthetic verisimilitude of the sequence is secured by many of the techniques and devices that pervasively recurring throughout the film. Shot on location with actual parishioners using a similar combination of handheld and/or miniature affixed digital video cameras, the sequence has the nonfictional appearance of eyewitness, caught-

on-camera, footage or footage captured by a news crew. There are various alternating shots of Julien in close-up and in medium shot until the camera eventually zooms in to reveal that he is crying. Julien's obsession with religion and religious ritual enhances the ambivalence that Julien's schizophrenic tendencies and often morally contradictory and incongruent behaviors elicit. This fosters a greater sense of discordance, dissonance, and estrangement, which further enhances Julien's status as a human grotesque. The imperfect perceptual techniques and devices used not only facilitates general impressions of authenticity, immediacy, and hence verisimilitude but also a sense of authenticity and realism to the grotesque.

The contradictions embodied by and engendered through Julien are symptomatic of his schizophrenia. This is often perceptibly manifest through what appears to be an acute attention deficit disorder. Motifs illustrating this are juxtaposed and inserted throughout the movie, whether through his interactions with others or in isolated sequences, which almost function as aesthetic parentheticals about how he copes and interacts with the world when he is by himself. That, in conjunction with the representations of the unpredictability of his madness, fosters an alienating sense of the grotesque in the way that his schizophrenia manifests itself through his own physical, externalized behaviors and the affects that this has on those that encounter him.

This exaggerated form of attention deficiency is highlighted by the dizzying interactions Julien has with himself and the outside world. For instance, in the tub after his blighted prayer, he starts singing a butchered version of "Frère Jacques", making up words as he goes. The dialogue of his stream of consciousness is constant and continuous, but the structure and content of his stream of thought is disorientated and fragmented. In another scene, shot using what appears to be a combination of handheld and pinhole video cameras, Julien is shot on a city street talking out loud – sometimes to himself, sometimes at passers-by on the street (people who are unwittingly being recorded at the time). The footage resembles eyewitness accounts incidentally caught on camera which lends itself to the verité audiovisual style and the

subsequent impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude that aesthetically shapes this sequence. He incoherently mumbles about various disconnected things ranging from the wind, to cars, to the police department acronyms of different cities, to the ease of downhill versus uphill travel, and even starts asking people about his "family tree" – as in the genealogical model for tracing family history – and asks passers-by what direction it is, as if it is a literal thing that he can physically visit. Ultimately, while he talks in the direction of people who do their best to disregard his presence, he is not really talking to anyone in particular anyway, nor does it seem that he is making any clear sense of the world around him. It is as if he is talking *through* people as he fidgets, walks in circles, and sits-down and stands-up on the curb of the sidewalk. He remains in a perpetual state of unsettledness, unable to remain still. The naturalistic mise-en-scene – the location shooting, the use of unsuspecting passersby as extras, and the unstylized lighting – combined with the verité style cinematography establishes the tension between fiction and nonfiction between which Korine regularly hovers. The unease and disbelief is fostered by the knowledge that Korine has partially staged, "manipulated" as he puts it, a scenario where not all of the participants involved are aware that they are part of one of his recorded events. This is one of the major contributing factors in the grotesque affect. The recording of Julien interacting with an unwitting public that is being unwittingly observed via technologies and techniques that are typically associated with nonfictional modes of audiovisual production, such as surveillance and eyewitness, caught-on-camera, footage secures the aesthetic verisimilitude used to render *julien*.

Julien's compulsive tendencies are demonstrated in another scene. An interior shot shows Julien leaning in the backrest of the sofa gazing out of his window in medium shot. He watches the postman through his window and begins repeating, "he loves me, he loves me not" over and over again, until he yells out "I hate you mailman!" The shots alternate between centrally framed medium shots of a shirtless Julien in the shallow background looking out of the window of the dimly lit living room and P.O.V. shots of Julien staring at the mailman in a shaky handheld shot framed by the window and brightly lit from the natural light of the sun. The establishment of space and

alternating shots are organized using conventional narrative structuring. However, it is the texture of the imagery and the interspersed use of verité cinematographic techniques combined with the naturalistic mise-en-scene that reinforces the aesthetic verisimilitude that Korine employs to render Julien's erratic behavior and to signify Julien's madness. This, in turn, intensifies the verisimilitude of the abjectly grotesque schizophrenic mind and body of Julien.

One of the most extensive scenes illustrating the depths of Julien's schizophrenia which shows his volatility takes place in his bedroom. Across a number of alternating medium and clos-ups, intercut with a few jump-cuts, similar to the bathtub sequence, Julien is shown armed with an air rifle, and as incoherent as his ramblings are, it seems as if he is hearing voices and even experiencing hallucinations of Hitler being with him in his bedroom. After pointing the rifle toward a wall that has various World War II photos attached to it, including one of Hitler, he blathers without pause, "don't ever come, don't ever come back like you did in 1980 when you come back and you ate like a cancer, you fuckin', you killed the Jews, you killed the hippies, you killed all the mother's titties. You're a fuckin' cancer, you come back in the 1980s dressed like a sheriff." Within his schizophrenic diatribe, he falsely recalls that Hitler took a punch from one of Jesus' disciples, but clarifies never to hit him on his left side; a complete distortion of the Christian platitude referring to turning your cheek to violence enacted upon you rather than meeting it with further violence. He then also invites Hitler/Jesus in after screaming at him, "Come on in, have a cup of tea, I'm only kiddin'". The dimly naturalistically lit basement bedroom and seemingly impromptu dialogue continues to facilitate the verisimilitude of realist mise-en-scene. While the erratic handheld videography, resembling home movie footage or the documented observations of medical footage spliced together for an instructional presentation, also reinforces the aesthetic verisimilitude that imitates nonfictional audiovisual techniques. During this entire episode, Julien paces back-and-forth in small proximity of his room talking towards the apparition that invades his mind, which is shot in a tightly framed handheld shots that alternate cuts of him in medium shot wandering around his room and close-ups of his face. Because we have witnessed other schizophrenic episodes, we

understand that his mind – his perceptions, his thoughts, his understanding of the world – has abandoned him at this point. At times he speaks nothing but nonsense.

The grotesque emerges from the fact that no matter how mentally estranged he is from the realities of the phenomenal world, it is evident that there is an internal logic to his own schizophrenic reality, a reality that in some way borrows directly from the world as we understand it, only the pieces rearranged. This is, in itself, conceptually analogous to the visual logic of much pictorial modernist art and even more traditional grotesque imagery such as that found in the Mannerist paintings of Arcimboldo. Arcimboldo's portraits of faces that are composed of other thematically unified objects (e.g. one composed of fish, one composed of land animals, one composed of birds, one composed of gourds, even composed of books). The face is discernible from the sum of its individual parts, and the parts are themselves discernible as autonomous entities. Julien's flow of thought, while it often seems totally incoherent, can be discerned by the thematic associations that he sometimes fragmentarily links together. The fragments are themselves discernible as coherent units of thought, as is the bigger picture of the sum total combination of those thoughts, but the individual unit and the bigger picture still often remain equivocal and incoherent. Conversely, if we look at a modernist tradition such as Cubism, whereby pictorial imagery is rendered using a combination of geometric shapes to compose a representation of an object in the phenomenal world, we can argue that Julien's mentality is similarly composed of skewed elements that are themselves abstractions, but when combined, they form a mental representation that is discernible, albeit distortedly. The personification of the grotesque through the mentally disturbed characterization of Julien is enhanced by the nonfictional rendering techniques – the naturalistic mise-en-scene and the grainy video imagery – which Korine employs to express Julien's madness and estrangement from the phenomenal world. His imperfect perceptual audiovisual techniques and stylizations furnish an impression of authenticity and realism that literalizes the ways in which the metaphorical demons, not unlike those that Kayser often refers to in his discussions of the grotesque, are manifest in the phenomenal world.

An ambivalence regarding the nature of Julien's madness is demonstrated in another scene of Julien at work. Again, shot using a series of contiguously consecutive jump-cuts, Julien is shown in slightly shaky handheld medium shots, interspersed with a few analytical shots, quietly mopping the hospital corridor, presumably a wing at the school for the blind. The location shooting and naturalistic lighting, combined with the home movie cinematographic techniques, the grainy texture of the imagery, and spliced jump-cuts again resembles the awkwardly edited footage of medical experiments filmed with noticeable time lapses where only the significant moments spliced together. These stylistic strategies enhance the nonfictional verisimilitude of Korine's rendering of Julien's unusually calm behavior which is contrasted to those on the benches around him – a man in pajamas and slippers has a bandage that wraps around his head and jaw with his arm around a woman who has a pillowcase that has eyeholes cut out of it over her head. As Julien mops the woman repeatedly lets out high-pitched barks. This scene, while still containing unusual characters, is banal and mundane. Julien demonstrates an observable normalcy in this scene that is contrary to his behavior throughout. The contrast of Julien adhering to socially accepted norms, even excusing himself for mopping around the unusual couple's feet and thanking them for the courtesy of lifting their feet, here illustrates the moments of clarity that he periodically experiences, but the irony is that this normalcy is not normative, especially in relation to our encounters of him. This, nevertheless, generates ambivalence towards Julien, and in this moment of banality, a sense of empathy and humanism is re-instilled. Again, however, the ambivalence is achieved through the embodiment – physically and behaviorally – of the characters, which are fundamental in the aesthetic experience of the grotesque aesthetic in *julien*, something which is enhanced, albeit not reliantly, by the traditionally nonfictional aesthetic strategies that Korine employs to render his imagery.

Aside from Julien himself, there are a number of other grotesque figures that populate the movie. The gallery of literal anatomical grotesques is made up of peripheral characters with which Julien and his family interact. This mainly includes a group of adolescents that attend a school for the blind at which Julien either

volunteers or works. They are introduced by a series of frozen digital video images of Julien interacting with them accompanied by a juxtaposed voiceover. This series of images surveys the various sight-impaired students at the school. Julien's erratic string of thoughts and predilection for exaggeration is further brought to light through his interactions. In one image he is shown hugging one of the female students from behind; in another he is looking out a window with a student repeatedly telling him in voiceover how he can "see across New York City all the way to Los Angeles, all the way across America, from the East Coast to the West Coast".[45] In another image, Julien tries to help one of the students make copies in an office environment but is more in the way than helpful. In another image he is in the restroom next to a student advising him to wash his hands as he does so himself. This series of still images, accompanied with voiceover, is reminiscent of *La Jetée* (Marker, France, 1962), or a slideshow of still images similar to those shown using a rotating slide projector in lectures or of somebody sharing their vacation photos before the digital era. The content of the imagery and the accompanying sound provides a contrast between the grotesque body and the grotesque mind through a highly stylized method of capturing isolated moments. While Julien assists a group of students in a bowling alley within the institution, Korine explores the gamut of the sight-impaired, anatomical grotesques that attend this school. A cross-section of races, ages, and sexes, the students range from characters who wear oversized darkened glasses to protect their eyes from light, to some who have *strabismus exotropia*, to others who are very squinty- eyed and appear as if their eye sockets are more deeply recessed than normatively functioning eyes. The illustration of these people at play is on the one hand another demonstration of the banal and mundane grotesque, but it also poses certain tensions that revolve around Julien's explosive temperament when his schizophrenia lacks containment. His erratic personality and proneness to violence highlights the severity of his mental instability as opposed to the anatomically grotesque blind residents, but it also fosters a tension that revolves around the safety of the residents and their ability to protect themselves from what they cannot see before it is too late. And while this is a highly unorthodox, even experimental, approach to storytelling, Korine retains the

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[45] Op Cit. *julien donkey-boy*.

impressions of authenticity and prevailing verisimilitude through his employment of imperfect perceptual techniques which are affiliated as much with nonfictional techniques of low-fi documentation as much as they are experimental abstraction. Due to the majority of the other nonfictional, documentary techniques and devices that Korine employs, this further triggers problem-solving schemata that links Korine's aestheticizations of the grotesque and his irrefutably experimental approach with realism rather than abstraction.

In another scene, Julien sits around and converses with a group of the students about being blind in what appears to be a common room. The conversation turns to pontifications about God and specifically God's design and will with regards to blindness. At one point Julien pipes in with one of his hackneyed and jumbled biblical references when he says, "Cursed be he who obstructs a blind man, who, uhm, obstructs a blind man's path, who puts an obstacle in the path of a blind man" and then without provocation blurts, "Cursed is he who sleeps with his sister", a reference to the incest theme in the film which I will be addressing below. The majority of the group seem somewhat baffled by Julien's interjection, but seem to ignore it because there is a sharp jump-cut to the group doing freestyle beat-boxing and rapping, with one of the group rapping. One of the recurring lyrics that he raps is, "I'm a black albino straight from Alabama." During this Julien gets quite excited and begins bouncing up and down intermittently and interjecting high pitched shrieks. Again, what Korine is so apt at expressing is the cornucopia of grotesque oddity while simultaneously conveying the normalcy of the extraordinary. Similar to the "dwarf" in *Gummo*, Korine finds and presents the corporeal anomaly in the extreme when not only does he find a blind African-American rapper; but a blind, albino, African-American rapper, from the deep South, whose anomalousness garners empathy as well as fascination as a bodily grotesque that violates not only norms of the typical categorization of race but whose physically grotesque status is made all the more emphatic because of his blindness combined with his bracketed sideshow performance. The shaky handheld videography has a distinctive home video appearance in this sequence of shots which is emphasized by the grainy surface texture of the image and the general imperfect

perceptual rendering of the scene. Moreover the usual underproduction of the mise-en-scene and staging in the common room contributes to the naturalistic approach and impression of authenticity that Korine employs throughout. This functions as a constant reinforcement of the aesthetic verisimilitude of the movie. The audiovisual style of Korine combined with the use of actual blind actors-cum-participants in this scene is exemplary of the way in which Korine blurs the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. He uses nonfictional presentations caught on camera that he conveys in a fictional context. This is an expressive trope that I referred to amongst my discussions of *Gummo* and it is even more pervasive in *julien*. The authenticity of the literal anatomical grotesques become more normalized through Korine's realist aesthetic strategies, on the one hand, but the grotesqueness is also highlighted as grotesque because of its gritty starkness on the other.

Similar to the inverse "freakshow" portrayal in *Gummo*, another scene that challenges the fictional/nonfictional dichotomy in which Korine presents his grotesque subject matter and content shows an armless man visiting Julien's dad. Shot in the sitting room of the family home, the naturalistic mise-en-scene shows a naturally lit room with the handheld video image retaining the grainy imperfect perceptual effects. The scene is organized using more classical techniques to establish the space, consisting of a number of alternating frontal and diagonal medium and close-up shots. Nevertheless, there are a number of stylistic devices and techniques that retain the low-fi, home video aesthetics of the movie which reinforces the aesthetic verisimilitude. Techniques include: grainy texture of the recorded imagery; naturalistic mise-en-scene, such as location shooting, natural lighting, and especially the dialogue between the two which seems unscripted (it is as if Herzog and the man are just having a conversation that Korine happened to captured on tape); and shaky handheld cinematography. These techniques retain the overwhelming home movie aesthetic that the sequence instills.

The armless man is a magician who is doing card tricks with Julien's dad. Julien's dad is frustrated by the man because he cannot figure out how he does his card tricks.

The man's most banal movements elicit fascination as he deftly uses his feet as most would use their hands. He shuffles through a deck of cards and picks out single cards one at a time without disturbing the rest of the deck. He is shown in another scene practices the drums, again quite competently, while one of his band members, a large African-American woman struts around in what appears to be an evening dress for special occasions. This performance, although reminiscent of the old freakshow performers, is distinctive in its incorporated status as part of an scenario scenario, which creates a greater sense of the mundane and realist grotesque. While not situated in the context of a sideshow, the character is shown performing extraordinary acts in everyday contexts; however, because of his anatomical status virtually all activities that he partakes in draw attention to his grotesque body, especially those activities that require expert training even when all body parts are intact. The stylistic rendering of the scene, one that utilized techniques and devices typically associates with nonfictional modes of production, reinforce the aesthetic verisimilitude to such an extent that the sequence elicits the presumptive assertion that Carroll identifies as a quality triggered by nonfictional moving images. This is another instance in which nonfictional imagery is being presented and recast in a fictional context. The aesthetic verisimilitude not only reinforces the impression of authenticity of both the general aesthetic of the movie but also the grotesque content. Adapting and extending Harpham's notion of the art of disgust in which he suggests that the aesthetic experiences of disgust are no different to those activated and experienced in real life situations, erasing any "distinction between art and reality",[46] the realist visual strategies conflates the ways in which the grotesque in art and the grotesque in reality become inextricably linked and intertwined.

In another sequence, Julien is shown amongst a number of the residents of the school for the blind and their family members at a hall which is being used for some kind of celebration. There is a blind master of ceremonies that is garishly dressed. He is wearing a powder blue, rhinestone encrusted Mexican style cowboy outfit, hat

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[46] Op. Cit., Harpham 181.

included, who plays the keyboard and leads singsongs. There is also a sideshow performer who has no observable anatomical anomalies, but whose novelty act, as a cigarette eater, or 'ingester', is an anomalous exhibition of the material bodily grotesque. His performance of the material bodily grotesque echoes the marketplace and carnival performances that Bakhtin referred to in his study of Rabelais and the social landscape in which Rabelais was writing. After the cigarette eater finishes the act, the MC starts playing vaudevillian style music that is reminiscent of slapstick comedy from the silent era. One of the blind residents, wearing a plastic party bowler hat, begins dancing a hat and cane dance in a burlesque vaudeville style; however, due to his blindness, his movements are jerky and erratic as he struggles to maintain his balance. During this, the master of ceremonies plays the keyboard and sings indiscernibly, with his guttural, gravelly, raspy voice which resembles Tom Waits. Almost the entire room eventually joins in and starts jovially dancing. All of the dancers appear a bit off kilter, largely because the majority of the partygoers are blind. This resultantly garners a mixture of joyousness and cringe-worthiness due their awkward movements. It is this co-presence in conjunction with the anomalous physicality of the characters that further contributes to securing the grotesque while the verisimilitude is reinforced once again by the naturalistic mise-en-scene – namely the non-actors and the unstylized lighting – as well as the documentary visual style of the low grade video imagery.

The grotesque is again manifest in a scene showing Julien trying to convince a young Hassidic Jewish boy to buy a set of ice skates he designed. The skates are a pair of shower style slippers with ice-skating blades attached. He tells the kid that he'll take ten bucks and the ice-cream cone that he is eating. The presence of the grotesque in this scene is formalized through a variety of aspects. This verbal exchange is reminiscent of certain areas of the comic tradition of the grotesque elucidated by Bakhtin. Bakhtin suggests that the bodily grotesque is found "especially in the comic genre", which is manifest through the "theme of mockery and abuse" and is representative of the "unofficial speech of the people."[47]   Correspondingly, Bakhtin

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[47] Op. Cit, Bakhtin 319.

identifies the comical dimensions of the grotesque as being firmly ensconced within the everyday sociality of the folk culture, "[w]herever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images" which includes the likes of human excrement.[48] This is demonstrated in the way in which the kid verbally dismisses and berates Julien. The kid verbally invokes imagery of the material bodily grotesque to empower his denigrating humor when he tells Julien that his design is ridiculous and that he would just as soon drop the ice-cream on the ground and let him lick it off the floor before he would make the trade. He follows this with further invocations of the material grotesque imagery by telling him to go home and eat the shit from his toilet. Julien's persistence annoys the kid to such a degree that he humorously forewarns Julien that he will be forced to swear at him in Yiddish if Julien does not desist.

The Hassidic boy illustrates the Thomson's and Carroll's notions of incongruity. The wittily vulgar quick-tongued putdowns of a kid who evidently comes from a religiously strict household, is indicative of Thomson's notion of the grotesque as a combination of seemingly incompatible elements. The masterful vulgarity engendered by the pubescent boy is delivered with an acerbic acuity expected to come from someone far older than him. Similarly, according to Carroll, this vulgar mockery performed by a child is a violation of cultural norms insofar that the child's command of the mockery is delivered with an adeptness of not only an adult, but an adult stand-up comic reminiscent of Jackie Mason. And although Carroll would say that this is a metaphorical extension, as I have argued in the introduction to this chapter, the moral incongruity that this resultantly poses, in terms of a child behaving in an adult manner, is something that seems more inherent in realist grotesque art.

Like other observed instances, this scene of the comic grotesque involving Julien's earnest attempts to persuade the kid to buy his invention is intensified by what Grodal refers to as the imperfect perceptual realism that is generated through the surveillance style imagery that captures the scene. Shot from afar, as if being recorded

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[48] Ibid.

by the surveillance of a private-eye, the surface texture of the video image is grainy as if captured on already degraded videotape. This imperfect perceptual realism links with the expectations that such imagery production has with current non-fictional modes of, primarily, televisual representation. While it enhances the aesthetic perceptual realism by reinforcing the verisimilitude of the scene it also enhances and reinforces the credibility and social extendedness of the representational content. This, in turn intensifies, the grotesque qualities identified above as well. By adapting and extending Harpham's notion that the aesthetic experiences of disgust are no different to those activated and experienced in real life situations it is clear that the realist visual strategies again conflate the ways in which the grotesque in art and the grotesque in reality become inextricably linked and intertwined.

Throughout the film we encounter Julien's family both individually and through their interactions with one another. The representation and depiction of the family is a site in which Korine's grotesque aesthetic is recurrently manifest. At first introduction to Julien's family, they are all shown in the family home through a series of alternating crosscuts. Pearl, his poodle-perm-haired sister who is in the latter stages of pregnancy, is doing ballet in a leotard and tutu in her bedroom to classical music. His dad, played by Werner Herzog, is babbling nonsense and dancing to an early recording of depression-era blues in his boxers while intoxicated on some kind of liquid medicine; his grandmother is spread out on the sofa holding her small dog in an upright position repeating the phrase, "Kiss, kiss. Kiss Mommy". His brother, Chris, a wrestler, wears his competitive unitard and is training by repeatedly hoisting himself up the stairs using only his upper body while he drags his lower body behind him followed by him sprinting back down the stairs. This is an exercise that he does throughout the film. Several more scenes of each of the characters in isolation exhibiting their idiosyncrasies are regularly intercut throughout. These scenes, like the others, take place on location and are shot on video using a variety of alternating medium and close-up shots handheld shots. These scenes persist with the traditionally nonfictional aesthetics, which resembles amateur spliced home video footage, thus reinforcing the impressions

of authenticity and immediacy and hence the prevailing verisimilitude of the movie's framing aesthetic.

The sequences showing the family interactions set the precedent for the dysfunctional as well as the bizarre dynamics of the family, but Korine maintains the nuance that he fostered in *Gummo* wherein the bizarre is situated amongst the banal and mundane. This is also how he succeeds in fostering a realist aesthetic which is coupled with the grotesque. The first instance in which we see the entire family together is when they are gathered around the table eating watermelon and having drinks. Shot using a variety of alternating medium close and close-ups. Julien dips his gold fronts in his juice drink while his dad gives a diatribe about a royal visit in Russia when Brezhnev was president and how he would pull out his false teeth during ambassadorial dinners and clean them out with a fork before, without pause, telling Pearl to sit straight because it is better for her, insisting in the same breath that the grandmother tell Pearl as well. The foreign grandmother, misunderstanding the dad, instead asks Pearl if she is eating well. He then commands her to sit straight until Julien starts piping in as well. The father then swiftly moves his attention to Chris, which is followed by the panning camera, and begins to berate him about his ambitions to be a wrestler in a tortuously passive aggressive way. This provides the first insights of the dynamics and dysfunctions of the family unit. The father is domineering and often cruel, the grandmother is largely absent, Julien's mentally unstable behavior is ignored, Pearl is sometimes derided but is usually disregarded or let be, and Chris is a son cruelly harangued by his father. The imperfect perceptual aesthetic of the home movie style rendering of this scene reinforces the verisimilitude of movie's prevailing nonfictional, documentary aesthetic. And while the grotesque is not dominant in this sequence, the interactions, especially the simultaneously unsettling and humorous cruelty of the father garners the same ambivalence that the grotesque furnishes. Ambivalence is a consistent quality throughout the movie. Thus while this does not contain obviously grotesque moments per se – save Julien and the pregnant Pearl, whose circumstances with regards to her pregnancy is yet to be disclosed – it bolsters the grotesque because of the shared qualities of ambivalence as a consequence of what Kayser refers to as the

presence of an annihilating sense of humor.[49]

Other such scenes showing family interactions also convey what can be best described as weak instances of the grotesque through a home video style verisimilitude. One such scene shows an interaction between Chris and his father move from passive aggressive to downright abusive. Outdoors, in front of their house, in a long shot from a high angle low level bird's eye view, the father is shown from behind hosing down Chris. The coldness of the act is synonymous with the coldness of the temperature based on the greyish coloration and misty texture of the image. A series of medium and medium close-ups follow which show Chris, only in a pair of shorts, attempting to dodge his father's cruelty without actually fleeing before curling into a ball trying to protect himself from the force of the water. All the while his dad, very even temperedly, follows him around saying things like, "I don't want you to scream", "stand still, don't shift around", and "c'mon, be a man, be a man and quit that moody broody, quit that". All the while Chris pleads for him to stop as he yelps in discomfort and professes his coldness. After his dad finishes watering his son, Chris uncontrollably shivers from coldness while his dad repeatedly instructs him to stop. This scene is simultaneously disturbing and hilarious. Herzog's even-tempered German accent along with the creative berating of his son is rather humorous, yet it is apparent how uncomfortable and humiliating that the experience is for Chris, who in no way attempts to flee. The co-presence of humor and abuse creates the grotesque tone in this scene, but Chris' physical and emotional suffering is where the grotesque is embodied. While not mutually inclusive, the verisimilitude produced by the imperfect perceptual techniques of the home video style of the handheld videography and the naturalistic setting with seemingly impromptu dialogue and movements enhances the nonfictional impressions of authenticity and immediacy of the home movie aesthetic. The father's maltreatment and abuse of Chris is a recurring motif throughout the film but it is always co-presently accompanied with humor. In another scene, persisting with the handheld home movie techniques and naturalistic mise-en-scene, the dad attempts to bribe Chris to put on one of his dead wife's dresses. The father, with a black curly villain mustache inked on

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[49] Op. Cit., Kayser 54-56.

his upper lip, says that he is the only one who looks like his mother and offers Chris ten dollars to put on one of her dresses and dance with him. Chris unequivocally refuses and eventually walks out of the room. Although he does not appear to have the erratically violent tendencies that Julien does, the father seems to be just as mad in his own right. The grotesque is garnered through his air or pretense of absolute normalcy with regards to his behaviors and perceptions. His behaviors are contradictorily embodied in a man who conveys a perverse sense of calmness. This is estranging and it elicits a sense of dissonance, but as it is often the case this is also accompanied with a wry humor.

Family interactions in which all members are present frequently descend into frantic madness. During one scene, Chris and Julien prepare to wrestle each other in the middle of the living room with the grandmother and father watching on the sofas and Pearl acting as the referee. Chris is already in the room waiting for his brother and is in his wrestling unitard. He is almost too serious about the imminent contest that is to take place in the sitting room of the house. In comes Julien wearing snakeskin-patterned bikini bottoms, a bra, black socks hiked-up his shins, and a karate-style white headband. Bouncing excitedly up-and-down, he repeats "I'm Julien the Jam Jammer". This is shot using a long take with the establishment of the space and the location of the family members present watching revealed through mobile framing. To Julien, wrestling is the soap operatic staged professional wrestling that is on television, but Chris is a committed Greco-Roman wrestler. When asked what his name is by Pearl, who evidently has expectations of the staged variety of wrestling, he says: "Chris. My name is Chris. This is real wrestling."

Julien's wrestling tactics involves half-heartedly lunging straight at Chris. Chris takes him down while telling him to be serious. Chaos ensues as Julien runs around taunting Chris while Chris increasingly gets frustrated. After taking his Julien down again, Julien curls-up like an opossum, and repeats "Chris, I love you." After Chris gets off of him, Julien pops-up to his feet, his eyes bulging out in a state of confused fear. The rest of the sequence is recorded the using the same shaky handheld videography

which resembles a home movie, but the rest of the sequence is organized to match with the franticness of the two brothers wrestling, through an array of medium and close-up shots of which are spliced together using somewhat erratic cuts. Chris leaves the house but Julien goes steaming down the sidewalk after him, still in his wrestling costume. Chris is eventually convinced to return to the house. During the next absurd round of wrestling, the father interjects with his usual mixture of straightforward and absurdly witty criticisms until he declares that he found the entire match "Very, very shitty." This mixture of the ridiculously absurd and the pathetically sad, sober seriousness of Chris combine to foster a grotesque aesthetic through the ambivalent co-presence of seemingly incompatible things. While the organization of this sequence shares a closer resemblance with a conventional narrative structure, more European Art Cinema than Classical Hollywood, the aesthetic verisimilitude is preserved through the naturalistic mise-en-scene, the grainy surface texture of the image, and the shaky handheld videography. The imperfect perceptual aesthetics of the sum of the parts retains the impressions of authenticity and immediacy of a home movie.

There are a number of sequences and scenes that also show the family members independent from one another, none more than the father. Shot using the home movie techniques highlighted throughout, Julien's dad is regularly shown as partaking in what are ultimately grotesque behaviors, rendered through the low-fi verisimilitude that reinforces the aesthetics of authenticity and immediacy throughout. He is conveyed 'medicating' himself in his bedroom across a number of juxtaposition scenes inserted throughout the film while exhibiting a variety of bizarre, often sexual, behaviors. In one scene he is dressed as a pornographic nun. He is wearing the veil coupled with matching black stockings and panties while performing sexual acts on himself. He exaggeratedly thrusts the air as if humping an imaginary partner, he humps a chair, and even spanks himself on the floor as he feigns female masturbation. His intoxication through the mysterious 'elixir' is depicted in another scene as he sits on his bed reading the label while wearing a gas mask. He reads the warning out loud that says the product should not be taken if you are "hypersensitive". In a quandary, he stands-up and removes the mask and repeats, in calm, slow voice, "am I hypersensitive?" as he

alternates between gazing out of the window, drinking from the bottle, and periodically looking down at the bottle inquisitively. The shot then cuts to the shirtless, disheveled father pouring the elixir into one of his house slippers and trying to drinking from it, only to make a mess all over the floor as he, in his German accent, says, "oh my God, that didn't hit right" in somewhat of a haze. He later begins reading from the bottle again, saying "natural high" and in a Marx Brothers-like association of logic, follows that with "like in the mountains, high up", before taking another chug. This erratic behavior, which is both bizarre and dissonant, is indicative of acts of the bodily grotesque which are motivated by a grotesque mental state that conceives and perceives the world in fragmentary and incongruent ways. Like Julien's mind, it seems to have a logical coherence in its own right, but is estranged from the realities of the phenomenal world. What makes the impact of this all the more effective is once again the way in which Korine uses aesthetic devices and techniques typically associated with low-fi non-fictional modes of production, namely the home movie.

Julien's siblings are also frequently featured in independently isolated vignettes throughout. Many of which include other sequences of his brother Chris practicing and training to be a wrestler. Chris' motivation, as we see from a series of still digital images accompanied with a voiceover (similar to the sequence of Julien and the blind students earlier) is a drive to be a "winner", which is contradicted by his belief that he is a loser, a belief instilled by his father. Chris, of all the family members, suffers the most psychological and emotional abuse in the family by the father. Some of the scenes of him training are in the realm of the bizarre. In one scene, which is naturally lit, he is shown in a centrally framed medium-long shot doing tai-chi outside on the sidewalk, in front of the family house, in his wrestling unitard before a cut to diagonal medium shots with an erratic cut of a close-up interspersed of him running up to the midsection height brick wall and doing handstands on it before popping back down, running back and doing it again. This he does until he over-thrusts and comically, in slapstick-like fashion, propels himself too far and crashes down the other side of the wall. After this there is a series of shaky handheld, erratic jump-cuts in medium close-up and close-up of him doing the stair exercises. Although his obsession with becoming a

successful wrestler is not an obsession that would typically appear grotesque, because of the context of his family, coupled with the way in which Korine captures a sense of immediacy through the use of video and the home movie feel that this entails, Chris' activities come across as comical behaviors of the material bodily grotesque as much as Julien and his father's. This is made more evident when a motif, similar to one present in *Gummo* is revisited in *julien* – the wrestling of inanimate objects. On the sidewalk, still in his wrestling unitard, Chris is shown intensely wrestling a plastic trashcan in medium long shot. He positions the trashcan in a variety of positions that he would find himself with an opponent until he gets annoyed about something and picks up the trashcan to heave it into the front yard. The experimental approach to structuring the shots does not impinge on the prevailing aesthetic verisimilitude of the imperfect perceptual aesthetics and immediacy of the home video footage, which enhances the bizarreness of the activities conveyed.

Pearl, on the other hand, tends to be shown discussing or making provisions for her impending pregnancy due date throughout, but it is the little cues that are provided surrounding Pearl's pregnancy which elicits the most curiosity, as a lone imagery of the bodily grotesque. Possibly the most predominant bodily grotesque themes in *julien*, above all others, involves the abject and taboo incestuous relationship between Julien and his sister Pearl. The incest is uncomfortably implied throughout but it is not totally confirmed until the end.

The first instance in which incest and the subsequent pregnancy is implied of occurs during a scene in which Pearl is at the obstetrician for a check-up. The initial shot, a centrally framed high angle close-up of Pearl's hands resting on her belly, quickly cuts to a slightly canted overhead medium shot of Pearl, shown in stirrups, and the doctor talking her (and the audience) through the internal examination procedure. The room dimly lit with the surgical lamp that the doctor is using for the examine providing a somewhat diffuse spotlight. Already this scene is constructed around explicit and implicit imagery of the bodily grotesque and bodily grotesque acts. After the doctor explains the sensation that Pearl can expect and that she will be using a jelly to

accompany the process, there is a cut to a medium wide shot of Pearl in profile on the bed with the doctors arms probing and continuing to inform Pearl of her probing. After the doctor removes her hand and tells Pearl that she can close her legs, assuring everything seems fine, she then asks her who the father is. Pearl, fragmentarily and rhetorically repeats the doctor, "the father?" at which point a series of digital still images show Julien and Pearl dancing. This is the first indication of just how grim the dysfunction of the family is. The implication of incest is posed which compounds the presence of the bodily grotesque imagery that now taking a truly abject turn, in which a creeping sense of curiosity is met with repulsion. And while this sequence of shots is comprised by a number of alternating shots to establish the space, and while the spatial organization and editing of this scene resists the home video aesthetic, Korine's expressive techniques still maintain a prevailingly verité quality which reinforces the verisimilitude and the impressions of authenticity and immediacy that he employs to render the perverse moral violations that are implied to have caused the bodily grotesque subject matter and content. It also reinforces the resultant ambivalence in terms of the sense of astonishment, disgust, and fascination affectively elicited.

The implied incest noted above is confirmed at the climatic end of the movie. Pearl is shown ice-skating in the background of long shot before collapsing over in pain. Other skaters rush to her aid while others circle her curiously looking on at her as she lies on the ice writhing in pain. The slightly shaky handheld shot here resembles incidental footage caught by a videoing onlooker or surveillance footage being recorded from afar. Eventually there is an erratic swish pan and that locates Julien run onto the ice which then tracks him through mobile framing attend to Pearl. It seems as if those that respond to Pearl may be unwitting participants caught-up in Korine's staged event. This combination of aesthetic strategies employed reinforces the aesthetic verisimilitude which intends to facilitate the impressions of authenticity and immediacy which in turn triggers the realist schemata of the spectator.

Pearl is rushed to the hospital. The first shot is an overhead close-up of Pearl's

pained face which is alternates between being over-lit and under-lit as she is traversed through a hospital corridor on a gurney. After a cut, alternating perspective, of an extremely blurry handheld diagonal close-up, there is an erratic cut to a centrally framed handheld medium tracking shot that follows the medical staff who accompany the gurney down the hospital corridor from behind. This is followed by a cutaway of a low angle long shot of the action coming from the background as they the action moves into an operating room which is matched by a cut of a shaky handheld medium shot. A series of alternating perspectival close-ups of Pearl writhing in pain follow as the doctors and nurses overhead discuss her symptoms and attempt to comfort and reassure her. The frenetic pacing of the cuts functions to intensify the seriousness of Pearl's health threat with the impressions of authenticity and immediacy of the video imagery maintain the aesthetic verisimilitude of the imagery.

There is a cutaway of Julian and Chris entering the brown tinged corridor in a series of medium and close-up shots. They are shown in the corridor looking in as Pearl is attended to which function as reaction shots which, in the final shot of this particular sequence of shots, shows a close-up of a darkly lit Julien backing away from the observation window with tears streaming down his face in emotional agony through a handheld close-up. There is then a crosscut of a slightly canted high angle medium long shot of the father dancing around in his gasmask in the background, evidently in a state of inebriation at home, framed between the stems of a hanging candelabra which are proportionately monstrous in size because of the wide angle framing and, as a consequence, diminutizes the father in the background because of the distorted constancy of size. He is shot from what looks like a hidden surveillance spy camera. As baroquely stylized as the scene appears, in this context, it also fits with the various nonfictional stylistic techniques that are pervasive throughout the movie and the prevailing verisimilitude which remains intact.

Cutting back to the hospital, a nurse is shown leaving the operating room and walking down the hall into the background with the baby wrapped in a towel as Julien follows behind while Chris remains to watch after Pearl. The baby is stillborn. The nurse explains that the baby is dead, but Julien, almost uncharacteristically keeping

it together, acknowledges that he understands but tells her that it was his baby. This is the first incontrovertible declaration of incest. The abjectly grotesque body prevails upon the confirmation of incest and a pregnancy. Julien's emotional pain is audiovisually corroborated by scenes of Pearl in the painful throes of childbirth, which is followed by the lifeless stillbirth corpse of the baby. The grotesque effect is once again intensified by the sense of immediacy through the surveillance and home video visual style and texture of the imagery, especially the footage showing Julien frantically fleeing the hospital from medium and medium long shots resembling incidentally caught-on-camera footage until he gets onto public transportation, still with the dead baby that is wrapped up in a towel. The videography goes from distanced observational shot to more intimate shots captured using hidden cameras. Onlookers are unaware of the situation and are not actors. Alternating shots capture Julien nervously rocking back-and-forth while he cradles the blanket wrapped baby corpse with shots of other travelers looking nervously over at the seemingly unpredictable Julien. People even move seats to get away from Julien. Eventually, the bus fills, but the seats immediately next to him remain vacant. The aesthetic strategy for filming this 'happening' of sorts fosters a real sense of unease and unpredictability, more so than the subject matter would alone if recorded using a more conventional approach. The impressions of authenticity and immediacy that the imperfect perceptual devices and techniques that this provides, not only confers the verisimilitude of the aesthetic realism of the scene, but it, possibly more than any other scene in the movie, facilitates the presumptive assertion that accompanies documentary modes of audiovisual production. This, in conjunction with the responses that the people seem to have, as they appear suspicious of Julien and what he is carrying, makes already disturbing content all the more tense, thus reestablishing an inextricable link with the stylistic rendering and approach to obtaining the footage and the grotesque subject matter and content. The corporeal grotesque content is enhanced and reinforced by the aesthetic effect, an effect which mirrors the grotesqueness of the encounter by the unsuspecting extras that experience Bremner as Julien in a thoroughly convincing performance. Here the aesthetic grotesque converges with a grotesque reality. Upon getting back to his house, Julien goes directly to Pearl's bedroom and gets under the covers with the baby,

still cradling it closely to him, as he utters some incoherencies. The shot under the covers looks as if it is shot using a night vision lens and with the covers closely hugging Julien's face, his face oddly distorted by the framing and lighting, Julien's physically grotesque head resembles the wrapped-up head of the baby.

The milieu of *julien* is exemplary of the ways in which the grotesque and realism combines to exemplify the modern American suburban gothic, but rather than being a chronicle of the social and cultural space, as it is more the case in Gummo, it is a chronicle of personal family space.50 At almost the exact midpoint in the movie during a telephone conversation between Julien and Pearl, we receive information that asks as many questions as it gives answers. In this conversation, Pearl pretends to be their dead mother. The majority of the conversation remains banal in typical Korine fashion. For instance, Pearl-as-mother says that she is now a dental technician. This is followed by a number of discordant and incoherent questions by Julien. However, there is a plethora of telling information in between. We come to learn that Julien was six and Pearl was four when their mother died giving birth to Chris. This in itself somewhat explains the strange relationship that the father seems to have with Chris. Pearl also takes the time to reassure, as the voice of their mother, that the voices in his head are friendly and that nobody is trying to hurt him, while somewhat disregarding of that, Julien continues to reminisce of his limited time and memories with his mother, such as when she used to sing "Frere Jacques" to him, which adds some salience and context to Julien's earlier fragmentary foray into singing the song in the bathtub. Like all gothic stories, the answers and truth are in what appears to be an entangled mess of questions, issues, and incongruities. The answers are merely repressed and suppressed improprieties of grotesque behavior that are being tucked away until they bubble to the surface because they can no longer be contained.

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50 In this sense, *julien* is closer in proximity to the nineteenth century American gothic tradition than *Gummo*, which is more indicative of the New American Gothic tradition of the mid-twentieth century. For discussions and distinctions of the traditions see: Irving Malin, *New American Gothic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962/1968); Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Eric Savoy, "The Rise of the American Gothic." (*The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002/2008. 167-88); Alan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004); and/or Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

CHAPTER 6
CATALYZING THE GROTESQUE
IN THE FILMS OF CLARK AND KORINE:
FROM NASCENT/LATENT TO KINETIC VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

The films in this thesis would not necessarily be considered violent movies by most classifications. However, borrowing from Devin McKinney's distinction between "weak" and "strong" violence, it becomes clear that these films are not only violent but complexly so.[1] Weak violence is the sort of violence that pervades the majority of popular narrative cinema. Films conceived through or using weak violence are easily digestible expressions of film violence that are without any real moral ambiguity. There are no pressing moral consequences or ramifications for the characters involved, or for the filmmakers who create the films. Moreover, these sorts of films do not really morally challenge the viewer. Films designed using weak violence are exemplary of what most people would ordinarily perceive and associate a violent film as being. This would tend to include most popular action and horror films. But, according to McKinney's schema, this also includes the, oft perceived, stark and uncompromising gangster films

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[1] Devin McKinney, "Violence: The Strong and the Weak" (*Screening Violence*. Ed. Stephen Prince. London: Athlone Press, 1993/2000. 99-109). Also see: Stephen Prince's introduction to the anthology, "Graphic Violence in the Cinema: origins, Aesthetic Design, and Social Effects" (*Screening Violence*. Ed. Stephen Prince. London: Athlone Press, 2000. 39).

of Scorsese and the exploitation chic films of Tarantino.[2]

Films that are created using strong violence, on the other hand, disrupt, if not pervert the "moral equilibrium" by emotionally, cognitively, and morally confronting the expectations and comfort zone of the spectators. Films shaped by strong violence transcend spectacle, and while rendered and experienced aesthetically, they manage to capture the humanism of its presence and consequences, which ultimately shape the feel or mood of the entire film. McKinney identified the violence in the bizarre melancholic thriller, *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, U.K./Japan, 1992); the organic and gritty, *Bad Lieutenant* (Ferrara, U.S.A., 1992); and the documentary style serial killer film, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (McNaughton, U.S.A., 1986) as exemplars of strong violence.[3] Likewise, I argue that McKinney's notion of strong violence provides a useful frame for appreciating the role of violence in Clark's and Korine's films. From almost the outset, Clark's and Korine's films reference violence, violation, confrontation, and aggression. There is an ever-present tension of immanent violence – violence between characters, violence enacted on lower beings and creatures, as well as a brooding sense of violence that permeates the atmosphere, the environment that the characters populate and inhabit – that never dissipates. The acts are often so graphic and realistic that they influence the tone of the film and the salience of these moments as both realist and grotesque.

While violent scenes alone do not constitute the grotesque in-and-of-themselves, the presence of these moments acts as catalysts that either ignite, augment, or enhance the other elements – the physical, cultural, psychological, and behavioral attributes of the characters as well as the aesthetically realist visual style – which shape and contribute to the prevailing grotesque aesthetic of Clark's and Korine's films. I refer to acts of violence in these films as generally nascent or latent because while, as I say, they are not 'violent' films, the 'feeling' of violence pervades throughout. Eventually, there is at least one scene in which the tension, unable to be contained, rises to the surface resulting in the latent violence becoming actual violence.

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

KIDS

In *Kids* there is one scene of brutal, graphic violence that erupts to the surface which is shot on location in Central Park using the same observational handheld verité techniques that pervade the rest of the film. The preamble to violence shows Telly and Casper meeting-up with their other friends who are gathered along a fountain ledge or skating throughout the park. The huge number of friends is highlighted by an establishing shot of all the kids hanging out at the park together, in excess of twenty, as Telly and Casper are shown entering the frame, initially in a medium tracking shot. The shot then alternates to a diagonal medium close-up of them in the shallow background working their way to the foreground as they ritually greet a long line of their friends with a special insiders' handshake followed by a hug-like embrace. This ritual humorously, lasts for what seems to be an inordinate amount of time, but it functions well to give a more panoramic view of the circle of friends that Telly and Casper run with. Their friends span a variety of races, ethnicities, and sexes, and they also appear to be representative of a wide array of popular cultural subgroups. While they are all part of the skate scene, some are 'punks', some are 'hip-hop', some are 'hardcore kids', and some of the females are 'riot grrrls', all of which have their own distinctive fashion, style, and music cultural affiliations. To this point, the diversity of the group signifies tolerance and the mood is jovial.

The kids soon turn feral while sharing a blunt. The tension begins to build as the kids look outward from their pack. One of the kids points offscreen towards the foreground during a diagonal medium shot from behind as they smoke. The group begins to collectively taunt and berate an interracial, adult homosexual couple shouting "faggots" repeatedly which is corroborated by a diagonal medium long reaction shot of the couple as they continue to walk hand-in-hand. Throughout Clark retains a verité audiovisual approach – emphasis of the naturalistic mise-en-scene, the shaky handheld camerawork, and the gritty imagery of the film stock – reinforces the impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude in spite of his employment of more conventional narrative techniques with regards to the organization and coherence of space.

The severe physical violence erupts shortly after this. Casper relinquishes the blunt after taking a few more tokes in medium close-up. After a cut, Casper takes the board of the friend that he passes the blunt to. The background of a diagonal medium long shot tracks him skating around using handheld mobile framing until it cuts to a close-up of him languidly gliding around the park before coiling down and to do an ollie at which point there is a cut to medium wide shot. Upon landing his half-hearted attempt at the trick, he bumps into a twenty-something African-American man who is walking through the park. The fallout is shown across a few alternating handheld medium close-ups. Casper immediately apologizes, yet the man admonishes Casper, telling him to "Watch where the fuck you're skating at". Casper responds by saying "Why don't you watch where you're walkin'?" After this brief exchange Casper actually attempts to diffuse the situation, but is subject to continuous verbal baiting. Casper stops backing down from the fight and invites the guy to make the first move, which he does, giving Casper a shove.

Into the shot comes running one of Casper's crew who whacks the guy in the back of the head with his skateboard. The man immediately drops to the ground and the rest of the crew swarms around him, punching and kicking him, as he lay helpless. To this point Clark shoots the scene using a handheld semi-distant medium-long shot that mimics most verité or direct cinema. During the beat down the shot remains handheld, but it soon breaks with the fly-on-the-wall technique as it alternates between frenetically paced close-ups and medium shots of those beating the guy with close-ups of the faces of screaming, taunting non-fighting members of the crew who encourage the rest to "Beat his ass!" and "Fuck him up!" Although the sequence is structured using more conventional techniques of spatial organization in terms of the establishment of space, the gritty texture of the image, in conjunction with the jerky handheld verité cinematography and naturalistic mise-en-scene enunciates the documentary stylistics and the impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude that aesthetically shape the content. The sequence is punctuated by one of the crew lifting the unconscious man from his belly onto his knees. Casper uses his skateboard like a cricket bat, taking a running swing across the jaw of the man who flops back to the ground. Unfinished, there is a brief cut and pan of the crew continuing

to insult the unconscious man. A diagonal low angle close-up of Telly reveals him looking down at the unconscious man as he hocks up some phlegm and spits it onto the temple of his crimson face. A cut to a ground level close-up shot verifies this punctuated act of humiliating cruelty as the phlegm lands on the temple of the man and slides onto his eye, followed by a close-up of Casper leaning over the man taunting, "Now get in my way, *bitch*!" The prevailing verité stylistics creates the distancing effect that results in the amoralism of Clark's expressive rendering of this sequence which, in turn, not only enhances the grotesque effects but secures the very presence of the grotesque. This sudden eruption of violence is the solitary scene of ultra-violence in the film yet it provides no sense of catharsis.

Another eruption of violence seems possible if they are confronted in any of their exploits, such as when they are breaking into a closed swimming pool, or having a boisterous party, or walking down the street talking about "pussy". The grotesque imagery emerges from the composite of specific elements and strategies. The fact that these teenage kids are shown behaving like animalistic, raving sociopaths fosters a sense of unease, especially after their friendly exchanges. Uncertainty is also generated because the question remains as to whether the man deserved some sort of comeuppance (though not as excessively as it was administered), given Casper's apologetic attempts at diffusing the confrontation. Finally, a recurring quality throughout all of the subsections in this chapter, the visual style of the film, in this case it is the verité style that Clark employs, amplifies the intensity of the actions because such a visual style relays the image as a recorded moment of non-fictional truth, as opposed to a scripted and prefabricated fiction.

JULIEN DONKEY-BOY

julien is similar to *Kids* in that there is one scene of graphic violence throughout the film that helps create the tension and atmosphere to make it seem as if violence could erupt at any time. Unlike *Kids*, *julien* begins with violence, which establishes the expectations for further eruptions that never quite come to fruition.

While several characters are unstable in *julien*, it is really only Julien himself who, with his severe schizophrenia, is so psychologically and emotionally unbalanced that he seems prone to violence at any time. This fosters a profound sense of anxiety throughout the film.

The violence establishing scene shows Julien wandering through some woods a series of handheld shots that ascend from medium long to medium to a close-up of Julien happening upon a young boy. He engages in conversation with the boy about a turtle that the boy has discovered in the wooded area. Julien is intrigued and approaches the boy. The space is reestablished with the boy in frame using a shaky handheld medium shot that intermittently cuts to shaky close-ups of each character individually. It is at this point that we first understand that not all is right with Julien. He asks the boy if he wants to "play turtle with him". The boy is genial and replies "If you can find another one, I think there's another one in there." Julien is then shown in medium close-up, turtle in hand at eye level, cackling at its very presence. This shot also establishes the true oddity of Julien's appearance – his wildly groomed mushroom shaped curly locks and gold-toothed grin. Rambling and searching through the mud and rocks in search of a turtle from a medium leveled high angle shot that captures Julien from the neck down as he tensely grabs at the earth and squeezes the mud between his fingers before he attacks the camera like a coiled rattlesnake after the boy tells Julien that he cannot get a turtle. The pouncing of the camera vicariously stands-in for the boy and functions to provide the attack from the boy's point-of-view. The perspective of the shot mimics reality T.V. or the shaky, disrupted footage of a cameraperson under attack. We remain with a point-of- view shot of the boy after the camera stabilizes. An oblique angle is used to mimic the P.O.V. of the boy on the ground looking-up at Julien who unrelentingly chokes him to death. The hands of the boy enter screen in an upward stretch, which provides a first-person perspective of the boy's futile short-lived struggle. This reinforces the nonfictional verisimilitude of the audiovisual style and aesthetics of the sequence. Were it not for Bremner's status as a known actor playing the lead role, the low-fi videography techniques and devices would trigger the schemata of

presumptive assertion that accompanies nonfictional productions.[4]

After Julien realizes that he has killed the boy, he again incoherently rambles, with snot dripping from his nose, spit bubbling from his mouth and collecting in globules on his chin as he seems to utter a prayer over the child victim that he just mercilessly killed. All this is still from the oblique camera position that would be a point-of-view shot of the boy, were the boy alive to have a point-of-view. He persists with his prayer-based rambling, repeatedly asking God to take away his sins as he desperately and manically scoops the muddy earth over the corpse of the boy. The shot now resembles unwittingly recorded actions caught on tape which are now being shown post facto, a technique typified by fictional Italian travelogue exploitation films such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato, Italy, 1972) as much as the more contemporary techniques of compiled incidental Reality T.V. footage of shows like *C.O.P.S.* or field correspondent news footage. At any rate, the historical links are those shared with styles and modes of production that are indicative of impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude that shape the realist film aesthetics.

The sudden eruption of violence sets the mood for the rest of the film, and upon encountering the rest of Julien's family shortly thereafter, it seems further eruptions of violence will be imminent throughout the movie as their erratic idiosyncrasies and unstable personalities seem like inevitable triggers for further violence from Julien, but, for the most part, this remains non-cathartic tension. Indeed, we spend as much of the film wondering whether Pearl's sweet, but emotion-provoking interactions with Julien will draw his wrath as we do wondering about the father of her baby. We also fear for the people that Julien encounters independent from his family – other children and adolescents, some of who are blind, realizing that these are people that would be defenseless if the volatility of Julien were to resurge.

The tension persists throughout the movie and the sense of impending violence remains just that, impending and latent, tightly wound, but never released with the

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[4] Arguably, however, Bremner's performance is so strong that it supplements the verisimilitude of the other stylistic elements of the movie.

exception of one scene that remains ambiguous regarding the extent to which any physical violence is actualized. In a disturbing sequence edited using a series of rapidly paced jump-cuts, Julien and Chris are together in the kitchen. The sequence of shots have Julien cooking bacon, bacon being a motif that Korine seems to be carrying over from *Gummo*, while Chris observes. At some point the process deteriorates into Julien violently accosting Chris with the bacon, backing him in to a corner in the kitchen, before he cooks it, places it in a bowl and forces Chris to get on all fours and bark like a dog upon receiving the bowl of bacon. The subject matter is itself quite estranging but the visual style that Korine employs in which he uses a series of rapidly edited jump-cuts not only expressively mirrors Julien's fragmented mind, but enhances the estranging grotesque effect of the content as well. Yet, the video texture keeps the image anchored in the domain of realism because of the aesthetic immediacy that the video image retains.

The persistent sense of latent violence is motivated in part by a relationship that Julien sparks with a ten to twelve year old blind girl. Frequent shots are interspersed throughout the movie of him giving her special attention. Their behaviors and interactions are odd but it is the way the two are audiovisually rendered that adds to the sense of creepiness and impending doom. In one sequence, the two are shown waiting at a bus stop in medium long shot. This is a distancing technique used frequently in *julien*. It places the spectator-cum-observer in a less intimate proximity of the action while still using techniques that are indicative of verisimilitude, techniques associated with surveillance, shots that are similar to that of a private eye catching footage of miscreant behavior – still shaky and handheld, imagery still grainy, often framed using mobile techniques – with the shots often medium long shots with the action being observed in the background. The contiguous scene that follows is the inverse. It is a series of shaky, handheld, mobile framed medium and close-up shots. The scene shows Julien washing the girl's feet while she sings James Brown songs. The girl, somewhat out of the blue, tells Julien that he will probably die because all of her boyfriends die. The proximity of these interior shots retains the verisimilitude of the preceding sequence as the techniques remain the same aside from the distance of the

shot and the depth of the space, but rather than distancing the viewer, the proximity reestablishes the intimacy of a home video. Aside from the concern for Julien's reaction to this statement, we wonder a number of things: How many boyfriends could a girl not even twelve have? Does this mean that she believes Julien is her boyfriend? Does Julien believe that too? The paraphilic undertones are substantiated by the film's distinct intimations that Julien has impregnated his younger sister at this point. While it is never verified that it was a result of a forceful rape that Pearl has apologetically attributed to Julien's condition, there is room for inferring this based on Julien's emotional solicitude towards Pearl in conjunction with his volatility. The hints, innuendos, and anxiety-driving connection between the young girl and Julien are further stimulated by the similarity of the girl's ice skating uniform to Pearl's ballet leotard, which we view in a scene in which Julien gawks at Pearl in the background of a shot through the bannister of the stairs while she unwittingly performs ballet moves in front of a mirror in her bedroom.

Seemingly omnipresent, there are other moments where violence seems certain, but never actually comes to fruition. In this sense, the foreboding in *julien* is all the more intense than it is in a movie that is filled to the brim with actualized moments of violence. Aside from Julien, the other avenue of violence seems as if it will emanate from the abusive father. In a scene fifteen minutes or so from the end of the film, the father is shown going from passive aggressive to a heightened state of rage, but this, for the first time, is without any of the humor that has accompanied his previous tirades. He also, uncharacteristically, focuses the entirety of his rage at Pearl, who is practicing the harp, and Julien, who is watching Pearl. The father verbally assaults them both, calling Pearl a slut while insulting her playing. Then, after Julien attempts to defend Pearl, the father tells Julien if he was as stupid as him, or if he had a face like his he would slap it. The subject of the father's rage fluctuates between the two, depending upon who is actively protecting the other, and it seems certain to spill over into physical violence. Indeed, at one point, Julien starts striking his own face in a state of high agitation. Ultimately, the father eventually leaves while the two siblings remain curled up on the floor with Pearl trying to console Julien. While not grotesque in and of itself,

scenes such as this enhance the already present grotesque aesthetic in the way that gritty realist home video imagery captures what almost looks like a real instance of domestic abuse. The disturbing emotional exchange creates a tension that fosters a sense of fear that paralyzes, which is further intensified by the mental condition of Julien. The ever-present nascent violence tinges the grotesque imagery with an unshakable sense of apprehension that teeters on anxious preparedness for something to jolt and shock our senses to attention.

Similar to *Kids*, what further shapes the grotesque aesthetic of *julien* is also what shapes its realist aesthetic. Like *Kids*, much of *julien* is shot using handheld techniques but unlike *Kids*, *julien* is shot on video. While the look of the film maintains a non- fictional quality, with the feel of a home movie or surveillance footage, the often pixilated, grainy, and degraded texture of the video has a more unshakably cultivated feel to it, which is one of the techniques that sometimes contravenes, albeit aberrantly, the more unencumbered fly-on-the-wall documentary feel that *Kids* has. Nevertheless, the texture of the imagery guides expectations regarding the status of the image in accordance with non-fictional modes of representation.[5] This, like *Kids*, contributes to the grotesque by intensifying the immediacy the grotesque content and reinforcing and enhancing the realist status of the grotesque imagery.

KEN PARK

Both *Bully* and *Ken Park* are thematically and narratively motivated by violence. The very premise of violence is implicit in the title of *Bully*, and, similarly, the title of *Ken Park* refers to a character in the film who is only seen at the beginning of the film when he skateboards to a designated skatepark (very different to the appropriated streets that the *Kids*' skaters occupy) and shoots himself in the temple while videoing himself doing it with a Hi-8 video that he places next to him to capture the act. Ken Park

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[5] Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion" (*Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Eds. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi. Blackwell Philosophy Anthologies. Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell, 2006. 154-171).

is symbolic of the often unperceived suburban blight – nihilism and fatalism – that possesses the youth who occupy that space. He and his situation provide a pathos in which the principal characters are thematically framed. They teeter on a knife edge, looking to survive their environmental trappings and pressures, as capable of being enveloped by a similar fate as Ken Park as much as they are as evading it. Both sides of this possibility are demonstrated. The former through Tate who kills his grandparents and the latter through the other three characters – Claude, Shawn, and Peaches – who rely on each other for emotional and psychological support to survive their youth.

Further to the opening scene of suicide, violence punctuates the film, underlying the lives of the other characters. Peaches and Tate have the most prominently marked encounters with violence within the film. Peaches lives with her father in a single parent home after her mother died at a young age. Her father is initially introduced as a calm, soft-spoken, and religious man; and Peaches as a subservient and obeying daughter. This, on both accounts, is a façade. The cracks in this façade begin to show during a scene in which Peaches, her father, and a boy that Peaches is involved with, who she tells her father is from her bible study group, are having lunch. The subterfuge and lies that Peaches maintains to keep up certain appearances as a means to operate around her father's strict moral guidelines become apparent during the conversation. Peaches and her boyfriend engage in deceit to gain enough trust of her father so that he allows Peaches to stay at home with her boyfriend alone.

After a series of tension building scenes that crosscuts between shots of the father making his way through the house looking for Peaches and shots of her and her boyfriend engaged in elicit acts of sex, the violence ensues when Peaches, semi-naked atop her boyfriend, whom she has tied to the bed, is caught by her father. After a brief frontal close-up reaction shot of his daughter semi-nude on top of a tied-up semi-nude boy engaged in what he later refers to as "harlotry", as she puts his erect penis back into his boxer shorts. A slightly high angled diagonal medium shot corroborates what he sees. A quick cut shows Peaches' father enter the frame of a medium close-up of a shot which already contains Peaches as he pulls her off the boy by the hair. After a brief cut of Peaches tumbling to the floor in medium close-up there is a centrally

framed eye-level medium shot of the father brutally beating the boy who repeated decries "I didn't do anything". The cuts increase in pace and become more frenetic as they alternate between centrally framed medium shots and close-ups of him physically brutalizing he boy as he pleas and cries out in pain while Peaches cries maniacally offscreen. Peaches' father sticks his knee into the side of the boy as he maniacally, even animalistically, alternates between punching the boy in the face, throttling him around the neck; he even bites him as the boy limply flops around while helplessly still tied to the bedpost.

While it is apparent to the audience that her father will catch her in the act due to tension producing crosscuts between her father's progress home and Peaches with her boyfriend in sexual foreplay, the protracted build-up results in what is quite a jolting scene of violence. This jolt comes even with the expectation of some form of confrontation. But those expectations are far exceeded. The fact that this seemingly mild-mannered and caring father could explode the way he does – punching, biting, and choking – against a defenseless underage adolescent breaks the tension that builds-up to that point only to replace it with a sense of shock and disbelief. The seemingly incongruent behavior of the soft-spoken, mild-mannered man of serenity provokes a grotesque sense of astonishment that comes from Peaches' father's inability to control his rage to such an extent that it seems as if he is going to kill the boy. This is intensified by the duration of his violent rage, which seems to go on and on while the camera unflinchingly observes from a distance, safe enough to be out of the way but close enough to capture the extent of his blind wrath. Again, while the shot is orchestrated using conventional narrative structuring techniques with regards to the organization of space and Art Cinema techniques of choppy erratic editing, the naturalistic mise-en-scene combined with the steadicam cinematography and the grainy film stock reinforces the impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude of the sequence.

Tate's relationship with his legal guardians is quite different to that of Peaches and her father. Tate's is an irritable and callous character who lives with his doting grandmother and caring grandfather (his parents absence is not explained) along with their three- legged dog named Legs. His volatile temper and predilection for cruelty

are all directed toward his family. His predilection for violence is signaled almost immediately upon his introduction within the film. After a few shots showing the normalcy of his bedroom – action figures, needlepoint on the wall, a racecar shaped bed, and a dog by his side – there is a series of eye-line medium close-ups and close-ups that shows Tate sitting in his bedroom looking through photograph clippings of extreme starvation and barely living people who cling to life from third world countries. He names the people photographed using names from the 1980s U.S. sitcom *Different Strokes*, using a Sharpee marker to label them accordingly. This contradicts the cookie-cutter normalcy that precedes the introduction of Tate and provides the first indication that Tate's personality may not correspond with the wholesomeness of his environment. This incongruity is corroborated in the sequence whereupon he abuses Legs.

Using a low angle medium shot of Tate looking downward offscreen, Tate strikes Legs. There is then a cut of him kneeling down to the dog's level in a medium shot as he threatens the dog with further loss of limb, talking to the dog as if he fully understands his detailed commands as he repeatedly instructs the dog to pay attention as he holds him by the throat. Offscreen, the sounds of a creaky doorknob catch Tate's attention and he looks offscreen in perturbed amazement. A slightly low angle medium shot reveals his grandmother walking through the door. Tate commences with a searing and unrelentingly tirade as he admonishes his grandmother for not knocking before entering. Bearing a plate of fruit that she has brought for him, she maintains a pleasurable disposition despite being shouted at profanely as Tate stands-up in the foreground of the shot and walks to the middleground as he continues to admonish his grandmother. The exchange between the Tate and his grandmother continues through alternating close-ups of the conversation before he forcibly ejects her from his room but only after grabbing he fruit off of the plate and chucking it on the floor. As Legs persists to bark throughout, Tate now with his back to the camera, shot in a medium wide shot, he stands in the shallow background as he slaps the closed door of his bedroom and continues to shout profanities at his grandmother before turning around in amazement and looking downward offscreen at the barking dog. Tate takes off his sock and walks toward the dog. A cut of him kneeling down by the dog again in

medium shot shows Tate wrapping the sock around his snout and tells Legs triumphantly, "Bark now, motherfucker". While the violence here is contained and while there is nothing that is grotesque in this scene, at least from an aesthetic perspective, scenes conveying these sorts of graphically and explicitly confrontational and aggressive transgressions of manners and etiquette garners an anti-sentimental grittiness in the typically sentimentalist domain of melodrama. Clark cultivates imagery of the suburban ideal which he then reveals as being a façade which is subverted through the malcontented egoism and pathological megalomania of Tate.

Tate's egoism and megalomania resurfaces again in a later scene which sees his nascent violent tendencies verging on surfacing but remain tenuously latent. Across a number of alternating shot/counter-shot close-ups while playing Scrabble with his grandparents, Tate accuses his grandfather of being a "liar" and "bullshit artist" whose attempts to cheat at Scrabble infuriate Tate. Tate's frustration, rage, and contempt are all directed at his grandfather after he places the non-word "sipi" on the board and claims that it is a part of the body just below the hip. In this scene, it is clear that Tate's anger is a regularly occurring phenomenon. As it builds, Tate's grandmother suggests that she thinks 'sipi' is a word, but her non-verbal communication says much more. Her head somewhat bowed down, she looks apprehensively upward toward her husband, her lips lightly trembling, in what seems to be a hope that Tate's growing anger can be defused before a full-on upsurge. After a highly inflammatory tirade, he slams his hand on the table while berating his grandfather. He then takes it upon himself to disqualify his grandfather for lying. He continues his tirade, overwhelmed with emotion, even as his grandfather leaves the room. Tate taunts him further by rhetorically asking him where he is going and that he should congratulate him for winning. Tate proclaims that he has the most points and that he therefore wins the game while he narrates the tallying of the points, once again reiterating that his grandfather is disqualified for cheating. He rips out the score sheet from the pad, slams the pad back onto the table and marches off declaring his victory, still enraged.

While structured using conventional narrative techniques to organize and cohere the space, the naturalistic mise-en-scene reinforces a neorealist compositionality while

the cinematography remains unobtrusively balanced and economical. It is the naturalistic mise-en-scene – the understated acting, setting and location, and the understylized lighting – that underpins the verisimilitude. The grotesque mood is further enhanced in the way that the scene again starts with a sentimentally framed wholesome board game with milk and cookies between a grandson and his grandparents that unravels into a venomous tirade of antipathetically repressed violence and discontentment of the family space. The grotesque emerges from the way that Clark expresses this. The façade is not removed or cracked inasmuch as Clark shows that in order to see the extent of the dysfunction one just has to look long enough as it is right there on the surface to be seen.

Unlike the violence involving Peaches, the violence that erupts involving Tate is not surprising based on his attitude and behavior, but the manner in which it ensues and the extent and nature of the violence is. Tate's murder of his grandparents is revealed through his recollection of the event which is shown as a retrospective while he narrates the act into a handheld audio-recorder in the present. The scenes crosscut timelines between the murder and his recounting of the murder. The sequence opens with a centrally framed eye-line close-up of his blood-speckled face, the early morning lighting emanating a light that tinges everything in the frame blue, as he explains how he will recount "how he did it" in detail. The voiceover bridges to the event with a cut to an empty framed medium shot of the kitchen with a fully nude Tate walking into the frame from offscreen on the right into background. After turning on the light, which illuminates the darkened frame, he walks to the fridge and gets a cake out, sets it down on the counter and proceeds to cut himself a piece which he flips into his palm and eats as he moves toward the foreground with the camera panning and tracking him as he walks into another room. The camera then halts as he walks into the background. While eating the cake, he wanders through the house to his grandparents' room. Tate continues to narrate his actions step-by-step. Upon opening the door to his grandparents' room, a medium shot tracks Tate approach his grandfather first as he leans over him while he sleeps in bed, and stabs him in the neck. After a cut of an overhead reaction shot in close-up of his grandfather being stabbed, a cut back to a medium shot of Tate mounting his grandfather is followed by a low angle close-up of Tate stabbing his

grandfather repeatedly as blood splatters onto his face from offscreen. After a timeline crosscut back to the present day as Tate narrates there is a cut back to an overhead shot of the incident with the grandmother looking up at Tate as she says "I love you Tate". This is followed by a low angle reaction shot of Tate looking back down at her before he stabs her in the breast. Tate describes in detail how his grandparents died but only after he describes the tactility of stabbing their flesh. He discloses how he began to get an erection as he remained there until Legs started barking, at which point he claims that he disappointingly goes flaccid – details which are which is both horrifically disturbing and darkly comical. The ambivalence produced by this incongruence is indicative of the grotesque effect.

Cutting back to the present, Tate proclaims into the audio recorder that he killed his grandfather because he is a "cheater who likes to tell war stories" and while he continues to narrate the sound overlaps to a crosscut back to the incident as Tate stands next to the bed looking down at this murdered grandparents in medium shot while he says that he killed his grandmother because she is a "passive aggressive bitch" who does not respect his privacy. He is then shown reaching into a glass and pulling out his grandfather's dentures which is corroborated by an analytical close-up shot before returning to a medium shot as Tate exits his grandparents' bedroom. Crosscutting back to the present, Tate has finished narrating his story into the audio recorder, which is signaled by him turning it off and setting it down. Still being shot using a centrally framed close-up, he places the dentures of his grandfather in his mouth and puts his arms behind his head in the relaxed position and closes his eyes. After resting on this image for an extended moment there is a cut to a diagonal medium shot of his nude blood-splattered body lying in his race car bed. He is quite a gangly kid, skinny, but with apparent musculature. However, laying there in that position, he resembles a figure in a morbidly grotesque rendition of the medieval painting, "The Lovers" (c. 1465), which shows two emaciated bodies in a state of deterioration. This image of the abject grotesque body provides a counterpoint to the otherwise vibrant and vivacious images of the naked, sexualized bodily grotesque that Clark exhibits in *Ken Park*. However, in the more general sense, both are different sides of the same coin in Clark's films

depending on what motivates a character. Both signify hedonistic impulses of pleasure or the alleviation of displeasure, but its status as vivacious and celebratory or morbidly abject depends on whether the character is instilled with Lockean or Hobbesian intentions. If Tate's megalomaniacal act of parricide is not shocking enough, numerous elements all contribute to securing a grotesque aesthetic: his pit-stop at the fridge to feed his late night hankering for something sweet – something made especially for him by his unreservedly doting grandmother; his rationale for committing the act in the nude – to not soil his clothes; and the heightened visual effect of the sequence in seeing him fully nude committing this act.

While the spatiotemporal complexity of this sequence breaks with the verité and neorealist strategies of much of the film, it is more indicative of narrative techniques associated with a polished slickness and self-reflexive artifice, the quietness of the sequence, the simplicity of movement and action and the naturalistic mise-en-scene of both timelines ensures that the verisimilitude of the profilmic spaces are maintained even if the structural organization of the film challenges that. The grotesque aspect of this scene of parricide coincides with what makes this an exemplar of strong violence, namely Tate's emotionally distant, even apathetic, act of brutality. This is how Clark expresses the murder of Tate's grandparents using the grotesque. The premeditated murder occurs in a startlingly casual and callous fashion with Tate, naked, first shown using the knife that he kills his grandparents with to cut himself a piece of the Boston crème cake that his grandmother makes for him on special occasions, which he states in voiceover. He even explains at one point that he committed the act in the nude to avoid getting blood on his clothes. Tate's moral and emotional emptiness and nonchalance is what transcends this scene from the horrific to the grotesque. The act may induce horror but the perversity of the mechanics of the act itself also elicits an astonishing sense of disbelief, even dissonance, with the viewer. This too is an affective quality of the perversions elicited by the grotesque.

The ambivalence invoked by Tate is not only demonstrative of his engendering of the bodily grotesque spectrum – both celebratory and abject – but are further

compounded by the spectrum of behavioral mannerisms and traits that we witness of him – impassionedness, apathy, confrontational aggressiveness, affirmation and acceptance. These mannerisms and traits garner ambivalence when confounded with residual aspects of his childhood innocence. This is made apparent in two scenes, one just prior and one immediately after the Scrabble altercation.

Prior to his outburst playing Scrabble with his grandparents, Tate is shown drinking a glass of milk. His grandmother glances over at him and smilingly tells him that he has a "milkstache". Serenely, he wipes it away by curling his tongue to his upper lip and sliding it back and forth like a young child. This scene provides a sharp nuance which accents the grotesque events to come, even facilitating the transformation of that which may initially just seem shocking to becoming grotesque. Likewise, after the Scrabble debacle, Tate peers out the window after banging angrily on the piano keys and sees a small group of girls playing Double-Dutch outside. He goes outside and sits on the curb cross-legged as he watches the girls in the street doing their routine. After greeting each other by name, he has a mundane interaction with one of the girls, Rebecca, about the new routine that they are practicing for a talent show. After a very brief pause in conversation, Tate pensively bows his head down. Rebecca immediately asks if he's been fighting with his grandparents again, signaling the fact that the tensions between him and his grandparents are known outside of the household. Tate calmly summarizes and Rebecca, Tate's junior, no older than twelve or thirteen wisely retorts by asking him why he plays with his grandfather if he cheats. Tate simply replies, "I don't know." However, he is eager to point out that regardless of his grandfather's attempt to cheat, that he still won as he waves the crumpled score sheet in the direction of Rebecca. Rebecca stops jumping and walks over to Tate, taking the score sheet from his hand and having a look at it. Approvingly, she tells him that his score is pretty good and asks him if he wants a 'fireball' in the same breath.[6] Tate nods his head agreeably, turns his head to the side, and spits as another one of the girls comes over and almost like a sacramental ritual, pops a fireball into his mouth after Rebecca instructs her to do so. The fireball is so large that it stretches the side of his cheek to cartoonish proportions. Nevertheless, chuffed with his reward, he manages to smile ear

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[6] A 'fireball' is a cinnamon flavored jawbreaker-like candy.

to ear while looking-up to the girl who gave it to him as he thanks her unreservedly. Rebecca then invites him to jump rope with them which he eagerly accepts. The scene ends with multiple shots showing the kids playing, and Tate, who is at least three to five years their senior, enjoying the innocence of childhood.

These two scenes are confounding in that they both indicate that, amidst his rage and deviant masturbatory proclivities, he still harbors innocent childlike qualities. It is as if Tate, when he forgets himself, is not all bad. The latter two sequences illustrate that – amongst his attempts to demonstrate a seniority of knowledge, decorum, and logic when interacting with his grandparents – he still looks for affirmation amongst his peers and those even younger than him. This confliction further confounds not only his actions, but the nature of his actions, fostering an ambivalence and co-presence that only enhances the way in which his seemingly behaviors – the graphic depiction of violence as well the graphic depiction of his act of auto-asphyxiation – contributes to not only grotesque aesthetics that shape the film but the specifically realist grotesque. Although the raw verité visual style is less emphatic in *Ken Park* than it is in *Kids*, which is largely due to the film's more perceptibly apparent classical narrative structure and less degraded visual texture, the film is still shot using a multitude of devices that, when combined, are indicative of verité – namely its observantly gazing, shaky handheld camera movements. Conversely, the content and imagery of *Ken Park* is far more explicit it its graphicness than *Kids*.

BULLY

The violence comes to fruition more frequently in *Bully* than all of the films here discussed by Clark and Korine. Violence pervades the entire film. The film centers on a circle of friends and acquaintances who suffer at the hands of sadistic bully, who is strangely also one of their friends, and their subsequent plot to kill him which they clumsily, yet fully execute. Even when violence is not being enacted, it is being discussed with either naivety or unflinching earnestness. More often than not it is also accompanied by sex or drug use which serves to reinforce an amoral nonchalance

towards violence that is fostered throughout the film, which contributes to its status as strong violence.

Violence permeates the entire film. It is either discussed or enacted throughout the film. Occupying a large majority of the film's plot, the various scenes showing the planning process of the murder spans nearly forty minutes. Lisa introduces the idea of killing Bobby just over thirty minutes into the movie. This occupies the plotline until Bobby is actually killed at around the seventy-fifth minute. In one scene all of the conspiring kids are sitting around in Lisa's room. They are discussing the ways in which they can kill him, when it comes to light that some of the people that are friends with Bobby's circle of acquaintances do not even know Bobby. None of them seem to take in the severity and finality of what they are planning. This is reinforced as Lisa hands Marty her mother's handgun. While Marty points it around the room, Donny, on some concoction of drugs and alcohol, asks what the gun is for with Lisa casually reminding him that it is to kill Bobby. He nonchalantly responds, "oh, yeah", before lying his drug-weary head back down on the bed. Heather pipes in by saying that shooting him will get blood everywhere to which Lisa explains that is the reason why they have to plan the murder out. Scenes such as this permeate throughout the movie up until the point that the murder is actually committed.

Even more transitional scenes during the plotting process involve discussions of violence. In one scene Ali, Heather (Kelli Garner), and Donny (Michael Pitt) sit in a car and Heather retells a story of how her grandfather, who drank too much, killed her grandmother with a claw-hammer during a drunken rage and then locked himself and her corpse in a room for two days in which he kept drinking and repeatedly having sex with her corpse. To make an already grim story even bleaker, she adds how her fifteen year old mother was in the house the entire time. While the content of Heather's story is in no way visually graphic, because of the subject matter and content of the rest of the film, this scene further accentuates the grotesque aesthetic that Clark fosters through bodily imagery. Similarly, in another transitional scene, Lisa is shown in the passenger seat of a car describing how she wants Bobby eviscerated, his throat slashed, and his head beaten with a baseball bat, which contributes to the

narrative aesthetic development of abject bodily grotesque imagery through the prevailing theme and motifs of violence that predominate the movie. The violence is so pervasive that its presence as a topic of discussion is dealt with a certain nonchalance. Ali and Donny are regular sexual partners, and when Ali first approaches Donny with the idea of killing Bobby, she sits next to him on a porch bench outside of his house and tweaks his shirtless nipples as she broaches the topic with him. This nonchalance of fetishistic sexual flirtation combined with a serious discussion of plotting a murder is not itself grotesque, but when amassed with the other elements of violence, sexual paraphilias, graphic nudity and sex, plus the realist mode of visual representation, it adds to the sum of the parts of *Bully*'s prevailing grotesque aesthetic.

The grotesque cultivates ambivalence that often stems from the earnest naivety of the characters, a naivety that addresses the posturing of some of the characters and, in some instances their exposure as posers. This is especially the case with the character simply referred to as The Hitman (Leo Fitzpatrick, Telly from *Kids*). The Hitman presents himself as a local kingpin. The conspiring group of murderous adolescents seems to have bought into this self-cultivated reputation. The conspiring teens that kill Bobby even refer to him as "The Godfather" in one scene just before the murder. But he is a well-to-do slacker that lives in his dad's basement (played by Larry Clark) in a nice house in a nice middle class neighborhood. Our first introduction of this character is of him in a garage in the suburbs looking over stolen car stereos with pre-adolescents boys between the ages of around twelve and thirteen who smoke cigarettes and drink forty ounces of malt liquor. The Hitman is pacing around the kids berating them for bringing him junk that he cannot possibly resell. He questions their own self-appointed status as "professionals", a humorous notion, as the tweens look on with grins on their faces as they continue to smoke and drink. The entire scene is shot straight without any sense of irony, yet it provides a rather incongruent humor nevertheless, because The Hitman becomes a facilitator, a consultant even, for those who go to him with regards to how they can eliminate Bobby. The incongruent and thus grotesque humor of his earnest, self-inflated status of being 'gangsta' seems to come from watching too many gangsta hood movies and rap videos rather than any real experience. It again, nevertheless, provides guidance for the

equally clueless group of friends adamant on killing Bobby.

Just prior to executing the plan to kill Bobby, the group gets extremely hyped-up. Their adrenaline is pumping and some are excited while others are noticeably petrified. Nonetheless, they all begin chanting "dead, dead, dead!" as they do a jig in a semi-huddled circle. The Hitman, perceptibly annoyed, tells the group "this isn't a game, we're not just a bunch of kids playing make-believe". However, and it is this irony which intensifies the grotesque, in terms of the narrative aesthetics this *is* a matter of a bunch of kids treating something very serious, something that is literally a matter of life and death, as if it is a game. The Hitman contrasts the teens about to kill Bobby with himself and his "people", who are "serious". His people, as we have seen earlier, are nothing more than a bunch of pre-adolescent shoplifters. In response to this verbal challenge, Donny, stoned out of his mind on pills and acid, even tells the Hitman that he knows what he is doing and not to treat him like a kid. The naïve, self-glorified poser that The Hitman is, is demonstrated once more by the very fact that he takes Donny seriously after his drug-addled defensiveness. Even after the group of kids, riddled with guilt and fear of being caught, start babbling to other friends and family they refer to him as some big mafia member, which we know to be an extreme over-exaggeration, as The Hitman is not even a street thug. He is a middle class petty criminal. Nevertheless, it is an exaggeration treated in earnest by the naïvely murderous kids and presented without irony through Clark's verisimilitude affirming verité mise-en-scene and cinematographic style.

The violence that permeates the film produces ambivalence throughout the movie and helps garner the grotesque aesthetic of *Bully*. It adds to the mixed emotions elicited regarding Bobby's humanity and lack thereof as well as his ultimate fate at the hands of his closest friend. The moral ambivalence of the motivations and consequences of the violence also contributes to the violence being of the strong variety. The primary ambivalence that cultivates the grotesque involves the way in which violence is represented with regards to those who are bullied *and* Bobby's death at the hands of those whom he bullied and their friends. This is what helps transform the acts of violence and aggression into the grotesque. In Bobby's heart-to-heart with Ali, just

prior to violently raping her, he discloses his plans to go to college and then open up a business with his father. A father who, while somewhat overbearing, is encouraging of Bobby's potential and supportive of his son. Bobby, during his discussion with Ali, even professes that his father is "pretty cool." Bobby's relationship with his father is reinforced on two other occasions as well, both of which contribute to the intensification of the grotesque moments of violence as again, we remember that Bobby is loved and loves; he is not *all* bad. Contradictory sentiments are generated with regards to the characters and their fluctuating behaviors and personalities throughout.

The ambivalent producing contradictions of Bobby's personality come to the fore in a scene where Bobby's father confronts him. The grotesque mood is heightened because of the timing of his confrontation which transpires immediately after Ali leaves after being raped by Bobby. Bobby's dad enters his house and upon seeing Marty on the sofa asks where his son is. Bobby's father walks into the bathroom and begins talking to a still nude Bobby who is once again at the sink. There, Bobby's father tells him to "buck up", get his "priorities in order" and to stop hanging out with Marty, who he refers to as his high school dropout friend. He reasserts to his son the vast amount of potential he has, and reiterates his plan to open up a business with Bobby. Bobby responds by disregarding the criticisms that he directs at Marty, and says that he will do everything his dad is proposing as long as Marty can work at the store with them. He stipulates this to his father with true sense of having the best interest of his friend at heart, but then again, this could be Bobby maneuvering the situation so that he can maintain his dysfunctional relationship. It remains ambiguous. On face value it completely contravenes the violently physical and sadistically emotional abuse that he enacts on Marty.

We are first introduced to the pervasive sense of violence the film quite early on through Bobby. He is the character that is the main focal point of the source and object of violence. Bobby's predilection for violence is introduced within the first few minutes of the film and this is reinforced as commonplace until Bobby is killed, which does not actually occur until the last quarter of the movie. The first indication of

Bobby's penchant for violence occurs when Ali and Lisa encounter Marty and Bobby for the first time. The boys are both working the counter at a snack stand in a supermarket at which the girls are getting refreshments. After Marty's attempt to flirt with Ali, Bobby slams his head into the pizza warmer. While the girls watch this act of seemingly playful aggression is filled with ambiguity. While it initially just seems like an act of machismo play, it is revealed to be real aggression after the girls leave. A cut to a close-up of Marty exhibits a sense of physical discomfort and humiliation that is absent of any sort of playful acceptance as he looks downward like a beaten dog and rubs the area of his forehead that slammed into the pizza heater. Suspicions of Bobby's abusiveness and sadistic pleasure in bullying his supposed best friend are reinforced only a few minutes later after an ellipsis of time (and space) showing Bobby and Marty out with Ali and Lisa. They stop at a carry-out for some alcohol when an innocent question from Marty results in a painful and degrading ear-twist at the hands of Bobby. All the while, Ali and Lisa watch from the backseat; Ali treats the scene as a joke, but Lisa's expression indicates a more knowing concern.

The first disclosure of real, unambiguous violence and the extent to which Marty suffers at the hand of Bobby is shown through a number of conventional shot/reaction shots in close-up between the two. Reinforcing the sadism and control that Bobby enacts upon Marty, the scene comes after the two leave a male strip club. In addition to coercing Marty to have phone sex sessions with paying johns, Bobby also forcibly coerces Marty to perform strip-dancing routines at gay strip clubs. After counting the money in the passenger seat on the way back from the club, Bobby looks over to Marty, who is driving and says, "you liked that back there, didn't you?" in a baiting manner. Bobby continues to verbally abuse Marty until there is a horn heard offscreen, and a cut back to Bobby pointing offscreen exclaiming "Lookout!" with a rapid cut to a car cutting them off, then an equally rapid cut of Bobby's car, which Marty is driving, rubbing up against the median curb to avoid a collision with another car. This gives Bobby the ammunition to begin physical abuse. Livid, he shouts, "You fuck, you fucked-up my fucking car!" and punches Marty in the face. Marty angrily, yet calmly responds "Watch the fuck out man, you're gonna make me fucking wreck," as a bit of saliva drips from his punched mouth. More rage from Bobby ends with Marty getting

punched again and the scene descends into chaos. Both Marty and Bobby are yelling and cursing at each other but it is Marty that ends-up with a heavily bloodied nose. Marty eventually pulls over having had enough. He leaves the car and approaches Bobby and punches him in the stomach. As Marty walks away, like a stereotypical abusive spouse, Bobby profusely apologizes as he tells Marty that he is his best friend while insisting that Marty get back into the car. Scenes such as this set the tone for the film, and while it is not grotesque itself or even a case of strong violence per se, it does contribute to the moral ambiguity and ambivalence which arguably facilitates the strong violence that occurs later in the film regarding the death of Bobby. Thus it also contributes to the grotesque effect in terms of the holistic aesthetic shape of the film. Indeed the strength of the violence and the presence of the grotesque is the sum of the formal and stylistic elements, which when viewed individually prove to be quite generic and nondescript.

Much of the violence in *Bully* is nonconsensual sexual violence. The prolonged graphic depictions of this are what contribute to the violence being an element of the grotesque. Sexual intimacy quickly turns to inescapable acts of sexual violence establishes the sense of incongruence within the film and defines the body based moral violations. Early in the film, Lisa and Marty are established as an item, and it is made evident that Bobby is not pleased about this. Both Marty and Lisa are made to suffer as a result. A sequence of sexual violence is predicated by a shot of Bobby nakedly standing in front of a bathroom mirror intensely washing his hands. While he dries his hands on a towel, he stares at himself while rocking back-and-forth before he spits on his mirror image and throws the towel down. After he turns to leave the bathroom there is a cut to an empty frame of him entering a room and looking offscreen, still with the intense look in his eyes, before a cut to a medium shot of Lisa riding Marty from an upward perspective behind Marty. Both are completely naked. The scene then cuts back to Bobby with a wry smile on his face as he quietly grabs a leather weightlifting belt that is resting on top of the dresser. The camera tracks him walking over to the unwitting couple who are in the midst of sexual throes as he whips Lisa in the back with the belt. The camera slightly pans over and down to her as the belt cracks on her naked back, which then cuts back to the medium shot of an upward perspective just behind Marty

with Lisa yelping in pain as she falls over. Marty sits up, exclaiming "what the fuck!" as Bobby, who is standing over him, loudly declares, "I'm next," as he punches Marty in the face. After an extremely rapid counter-shot of Marty being hit from a downward angle over the shoulder of Bobby, the camera cuts back to the upward shot just behind Marty with Marty collapsing onto the bed again and Bobby leaning further over Marty, jaw open, teeth clenched as he stares intently down at his friend. This followed by a superimposition of Marty sleeping on the bed in his boxers by himself that is juxtaposed over the last aforementioned shot, indicating a brief ellipsis of time.

Significantly, we never know if it is with Marty or Lisa with which Bobby takes his nonconsensual turn. The grotesque aesthetic here is fostered by a combination of the intimacy of the violence, the ambiguity that remains, and the explosive suddenness in which it occurs. While up to this point Bobby has been shown bullying Marty, his predilection for sexual violence has not even been suggested in the film. There is added ambiguity based on Bobby's own self-loathing which is demonstrated at the beginning of the scene when Bobby spits at his own mirror reflection before violently interrupting Marty and Lisa. The sudden impact of violence erupts out of what seems to be nowhere during another moment of sexual kinkiness showing two fully naked youths in the midst of sex. This combined with the graphic full-frontal nudity of all the characters involved and the graphic depiction of hard sex between youthful-looking characters all contribute to the realist and grotesque aesthetics of sexual violence depicted with Clark, which again implicates the viewer as a deviant spectator after jolting them to attention.

Bobby's predilection for sexual violence is not isolated to this one instance. Bobby's next victim is Ali, and Bobby's violent sexual abuse simultaneously erupts again with an ambiguity regarding his homoerotic tendencies. It is unclear whether he is a self-loathing homosexual or whether he is self-loathingly turned-on by homoeroticism, and he vents his sexual maladjustments through violently and sexually abusing others; or whether the homoerotic motifs are merely a manipulation and control tactics that he uses to exploit the insecurities and taunt his so-called friends. The scene takes place in Bobby's house with Marty and Lisa sitting on the sofa watching music videos while

Ali and Bobby talk about Bobby's future, which entails going to college followed by the possibility of opening up a business with his father. It is something of a heart-to-heart as the two seem to be really talking, with Bobby disclosing some of the dynamics of his relationship with his father, who is overall encouraging and supportive of Bobby, and Ali disclosing how she was briefly married for ten months and that she has a little boy who is primarily cared for by her parents. This scene functions as a counterpoint and facilitates the formation of the impending violence to come as also qualifying as grotesque. Soon after their shared emotional intimacy, Ali gets up and leads him to a bedroom. They both undress completely while facing each other in silence. The camera pans down following Ali onto the bed with Bobby following. A cut of a close-up shows Ali rolling onto her side as Bobby, on his stomach, rests on his elbows. Like in the other scenes of nudity, the camera bares all. But for a very brief moment, it seems as if the intimacy shared in the living room is going to be transferred to the bedroom.

At that moment, however, Bobby pulls a remote control from under him and pointing it at his entertainment system, proceeds to play a hardcore gay porn video, and glancing back to Ali, tells her to watch. Ali, amusedly aghast, responds by insisting that what she is seeing is "gross", but she seems mildly amused nevertheless. Shot from behind the two, Ali is now on her belly watching at this point while Bobby, who is also watching, gets on top of her. The gentle teasing and attempt to get her to watch becomes increasingly hostile. Bobby aggressively pulls Ali's hair back in his attempts to force her to watch, eventually holding her down before flipping her onto her back as he mounts her and continues to hold her down by her wrists. This is shown from an over-the-shoulder shot of Ali from below looking up at Bobby in medium close-up. Alternating between over-the-shoulder shots of Ali focusing on the acts of Bobby and over-the-shoulder shots of Bobby showing the reaction shots of Ali, Bobby is shown penetrating Ali, repeatedly uttering "do you want to get fucked?" while Ali struggles to wriggle free from his aggressive clutches. What began as consensual sex only moments ago steadily deteriorates into a more and more aggressive rape. She resists, exclaiming, "Fuck you!" continually and it becomes clear that the rape is not enough. Bobby's need for intimidation and control becomes more apparent. He commands Ali to tell him that

he is the best that she has ever had. Her defiance is met with slaps to the face and pulled hair, being choking, along with Bobby's violent penetrative thrusts. She finally concedes to him, tearfully proclaiming, "You're the best I've ever had", as Bobby looks down with a sadistic smile as he continues. Shaking her head, he yelps out a cry of aggressively fuelled pleasure demanding that she say it louder. Ali cannot say anything as tears of humiliation and trauma paralyze her ability to speak and she instead gasps for air as she hyperventilates.

The scene ends and immediately cuts to a fully-dressed Ali entering an empty frame back into the living room where Marty and Lisa are. She is still in tears yet, at the same time, in surprisingly good control of her emotions considering what has just happened to her. The grotesque aesthetic here, like that above, is fostered by a combination of the intimacy of the violence. The scene is shot using alternating close-ups, medium close-ups, and extreme close-ups which creates an intimacy with the violence and claustrophobia, which fosters unease in the proximity of the violence. Moreover, the two characters were just shown sharing what seemed to be an authentic moment of mutual emotional disclosure, which quickly transformed into a predatory moment of violent sexual abuse. Similar to the scene in which Bobby whips Lisa in the back with a weightlifting belt and takes his turn with her or Marty, the violence combined with the graphic full-frontal nudity of the characters, both of whom appear quite youthful and young, all combine in facilitating the realist and grotesque aesthetics of sexual violence depicted.

Possibly the most violent moment in the film is the murder of Bobby. In this scene the physical, corporeal aspects of the bodily grotesque converge with the jolting effect and consequentially affect that the violence itself prompts. This is due not only to the graphicness of it, but also because of the circumstances surrounding it. The perpetrators are his victims, but they are also supposedly his friends. What truly punctuates the violence and transforms it into the category of the grotesque is the clumsiness, the messiness of the execution itself, and what makes it a strong instance of violence is the similarly ambivalent sense that he had it coming and that, especially Marty's part in the scandal was justified. The conspirators lure Bobby to the swampy

marshlands by convincing him that Ali wants to hook-up with him again. Although Bobby is initially suspicious regarding the number of people tagging along, some whom he does not even know, Marty convinces him that they are friends of friends that are going to party with them later. The incident is structured using quite conventional methods of spatial organization. In saying that, the way in which the sequence is constructed expertly demonstrates Clark's narrative construction. He uses a single space and parcels various actions and perspectives scattered throughout that space and he utilizes the various spatial planes and edits the sequence. Upon pulling up to the swampland, Bobby leads Ali to the shoreline. A long shot shows the two walking into the deep background. The hoods of the two cars are in the foreground which functions as internal framing devices. The rest of the kids enter the frame from offscreen – both left and right –as they circle in front of the cars in the middleground. They are now internally framed by the cars as they block Ali and Bobby in the background and reduced the perspectival depth of the shot in the process. They gather around still trying to figure out a game plan in terms of how the murder is going to happen. This is followed by alternating shaky handheld close-ups of the kids' last minute plotting. After a reestablishing medium-long shot of the group with Ali and Bobby in relatively deep focus in the background, Marty is shown walking offscreen towards one of the cars and then reappearing with a baseball bat in tote as the shot then cuts to alternating close-ups of the conspiring group once more.

After establishing a very loose plan the kids set into action. After a further series of alternating shaky handheld close-ups showing the various kids anxiously discussing how to strike, another reestablishing shot shows Heather walking into the background towards Ali and Bobby as Donny stands observing between her and the other kids who are leaning up against one of the cars. Donny and the other kids observing Heather's reconnaissance mission occupy a multi-planar middleground as the vast depth of space of the background is also demonstrated by Heather's distance from the main group as well as her relative distance to Ali and Bobby. After a centrally framed frontal medium shot showing Marty on the flank, there is a cut to a medium shot of Heather walking into a frame from offscreen right that shows Ali's back as she is embraced by Bobby on the left side of the screen. After a series of handheld diagonal medium shots

of the various positions of all the characters involved there is a brief deep focus reestablishing long shot of everyone in the various spatial planes with the exception of Marty who is flanked offscreen right. From the middleground Donny storms towards the background which then cuts to a frontal close-up of Bobby with Donny quickly approaching as he stabs Bobby in the upper back accompanied by a popping-tearing sound.

Grimacing and grabbing at his back he turns and exclaims profanities, which in turn reveals a stream of blood that has soaked through his ash colored t-shirt. The shot cuts to several medium close-up reaction shots of the conspiring participants, all of who appear to be in various states of excitation and/or shock. The shot cuts back to a close-up of Bobby as he pauses in shock in before calling out for Marty. A cut of Marty in close-up shows him walk intently offscreen toward Bobby. After a brief slightly high-angled medium-close-up of Heather retreating and cowering into the backseat of one of the cars, the shot returns to a close-up of Bobby calling out to Marty again. From this point the pace and rapidity of the editing increases steadily to illustrate the franticness of the situation. A rapid quick cut of a medium long shot, reiterating Marty's intent knife-wielding march from the shallow background to the foreground towards Bobby in the extreme foreground, is followed by a brief cut to a medium low angle shot of a cluster of three conspirers all of whom are looking offscreen left towards the occurring violence. Two rush offscreen and one remains staring offscreen in what appears to be shock-induced paralysis. As the shot cuts back to Bobby, Marty is now in the frame with Bobby plunging a knife into the belly of the already hemorrhaging body of his friend. After a rapid cut of a close-up of Lisa, who is looking on, the shot returns to Bobby keeling over from the force and pain of the stab. A quick cut to a reaction close-up of Marty follows succeeded by two erratic analytical shots of Bobby's stomach wound – a close-up followed by an extreme close-up. A cutaway to a straight medium close-up shot of Ali is followed by a quick zoom her in profile getting into the driver's seat of one of the cars while screaming in fear. The shot returns to a close-up of Bobby who pleads with Marty.

The alternating cuts of reaction shots of the other participants are frequently re-

anchored to the main focal point of the both the conspirators and the spectator – Bobby's brutalized body and the savage carnage being enacted upon it which only heightens the savagery of the act. Bobby grabs his now blood-saturated stomach, crying out and pleading with Marty as he repeatedly apologizes to him for "whatever he did". The shot cuts to a medium shot of Marty and Bobby filling almost the entire frame. Marty occupies one side of the screen and Bobby the other. After a cut to a close-up of Ali in the driver seat of one of the cars, Derek enters the frame in the shallow middleground frantically demanding that Ali go. The shot quickly returns to Marty facing off with Bobby in medium long shot as Marty slashes at Bobby again, this time across the chest and arm. Both boys are in the background flanked on both sides by two of the other conspiring teens in the foreground whose backs are only partially perceptible in frame. Like the previous scenes with the cars, the co-conspirators in the foreground frame the two boys who are centrally located in the frame, but in this case there is also a distortion in the constancy of size due to the deep focus wide angle framing devices and the resulting proportions of the objects in the foreground and the background. After Marty stabs Bobby there is another cut to Bobby. Donny runs into the frame from offscreen left, sticking Bobby in the back again, before leaving the frame again offscreen right, but then pops back into the scene again from offscreen right from behind Bobby, which is followed by a series of jump cuts of him repeatedly stabbing him in the back in different areas as if he were a pincushion while maniacally laughing. After another quick cut back to Ali and Derek in one of the cars showing Ali crying, the shot cuts back to a diagonal medium shot of Bobby grabbing at his new wounds with one hand as he holds his belly wound with the other while Donny continues to shuffle back-and-forth behind him out of focus, still maniacally laughing.

After a few blurry and shaky handheld point-of-view shots depicting Bobby's slow loss of consciousness, there is cut back to the medium long shot of Marty, Bobby, and Donny internally framed by two of the other conspirators in the foreground on the left and right side of the screen as Bobby staggers offscreen right in the middleground towards a car. There is a quick cut to Heather in a slightly canted slow zoom medium close-up curled in a fetal position in the backseat of one

of the cars is followed by an over the shoulder shot of Ali sitting in the car that Bobby walks towards with the headlights shining on him in the background in sharp focus. Further shaky handheld P.O.V. shots of Bobby immediately follow. A cut back to a medium long shot of Marty, Donny, and the two conspirators in the foreground shows them run after Bobby offscreen right. A cut back to another over the shoulder shot of Bobby from inside the car in which Ali and Derek are seated shows him walk to the front of the car and bend over in front of a headlight, which is corroborated by a cut to a low angle medium close-up of Bobby falling to his knees next to the headlight-lit front of the car, still grasping onto his profusely gushing stomach, shaking and heaving as if about to vomit. Three of the conspiring kids enter from the background, offscreen right, behind the frontally shot Bobby. The proportions of the characters and the objects onscreen again play on the constancy of size of the shot as the nose of the car diminutizes the keeled-over Bobby, who, himself, diminutizes the conspiring teens in the background who slowly approach him like a pack of circling jackals. Unable to hold himself any longer, he falls backward and is helped on his way by Marty who mounts him and with the shift in action, what was an eye-level shot of Bobby becomes a slightly low level shot as Marty bridges Bobby with his back to the camera as the other watch. This is followed by a cut of a close-up of a downward looking Marty on top of Bobby, which is immediately followed by an analytical extreme close-up of Bobby's eyes-bulging as Marty puts a knife to the throat of the petrified Bobby. An acute high angle shot from over the shoulder of Marty rapidly follows as he slits Bobby's throat from ear to ear with blood spilling to the surface like a levee seeping overspill. Bobby's eyes flutters back into his head before widely popping open again. After a quick cut to a medium shot of Marty rising to thrust his knife once more there is a shot showing three of the downward looking conspirators circling the actions and filling the frame. This is followed by another rapid cut to an oblique low angle medium close-up shot of Marty thrusting the knife downward followed by a jump cut of another medium close-up of Marty from a slightly shifted angle to punctuate the pop of his thrusting action. This concludes Marty's part in the brutal murder of his best friend.

After an extreme close-up of the still fetal and quivering Heather, there is a reestablishing low height shot of the three conspirators looking downward offscreen at Bobby. At this point Marty is also offscreen. The so-called Hitman walks into the foreground with his back to the camera. He hovers over top of Bobby while holding an aluminum baseball bat. After a brief cut to a downward, extreme close-up of the pale, blood-spitting face of Bobby lying on the ground, the shot cuts to a medium wide shot from inside the car looking through the windshield which shows The Hitman centrally framed in the middleground with Marty on the left side of the screen, Donny on the right and Lisa in the background. The rearview mirror of the car reflects a portion of Ali's face watching on as The Hitman raises the baseball bat over his head. After a quick cut to a close-up of Marty looking towards Ali in the car commanding her to turn off the headlights of the car, the shot cuts back to the medium shot of the circling conspirators outside with The Hitman thrusting the bat down from overhead, punctuating the final act of savagery, as he delivers the final blow. The scene fades to black as the headlights darken the frame while the striking bat simultaneously reaches the already brutalized grotesque body of Bobby. The remainder of the sequence deals with the fallout of the murder including the disposal of the body.

The execution of the murder is frantic, savage, clumsy, and messy, which highlights the abject corporeality of the bodily grotesque through the violent devastation that the kids wreak on Bobby as he bleeds out and convulses. The clumsy awkwardness of the act only intensifies the grotesque. While the murder is deliberate in its execution and the barbarism of these kids is apparent, so is their naivety, but we witness whatever innocence these kids had left draining with Bobby's life as their strikes become more exacting and his death becomes more certain. The ambivalence of whether Bobby deserves his comeuppance fades into a dissonant sense of astonishment and disbelief which is accompanied by the fact that these kids really have not reflected on the ramifications of their actions. Stylistically, the sequence is constructed using a mix of traditional neorealist techniques, such as the depth of space framing and the location shooting. This, combined with more contemporary stylistic techniques affiliated with aesthetic realist filmmaking, such as the shaky handheld cinematography combined with the erratic cutting, which is something between a jump-

cut and a cleaner transitional cut found in a typical classically structured narrative film, preserve the prevailing verisimilitude. The relative slickness of the sequence, and the film for that matter, compared to the likes of *Kids* and *Gummo*, is indicative of the more conservative realist methods. They are conservative insofar that they are acknowledged realist methods from the past which have since been transcended by newer techniques that are linked to newer technologies and modes. This, however, combined with the adolescent characters and related subject matter typifies the dramatic realism of *Bully* as well as its adaptive status an explicit version of an afterschool special.

Gummo

While actual scenes of violence with identifiable perpetrators are ever-present in *Bully*, in *Gummo*, there are numerous references to violence and victims of violence, but there are few scenes of violence depicted. A sense of latent violence pervades the film with references to violent aggressive behavior – rape, pedophilia, incest, and suicide – are suffuse throughout. In Solomon's opening voiceover, he describes the tornado that devastated the city, and tells of the physically devastated bodies and corpses of those killed by the tornado, explicitly describing how "peoples' legs and neck bones were sticking out". In typical Korine fashion, he also embeds a grotesque morbid humor into the violent narrative imagery when Solomon explains that when a girl was floating around in the tornado, he could see up her skirt and continues the monologue of devastation to explain that his neighbor was decapitated and his head was never found. Solomon adds another bit of morbid humor when he discloses that he "always thought that was funny." The incongruence of the appropriateness of the humor in relation to the violence and destruction he describes is what makes the humor grotesque.

The nascent violence in *Gummo* is expressed differently to the other films. There are several references to violence and a prevailing sense of tension remains throughout the film. This tension contributes to the sense that violence could erupt at almost any point in the film. However, aside from two brothers who playfully punch

each other, and a character who wrestles a chair in the middle of a kitchen before completely destroying it, the only real violence in the film comes in the shape of animal cruelty, specifically cat killing, in which cats are sold for meat to the local Chinese restaurant. This is a motif that recurs throughout the film, principally through the narrative strand that follows the entrepreneurial cat hunters, Tummler and Solomon.

Cats are subject to an inordinate amount of violence in *Gummo*.[7] Indeed the creatively sadistic killing of cats bookend the opening and closing credits of the film. In the beginning of the film we are introduced to Tummler seconds after the opening credits as a low level medium tracking shot follows the bare-chested Tummler holding a cat by the scruff as he walks toward a barrel filled with water which cuts to an oblique crane shot as he dunks the cat into it in order to drown it. The shot cuts to his arm plunged in the water with bubbles of the submerged suffocating cat rising to the surface. This is bookended by a sequence that comes seconds before the closing credits. Accompanied by Roy Orbison's song "Crying" which is non-diegetically juxtaposed overtop of the sequence, Tummler and Solomon are in medium shot standing in a field in the rain as they emotionlessly and continuously cock and shoot a cat with their BB guns as water drips from their rain soaked faces. Solomon is shot in profile on the left side of the framed in the middleground while Tummler is shot with his back to camera in foreground with the cat occupying the central perspective. After resting on the shot for a few moments the shot cuts to a close-up of Tummler looking down at the cat as the rain pours down his hair and face as he slightly trembles from cold before the shot cuts to an analytical shot of his gaze, a slightly high angle close-up of the rain drenched cat corpse. The cat turns out to be Foot-Foot, the missing cat of the three sisters which they have been searching for during the last half of the movie. This is followed by an isolated shot of Solomon repeatedly cocking and shooting the cat which inversely matches the one previously shown of Tummler. A straight medium long shot of the boys flanking the feline carcass follows with Tummler giving the cat a small kick to ensure that it is dead, at which point the boys simply gaze downward at their handy work as "Crying" continues to play. One last close-up follows showing Tummler looking downward at the cat in the pouring rain.

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[7] As I have discussed in the previous chapter, so are the people, but not in a directly violent manner.

A much briefer interlude of Tummler and Solomon's cat hunting exploits are illustrated in what is almost the exact midpoint of the movie. The juxtaposition of non-diegetic music again plays a role in shaping the ambiance of their violent activities. With the post-Black Metal track "Give the Human Devil His Due" by Mystifier non-diegetically superimposed, a cat corpse is shown tied to a tree and dangling from a rope upside-down in medium close-up as the arms of the otherwise offscreen Tummler and Solomon whip the cat corpse with switches. A quick pan left shows a shirtless Tummler entranced while whipping the cat before cutting to a low angle frontal close-up of Solomon, who is wearing a black t-shirt and a replica firefighter's hat while smoking a plastic tipped cigarillo, who is also entranced as he lashes the lifeless feline. The shot then cuts to a diagonal medium long shot of the two boys lashing the dangling cat which is tied-up by one of its legs. The shirtless, swimming trunk and white sneaker wearing Tummler is fully captured in the near middleground with Solomon framed slightly to the right with his back facing the camera from just below the waist up. The scene ends with an extreme close-up of the cat dangling from twine as the camera tracks its way down from the leg that it is hanging from down to its protruding tongue – a true image of the abjectly inflected conception of the Bakhtinian notion of the corporeal grotesque.

Other motifs of cat violence permeate the film, even if only in dialogue. Although they are distraught that their own cat is missing, prior to the cat's disappearance, even the three sisters discuss how, if their cat has babies, they will have to drown them. Recall the sequence discussed in the previous chapter in which the group of adolescents hanging out on a stoop discuss how they have to kill the strays because they are like vermin, and how one of the boys recalls how he was party to one stray having its mouth filled with gasoline and then set alight. Another recalls how she watched someone stick a cat in the microwave. The violence is grotesque because of the sociopathic disregard for lower life forms. Tummler and Solomon's acts are also grotesque because of the apathetic nature of their pursuits in viciously killing people's pets for financial gain. Their inhumaneness is accompanied by their mundane and banal attitude toward their pursuits which fosters the sense of anomie that pervades the mood and feel of the film. And it is the estranging sense of familiarity and the nonjudgmental sense of social acceptability with which this subject matter is imbued

that contributes to the grotesque. The naturalistic mise-en-scene and the various nonfictional, documentary cinematographic strategies reinforce the impressions of authenticity and verisimilitude of the conveyed violence that seems to permeate the everyday life and existence in *Gummo*'s Xenia.

SUMMATION

One of the overwhelming factors of the violence or threat of violence in Clark's and Korine's films is that there is no sense of catharsis, no closure, no moving on. It seems as if the tension will never be alleviated as the potential for violence is woven into the very fabric of the worlds that Clark and Korine convey. There is a constant tension and a foreboding sense that violence may erupt at any time. And unlike films whose narrative is driven by acts of violence – whether it be an action film or a horror film – the violence, when latent, seems to almost come out of the blue. Like horror films, it also seems to use the startle effect as one of its principal aesthetic strategies. The way in which violence is depicted undoubtedly adds to the shock and jolt that these scenes elicit. And while violence is not always itself grotesque, the suddenness, the duration, and the contemplating yet frantic style that mediates the depicted violence all contribute to what can appropriately be described as embodying a grotesque *effect*, which in turn elicits a grotesque *affect* as well as effecting the prevailing grotesque milieu of Clark's and Korine's films.

SUMMATION

The aesthetic dimensions of the subject matter represented and content depicted of Clark's and Korine's realist films revolve around particular themes that reflect the filmmakers' interests and objectives. Clark's interest is to portray disaffected hedonistic youth from urban, suburban, and semi-rural American environments. Korine's interest is to portray the dysfunctions and dynamics of American spaces, paying special attention to inhabitants, whether a particular family or city. Between them the grotesque manifests itself through: incest, pedophilia, adolescent sex, rape, animal cruelty, graphic depictions of full frontal nudity, explicit sex, some of which is unsimulated, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, the prostitution of the vulnerable, parricide, euthanasia, bigotry, misogyny, graphic depictions of drug preparation and consumption, foul-mouthed youths, unbridled violence, suburban unrest, urban squalor, and white trash reprobates. However, as I have reiterated throughout, it is not just the subject matter or content of these films alone that establish these filmmakers as artists of the grotesque. It is also their realist imperatives and motivations which contribute to their films as grotesque art. This includes the way in which the subject matter and content is audiovisually depicted – visual style; formal structure; compositionality and the effect this has on the texture, feel, mood, and the expressive attitude of the films – as much as it does the subject matter and content itself.

Points of doubt, however, emerged at times in my analysis regarding the

unassailability of my delineations of Clark's and Korine's films. While this was sometimes in relation to my explication of their films as grotesque, it primarily arose from my observations and attributions of their films as realist. However, I maintain that these moments of doubt or uncertainty revolving around my exploratory optics of the grotesque and realism are largely aberrations. And while these moments of uncertainty sometimes pose some troubling questions regarding my hypothesis, they never really undermined my argument. Rather, they validated the complexity of the films being explored. However, it also affirmed the possibility for a multitude of equally viable aesthetic frames of reference and conceptually led analysis of the audiovisual form and style of Clark's and Korine's films.

Because of the structures of Korine's films, unconventional for a narrative, even for art cinema and indie films, it would seem that an approach exploring these films that focuses on their avant-garde and experimental heritages in relation to the more non-narrative films of the American Underground would be just as productive as my approach contrasting his films with realist tendencies based on their observed verisimilitude. This could be argued more strongly for *julien* more so than with *Gummo*. The more varied imagery sources of *Gummo* anchors the collage approach of the film in televisual and cinematic modes of documentary such as travelogues, reality T.V., and video diary home movies, and therefore more closely to my analysis. The more consistent aesthetic unity, relatively speaking, regarding the look and structure of *julien*, as well as the more focused narrative trajectory, again relatively speaking, that centers on Julien and his family, draws attention to certain structural fissures and shifts to the formal assembly of the film, which would lend itself to historical comparison to avant-garde or experimental traditions of filmmaking. Indeed *Gummo*'s very inconsistency of image sourcing – film, video, still photography – and the mix between categorical and associational structuring of *Gummo* establishes a consistency through rhythm and pacing.

One such instance in *julien* where certain uncertainties were posed in relation to my analysis is the scene in which Julien is shown interacting with a number of the

occupants at the home for the blind where Julien works through a series of still digital video images. This is accompanied with a voiceover of Julien and the people with which he is purportedly interacting. As previously indicated, this element of *julien* is reminiscent of *La Jetée*, but the entirety of *La Jetée* is composed of a series of stills. Whereas the content of *julien* has stronger links a socially extended subject matter that is anchored by its verisimilitude, *La Jetée* is ultimately an Art Cinema version of a sci-fi film. Ultimately, because there is a relative unity in the film as realist when this technique is adduced to the organic whole of the film, it functions as a slideshow lecture rather than an abstract experimental form in the manner that *La Jetée* does.

Possibly even more troublesome is another moment of uncertainty in relation to my classification of realism that occurs earlier in the movie. It is a straight medium-long shot of Julien and his dad walking from the background into the foreground. Early into the shot, a still of Julien's father's head is superimposed onto the shot in close-up. Also juxtaposed over this palimpsest is Julien's father speaking of the Spanish conquest of Peru. This seemingly discordant layering of sound and image results in an aberrant moment that is more exemplary of Structural filmmaking or the non-narrative experimental filmmaking of American Underground filmmakers such as Bruce Connor, Ron Rice, and Stan Brakhage. However, it still fits into Korine's creative motivation derived from collage, but rather than a more *horizontal approach* to the decoupage and assembly of audiovisual material, this scene takes a more *vertical approach* by stacking the audiovisual material using a more layer-based assembly. Yet the surface texture of the video imagery prevents the scene from entirely eradicating some semblance of a realist aesthetic even in a scene as formally experimental as this. This is not dissimilar to the ways in which the experimental Underground films of the Kuchar brothers still maintained a home movie quality to many of their films. Scenes such as those mentioned above did pose challenges to my analytical contemplations. But I maintain that these are aberrations and that they do not undermine my argument that *julien* can be better appreciated through an understanding of its realist motivations. Instead it highlights the richness of the film and signals the other frames of reference that would also contribute to a fuller understanding and appreciation of *julien*.

In *Gummo*, there were aberrations, but this aberration revolved around the subject matter and content more than it did stylistic effects on form and structure. As Robert Sklar has pointed out, *Gummo* shares certain qualities with Kenneth Anger's discordant use of sound and image. However, while this discordance is an irregular strategy for a conventional narrative, it establishes an associational thematic unity and hence a loose narrative unity through the juxtaposition of music and imagery. Like *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, U.S.A., 1964), Korine paces *Gummo* by incorporating several sequences that coordinate various types of heavy metal with his imagery in an associational manner.

The Bunny Boy character, however, is the most troublesome character to the realist optic in *Gummo*. His presence is in some regards fitting with what we have come to associate with *Gummo*'s Xenia. His appearance is scrappy and dirty. He engages in behaviors such as pissing and spitting off of an overpass, skateboarding down a residential street, and smoking cigarettes while wearing nothing but a pair of swimming trunks and a pair of beat-up and stained white trainers. But the problem is that he is also wearing a pair of pink bunny ears and he does not speak a word throughout the film, and he also appears in one scene sitting in a public toilet stall ineptly playing an accordion. This character seems to have affinities with surrealist tendencies found in Fellini and Godard films that often have characters who drift without much development or explanation other than providing an expressive meta-commentary on some existential predicament or statement. This is especially apparent in one of the last scenes of the film in which Bunny Boy splashes around in a medium sized above ground pool with Helen and Dot in the middle of a pouring rainstorm. There is no diegetic sound while Roy Orbison's "Crying" is non-diegetically juxtaposed over the blue-tinged looking medium-long shot of the cavorting trio. This lyrical-poetic sequence reinforces a certain surrealist quality that runs throughout the film, which in no way contravenes the grotesque optic but it does pose questions regarding the realist one that I attribute to the film's prevailing aesthetic. And while it is difficult to reconcile this with the surreal-realism of the likes of Buñuel due to the parenthetical or bracketed status of the scenes placement and lack of integration to the rest of the film's collage patterning, this scene

remains an aberration at the end of the film, almost as if a punctuated moment of expressivity from Korine.

There were far less uncertainties or doubts regarding the realist imperatives of Clark's aesthetic agenda. His verité approach was typically deployed relatively consistently throughout his films and even when he used a more conventionalized narrative structure to formalize his film, the style was such that the form remained masked to such an extent that the verité style prevailed – shaky handheld and steadicam shots, longer takes, non-actors, the impression of unscripted or impromptu dialogue, and zooms and pans in favor of cuts. The one standout scene that raised some issue is the last sequence in *Ken Park* that shows three of four main protagonists, who are fully nude, engaged in sexual acts. Some acts, if we recall, are non-simulated and include graphic depictions of genitalia, oral sex, and even a scene showing one of the characters ejaculating. The sequence, however, intersperses various recording speeds that includes lyrical-poetic slow motion shots of the kids having sex with real time motion shots of the characters lounging about and talking. Again, like *julien*, because of the consistency of style and form up to that point in the film, the sudden alteration in pacing and form draws attention to the style and structure of the film. This scene seems to share a heritage with more with traditional exemplars of Art Cinema in which the stylized scene represents the expressive subjectivity of the filmmaker as a meta-commentary. Yet again because of the verisimilitude of the characters' actions in the scene and because of the content of their conversations and interactions when lounging about, the scene shifts its realist imperative from a naturalist-*Lukácsian* to a socialist realist-Brechtian approach rather than undermining the realist imperative altogether. But, nevertheless, it was a cause for pause and strongly signaled an alternative approach to realism that in some ways would highlight the very dynamics that I have argued are veiled throughout the majority of Clark's film style, and would signal an alternative heritage amongst which Clark could be situated.

Similar to the aforementioned sequence noted in *Ken Park*, *Bully* also challenged certain notions of realism of which I argue Clark's films are formally and stylistically

indicative. Again, however, rather than completely undercutting my hypothesis that *Bully* is, at least in part, best appreciated through certain understandings of realism, alternative traditions of realism seemed to emerge. Rather than the strong links with verité documentary styles which still remain, albeit to a weaker degree than his other films, *Bully* is strikingly closer in its visual style and decoupage to a telefilm. There are very few long shots. The majority of the film is framed from a very central position with the action taking place in the middle and foreground. The rhythm and pacing of the movie is very much orientated around an establishing shot, shot, counter-shot pattern. Shot times and cuts are also far more frequent in *Bully* than Clark's other films. The image is also far crisper in Bully than his other films, giving it a slicker look, relatively speaking. The film has the look and feel of an ABC Afterschool Special combined with a docudrama.[1] Like many American afterschool specials, the film is based on topical issues of the day involving teenage adolescent life and like a docudrama it is a fictional account based on the available facts of true real life events with added poetic license. In this sense, the social extendedness is more mimetic of reality than his other two films even if the style is the furthest away in terms of verisimilitude. But this shares with another televisual documentary tradition, the docudrama. The docudrama often has the look of a canned high budget production but the subject matter is anchored in some actual occurrence, as *Bully* is. So while the particular angle and strategies I suggest with regards to the realist imperative is challenged, the notion of realism itself in the broadest sense of the term remains intact. This does consequently shift the heritage in which *Bully* is situated, locating it amongst the 'afterschool special' in terms of content and subject matter and the docudrama in terms of its formal construction of narrative and rendering of truth-based content.[2]

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[1] ABC , the American Broadcasting Company, is one of the main terrestrial broadcast television stations would have hour long specials, approximately forty-five minutes with commercial breaks, for adolescents from the early 1970s to the early 1990s. The topics of the programs ranged from teen pregnancy to dealing with divorced parents to molestation. Not all episodes revolved around coping. Some were episodes that looked at achievement against the odds or the benefits of honesty, hard work, and graft.

[2] *ABC Afterschool Specials* include the likes of: *Pssst! Hammerman's After You!* (Regas, 16 January 1974), *Runaways* (Florea, 27 March 1974), *The Horrible Honchos* (Elikann, 9 March 1977), *The Terrible Secret* (Elikann, 5 March 1979), *Schoolboy Father* (Seidelman, 15 October 1977), *Stoned* (Herzfeld, 12 November 1980), *Tough Girl* (Thompson, 28 October 1981), *A Very Delicate Matter* (Kerven, 10 November 1982), *But It's Not My Fault* (Lobl, 22 March 1983), *Don't Touch* (Bridges, 6 November 1985), *Teen Father* (Hooks, 22 October 1986), *The Day My Kid Went Punk* (Field, 23 October 1987), *Jacqui's Dilemma* (Harrington and Watkin, 2 June 1994), *Boys Will Be Boys* (Van Ark, 15 September 1994), *Too Soon for Jeff* (Du Bois, 12

The moments of reconsideration with regards to my observations and attributions that the grotesque is a beneficial conceptual frame of reference for better appreciating the films of Clark and Korine, similar to my causes for pause with regards to my claims of verisimilitude and realism, did not so much raise doubts or uncertainty inasmuch as they were moments of realization that other conceptual frames may not only be equally viable but even extremely productive. The most notable instance of this is based on my argument that Korine does not only use the grotesque as a *means* for demonstrating something else, which he does do, but that the pervasiveness of his engagement with grotesque aesthetic strategies results in his entire films being representative of a grotesque *mode*. This contemplation occurred when I began pondering whether Korine's films would be more appropriately suited to be explored through the concept of the gothic and whether the grotesque was simply a means or a strategy through which the gothic was achieved.

I firmly believe that an exploration of Korine's films through the aesthetic concept of the gothic and situating his work amongst the American gothic heritage would bear fruitful results, especially in terms of the narrative themes and content of his films – the way in which he renders characters, the way in which they interact with their environments, and the overall milieu that he fosters through this interaction. It would be a useful exercise in looking at some of the ways that the gothic has transformed and been absorbed by contemporary narrative practices and art. Recall that I attributed a scene involving Julien singing in the bathtub as a motif that is indicative of gothic narrative techniques and representation. However, I maintain that, overall, Korine's films are more indicative of the grotesque mode with elements of the gothic rather than the other way around due to one major factor alone: gothic narratives are motivated by the repressed improprieties of its characters which remains tucked away and out of sight until it finally bubbles to the surface in some climatic finale after it can no longer be contained. The activities and behaviors of Korine's characters almost painstakingly take place on the surface for all to see and bear witness to. This characteristic enhances the grotesque tone of his films through the moral

September 1996). Some notable television docudramas includes: *The Burning Bed* (Greenwald, 8 October 1984), and *The Karen Carpenter Story* (Sargent, 1 January 1989), and Roe vs. Wade (Hoblit, 15 May 1989).

incongruities of his characters and their actions. Nevertheless, an exploration of the Korine's films as adaptations of the gothic tradition could shed light not only on the gothic tradition but also some of the narrative devices that Korine borrows from the literary world to tell his stories that, also typical of the gothic tradition, revolves around the eccentricities of humanity.

Also, while Clark defends the purity if his motives and rejects the remotest insistence, let alone allegation, of titillation and exploitation, his films could qualify as being modern instantiations of the exploitation or even grindhouse traditions of cinema. While many of the exploitation films of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s exploited a large faction of the cinema going public's desire for titillating imagery and subject matter that is on the fringes, if not entirely off the map, of what official culture may term 'good taste', films of this ilk have since been appraised for their aesthetic and critical socio-cultural reflections of the times that they were made and shown. Clark's films strike me as being relevant to this tradition and in the frankest and most pragmatic of terms. His insistence does strike me as a situation of the 'lady doth protest too much' in light of the evidence educed from a close analysis of his films.

The formal and stylistic strategies by which the above themes and motifs and grotesque tropes are conveyed are depicted through devices and techniques commonly associated with documentary forms of audiovisual production in cinema, nonfictional forms of television, and even non-entertainment based audiovisual production, such as surveillance. And, as I have elaborated in previous chapters, while they share strategies and propensities with a number of other movements and styles of filmmaking in the history of film, they also shape their films using their own distinct twists. Their emphasis on the urban and suburban landscapes and settings and environments are shown to be as grotesque as the characters themselves. A grotesque reality that only those who have lived within the underbelly of American society, the flipside of the American dream, which Clark and Korine have, can fully understand and appreciate. They provide the rest of humanity a keyhole peek into through their savage yet unflinchingly gritty and real art.

The grotesque aesthetics and indeed the grotesque effect that is aesthetically experienced from Clark's and Korine's films are the product of their aesthetic strategies and the cultural assumptions that they attempt to confront, transgress, and subvert. Or, in Murray Smith's terms, they are perversions of *both* art and culture.[3] Likewise, Carroll argues that while immorality is not an intrinsic feature of the grotesque that it is nevertheless often an element amongst the grotesque. He claims that some things can be regarded as grotesque according to their violation of moral norms, but that to do so is to classify them by metaphorical extension, and that such an attribution is without ontological salience. Yet it seems that in the case of Clark's and Korine's films the various ontologies, tropes, and functions of the grotesque are inextricably linked to the perverse transgression of existing moral and cultural boundaries and categories.

This connection between the morally perverse subject matter and its inextricable link with the overwhelmingly grotesque content is intensified all the more through Clark's and Korine's prevailingly realist aesthetic mode of representation, which is largely constructed around stimulating "an impression of what might be the real experience"[4] of the subject matter and content being conveyed. Geoff King encapsulates Clark's and Korine's films perfectly when he indirectly describes how their almost deceptively realist visual style not only shapes but intensifies the grotesque subject matter and content of their aesthetic:

> An *impression of authenticity* can also be fabricated more directly and deliberately, through the use of devices associated with documentary or news footage…techniques associated with documentary-realist forms have often been used in fiction features in an attempt to increase their claims to the status of verisimilitude. Unsteady, hand-held camerawork, inexact framing, restricted views and sudden zooms are among devices that can be used to create an impression that the filmmaker is capturing events as they unfold, unpredictably, before the camera – as is often the case, for practical reasons, in the world of documentary or newsreel – rather than that the events have been planned in advance and carefully staged *for* the camera.[5]

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[3] Op. Cit., Murray 217-225, 228-233.
[4] Op. Cit., King 147.
[5] Ibid., 108. The first italicized emphasis is mine; however, the second one is King's.

The deceptiveness of this docu-realist visual style not only shapes but intensifies the grotesque subject matter and content of their films. I say 'deceptive' because their realist styles tend to be ones typically associated with documentary modes of filmmaking.

Indeed, as Carroll suggests of fiction films using techniques and styles typical of documentary, Clark's and Korine's films incorporate documentary techniques "for expressive effect".[6] Similar to Carroll, King adds that while "[d]igital video may lend itself very well to the creation of a verité impression, its relatively flattened original image quality being capable of signifying harsh immediacy and presence, but a particular aesthetic is not hard-wired into the medium."[7] Both Carroll and King acknowledge the conventionalized and constructed status of these techniques and devices in terms of their representational currency as indicators of a particular mode of representation. They both acknowledge those strategies as nevertheless prompting particular effects in their activation of particular viewing schemata. King further affirms that the "use of formal devices designed to create an impression of documentary-type authenticity remains a contrivance", but this results in stimulating "specific effects" and "gives the film its particular impact"[8] because of its conventionalized status and the schemata that are activated in viewing such formal devices. Such devices regularly include the use of "[u]neven hand-held camerawork in a mixture of 16mm and Hi-8 video" where the "combination of the two kinds of footage immediately established a hierarchy of degrees of implied authenticity."[9] Nowadays the use of common low-grade video imagery serves to indicate a "looser and more spontaneous" image that appears to be "shot in an off-hand manner"; and when combined with an editing regime that purposefully establishes gaps and ellipses employed through "jump-cuts and elisions" creates a sense of "incompleteness and the existence of prominent absences".[10] The

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[6] Noel Carroll "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film" (*Theorizing the Moving Image*. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 243).
[7] Op. Cit., King 120.
[8] Ibid., 114.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 114-115.

imbuement of 'incompleteness' is "used as a signifier of reality" as it contributes generating a sense of realism or reality by creating an "impression of rough assembly" and further contributes to the impression of "unanticipated and unstaged developments" of the recorded footage.[11] To reiterate, not only does this reinforce and enhance the grotesque aesthetics of Clark and Korine, it establishes an inextricable link to their grotesque and realist aesthetics.

But Carroll's exemplars of cultural grotesques referred to in the GENERAL INTRODUCTION – such as bearded ladies, dwarfs, giants, and people missing limbs – are far too restrictive in accounting for the incongruity, ambivalence, and anomalousness of the corporeal manifested violations of morality and culture that Clark's and Korine's films exhibit – corporeal acts such as incest, pedophilia, and sexually sophisticated youth. Firstly, Carroll does not attribute the moral violation and transgression of behaviors and activities, which are determined by the establishment of a society as qualifying as a criterion of the grotesque. Carroll contextualizes his discussion through more hyperbolic film genres – horror, fantasy, science-fiction, (slapstick) comedy. The moral violation, according to Carroll, is a consequence, a function, of his structural-ontological conception of the grotesque. The grotesque itself *is* a product of the violation of bodily norms. So, for example, when a person's arm is ripped off in a horror film, the moral violation of causing extreme harm to another human is not grotesque itself but is a consequence of violating bodily norms. And while not all acts of violence in cinema result in the grotesque, Carroll's position seems to neglect the dynamics of realist movies. I take the position that in aesthetically realist films, certain moral violations or transgressions, especially taboos, are an inextricable criterion of the grotesque. These moral transgressions act as schemata that are stimulated in realist expressions of the grotesque. While still acted through or enacted upon the body, the severity of the moral violation, as expressed through realism, can qualify it *as* a criterion of grotesque. I submit that the films of Clark and Korine combine domains of the social world that are "generally thought to be otherwise exclusive"[12] or they contradictorily imbue their characters with complex ambivalences – kids

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[11] Ibid., 114.

[12] Op. Cit., "The Grotesque Today" 296.

engaged in predatory sexual activity, parents having sex with kids, kids engaged in fetishistic sexual acts, kids conspiring to kill their friends, morally conscious reprobates, incestuous relationships leading to pregnancy, to name only a few.

Some people in Clark's and Korine's films qualify as grotesque according to Carroll's classification. These are people who have medically abnormal bodies. This is most apparent in Korine's films. Korine's films also more readily demonstrate a cultivated grotesque abnormality, even though they are anatomically 'normal'. The films of both filmmakers nevertheless violate "our standing categories or concepts; they are subversions of our common expectations"[13] and perceptions of the way people should (figuratively speaking) look when we encounter them, especially Korine. An extension of Carroll's concept should be made to also include the excessive violation and transgression of certain moral and cultural categories. This is especially the case amongst grotesque cinematic art and the corresponding effects and subsequent affects that they elicit which is created using an intensified verisimilitude and realism as a mode of representation.

The realist film art of Clark and Korine combines social and cultural categories and domains that firmly result in what Carroll refers to as 'category mistakes' or 'classificatory errors' according to his theory of the grotesque.[14] These anomalies violate and transgress our "standing categories" well beyond the limits of what is deemed acceptable.[15] The discussion of their films above has demonstrated how their grotesque aesthetics incongruously subvert standing concepts and conceptual domains that results in conceptual anomalies, which in turn "violate[s], transgress[es], problematize[s], or jam[s] our standing categories".[16] Whether physical, cultural or a combination thereof, the grotesque in Clark's and Korine's films invoke and elicit repulsion, fear, and anxiety, fascination, allure, laughter or some ambivalent combination of these. The grotesque in the films of Clark and Korine is able to foster such a wide range of "disparate functions" because they are structurally rooted and

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 303.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 309.

motivated by transgressing concepts and categories (e.g. conventionalized narrative structures or characters who have clearly defined moral positions). The grotesque is an aesthetic that is flexible enough to facilitate a variety of "intense" emotions and "novelty" and it is "almost by definition…a departure from the ordinary".[17] The aforementioned affective responses are corroborations of a successful grotesque aesthetic agenda which emerges from this incongruous combination or crossing of cultural and moral domains – often via the explicit and graphic rendering of the corporeal and material elements that comprise the subject matter and content of the films. The incongruity elicits ambivalent or dissonant responses cognitively, emotionally, and indeed, viscerally. Given the aforementioned construction of the grotesque as adapted from Carroll (and others highlighted throughout the previous two chapters), and the aesthetic strategies of form, style, and narrative storytelling of Clark and Korine, I would suggest that they and their films sit comfortably amongst the realist and grotesque traditions of film *and* art.

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[17] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Through an exploration of both the aesthetic visions of Clark and Korine as well as a close descriptive analysis of their respective oeuvres, I have shown how their creative visions and motivations derive from a grotesque imagination, which is simultaneously motivated by a realist imperative. Correspondingly, I have shown how the grotesque and realist aesthetics that Clark and Korine envisioned are aesthetically manifest – stylistically and formally – through grotesque and realist themes and motifs. My objectives, more exploratory than theoretical, have been to contribute to two conversations and debates going on in Film Studies, which revolve around 1) the dialogue currently taking place involving Clark's and Korine's filmmaking; and 2) the discussion involving the status and presence of the grotesque in cinema.

I have contributed to the conversations and debates going on in Film Studies that surround Clark's and Korine's films through an exploratory and conceptual analysis of their films and aesthetic visions as articulated by the filmmakers themselves and by conducting a broadly formal analysis of their films. This analysis addressed the aesthetic strategies that they employ, their aesthetic imaginations, and how their films are motivated and shaped by a realist and grotesque aesthetic imperative. In doing this, my discussion of Clark's and Korine's films has also attempted to extend the discussion of the grotesque in cinema to capture how their realist film aesthetics enhances their grotesque film aesthetics. I have adapted several of the notions and tropes of the grotesque and perceptual and aesthetic notions of realism to assist my

elucidation of Clark's and Korine's oeuvres. In particular, I have adapted Carroll's structural-ontological conception of the grotesque as a violation or transgression of bodily norms to include the ways in which the moral transgression and violation of norms is an essential criterion of the grotesque in realist films. Also, by advancing Murray Smith's exploration of perversion, I have demonstrated that the perverse transgression and violation of certain moral norms and taboos are not merely a function or consequence of the grotesque in Clark's and Korine's films but are a fundamental criterion.

Like most film critics and historians that engage with the grotesque, the primacy of the physical, that is the material and bodily world, is fundamental to engaging with and understanding the grotesque. Like Lavery's and Stubbs' explorations of Fellini's oeuvre, I chronicled the gallery of banal and mundane grotesques that populate the diegetic worlds of Clark's and Korine's films. Similarly, like Paul and Werrett, I looked at the ways in which the grotesque of Clark's and Korine's films is filled with ambivalent, even contradictory moments that result in the elicitation of similarly ambivalent responses. However, unlike Paul and Werrett, the films of Clark and Korine are fundamentally linked to their perceptual realist approaches and the social extendedness that their films share, not only through the content of their films, but also their various documentary techniques that texture their films and enhance their sense of the real. In other instances, like Kolbenschlag, the transgression and violation of certain societal norms result in a sense of dissonance rather than ambivalence, but rather than an alienating dissonance resulting from a perceived distortion, the dissonance and disbelief in Clark's and Korine's films worryingly reinforces a sense of astonishment due to its perceived status as something remotely real.

Unlike those that have referred to the distortive and misleading aspects of Clark's and Korine's films, I argue that their cinematic art provides a more authentic expression of certain crevices of the marginal underbelly of American culture and society. Like Gandal, Giroux, and hooks I have touched on the ways in which their films

broach and comment upon issues of class, race, gender, and disability. But rather than engaging with the representational politics of their films from a symptomatic perspective, I have shown how, as film artists, they express their subject matter and content by adducing films and filmmakers from other eras and movements from which they derive inspiration and influence, as well as through a more concerted analysis of the ways in which they craft and shape their films through particular aesthetic strategies and mannerisms. Like McRoy, Crucianelli, and King I argue that their grotesque aesthetics are principally motivated by realist motivations, which are associated with notions of immediacy and authenticity as if what is occurring onscreen is happening right there and then without premeditation.

While I argue that the films explored in my thesis are exemplary of a realist and grotesque aesthetic, I am in no way suggesting that that they are the only contemporary films to embrace aesthetics of the grotesque. Indeed as Noël Carroll has observed:

> Presently the grotesque proliferates in mass culture at a rate almost as accelerated as pod people in a small town. Just as it was once claimed that "the sun never sets on the British Empire," it can be said now…that without much effort, one could, given the composition of contemporary mass culture, find something to quench one's thirst for the grotesque every hour on the hour every day of the week.[1]

Of course, there are a multitude of films that have continued to adopt more conventional notions of the grotesque in more hyperbolic and fantastical genres such as horror, science-fiction, fantasy, and comedy films, which are the very types of films that Carroll attributes as grotesque. Yet other contemporary dramatic or melodramatic films, which are not hyperbolic genres, contain grotesque elements and are also shaped using realist strategies, even if only shaped through a dramatic realism that obeys the laws of the physical world, but organized using a more refined classical narrative structure. However, other contemporary American films, films which also tend to be independent in the broadest sense of the term, that contain both grotesque and realist elements are far more diluted with regards to the presence of their grotesque, realist, or both aesthetic elements. The grotesque and realist

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[1] Op. Cit., The Grotesque Today 291.

qualities are not as explicit, graphic, or intensive as those that shape Clark's and Korine's films are.

The films of Todd Solondz, which include *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (U.S.A., 1995), *Happiness* (Solondz, U.S.A., 1998), *Storytelling* (Solondz, U.S.A., 2001), and *Palindromes* (Solondz, U.S.A., 2004) are undoubtedly filled with grotesque moments. The themes and motifs of his films comprise issues revolving around teenage sexuality, pedophilia, underage pregnancy, and more general suburban strife. His darkly comical farces satirizing suburban middle class America address similar content and subject matter to those of Clark and Korine, but the visual style and mode of address of his films is more indicative of the artifice of what is now perceived to be the conventional indie flick. It adopts a morose and stoical approach to characters and a loose narrative structure that can be situated somewhere between the drift of art cinema and the causally-driven narratives of classical narrative structure. While they appear more realist than most mainstream narrative cinema, the dramatic stoicism and almost a-emotional tone of the films still have a very artificial feel to them with an overall form more similar to Jim Jarmusch films.

Other films constructed using more conventional or classical narrative techniques can also purvey the grotesque. Sequences and scenes in the films that I have explored in this thesis which adopt these techniques have demonstrated this. Some films, however, are overwhelmingly constructed using more conventional narrative filmmaking techniques without the same realist techniques of nonfictional and documentary verisimilitude that I argue Clark and Korine employ in their filmmaking. Films such as *L.I.E.* (Cuesta, U.S.A., 2001), *Thirteen* (Hardwicke, U.S.A., 2003), and *The Brown Bunny* (Gallo, U.S.A./Japan/France, 2003) contain grotesque elements, and from more classical perspectives of realism past, they are even shaped using antiquated techniques of verisimilitude from the history of film. Moreover, in the cases of both *L.I.E.* and *Thirteen,* while the grotesque is present amongst these films, the elements are not strong enough to provide an overwhelmingly grotesque aesthetic in the same way that I argue it is the case in the films of Clark and Korine. The texture of the image

of the film has a rough gritty look to it which establishes some semblance of verité documentary aesthetics, and the contentious subject matter and content of both films revolve around the activities and behavior of underage teens and their interpersonal relationships with their peers and adults. In *L.I.E.,* the grotesque emerges from the characterization and behavior of Big John (Brian Cox), and the ambivalence that stems from his likeability mixed with the abject disgust of his sexual predilection for teenage boys which is similar to the father in *Happiness*. *Thirteen's* grotesque elements stem from the subject matter, but not necessarily the content depicted. The subject revolves around the developing friendship of two thirteen year old girls, Tracy (Evan Rachel Wood) and Evie (Nikki Reed), who steal, drink, do drugs, skip school, self-mutilate, and have sexual encounters. On the surface, this sounds a lot like a version of *Kids* with female characters in the main focus. While the film was co-scripted by the fifteen year old Reed, and similarly provided an intimate look into some of the deviant antics of young adolescents as Korine's insights as the scriptwriter did for *Kids*; Hardwicke's more tightly construed classical narrative film structure and the distinctive lack of scenarios involving the sexuality and sexual escapades of the girls lessen the impact and perhaps even presence of the grotesque.

There are also films that are closer to the mainstream, Hollywood independents, such as *American Beauty* (Mendes, U.S.A., 1999) that deals with much of the same subject matter as the films of Clark and Korine. Indeed, it is virtually a watered-down version of one of the plotlines of Solondz's film, *Happiness*, in which a respectable middleclass psychologist father and husband drugs and rapes a twelve year old boy who is the friend of his son. Intriguingly, the discrepancies in content are so vast that it reshapes the impact of the film's aesthetics to such an extent that films such as *American Beauty* are not really grotesque at all, even though the subject matter shares great similarities. The main character, Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), is sexually obsessed with his daughter's friend, Angela Haynes (Mena Suvari), whom he daydreams about, but the film maintains a very tame representation of these things, which keeps the carnal quarantined within the domain of the cerebral and the philosophical.

The Brown Bunny (Gallo, U.S.A./Japan/France, 2003), on the other hand, is not full of grotesque moments nor are its premise or themes typically found in the grotesque; however, one grotesque scene tinges the entire film as grotesque. The film follows a road trip that a professional motorbike racer, Bud Clay (Vincent Gallo), makes from New Hampshire to California while he attempts to reconcile his emotional unrest and the void he feels in his inability to live without his true love, Daisy (Chloë Sevigny), who broke his heart. The textural aesthetics of the film comes from a grainy 16mm stock which is largely shot handheld and thus contributes to a certain verité look of the film. It is formally assembled in a manner that has become typical of indie flicks or international art-cinema, using a loose episodic narrative structure that drifts as it traces Bud's journey. During an awkward and temporary reunion between Bud and Daisy in a dingy motel, Bud receives unsimulated oral sex to climax from Daisy (and Sevigny) in close-up. This moment is graphic, but the scene discloses the revelation that Daisy is dead and the narrative involving Daisy cheating on him at a party and becoming a drug addict are the stories Bud is telling himself so that he can deal with the guilt that he feels for her death. It is not a film that is shaped through the grotesque as much as it is a film that has a pregnant grotesque moment which nevertheless seems to emblematize the film as a whole.

Clark's and Korine's varied grotesque realist aesthetics do not reflect a particularly American style of filmmaking, although their subject and content do attempt to directly speak to a neglected portion of the American experience – the margins, the underbelly, and the hidden corridors of the urban, suburban, and semi-rural American landscape. In saying that, there are a number of contemporary European films that embrace the grotesque and realist aesthetics to some degree, such as *The Idiots* (von Trier, Denmark/Sweden/France/Netherlands/Italy, 1998), *Baise-Moi* (Despentes and Trinh Thi, France, 2000); *Irréversible* (Noé, France, 2002); and *Dog Days* (Seidl, Austria, 2001).

The Idiots shares aesthetic similarities with Clark's and Korine's films. It is the second official Dogme film made and released, and uses a video verité visual style

to follow a commune of people who revolt against the established normality of polite society by infiltrating social spaces and behaving like mentally retarded or disturbed patients who are acting out or agitated. The grotesque is extended through characterization (i.e. characters who behave mentally retarded as a political tool) to scenes of explicit and graphic un-simulated sex that take place in the film. These acts of the bodily and behavioral grotesque generate ambivalence throughout as their behaviors can be funny, but are also very unsettling, in that they create a real sense of discomfort in the knowledge that the characters are purposely acting the way that they are.

Baise-Moi, which translates to "Fuck Me", is a road movie about two women, Nadine (Karen Bach) and Manu (Raffaëla Anderson), who encounter each other by happenstance after each goes on the run after experiencing traumas, and set out to enact their revenge. The film is filled with non-simulated sex scenes and is framed and staged as if it were made for television. It is shot like a porn movie from the days of Hi-8 video and is also lit accordingly, also resembling a daytime soap opera or a made-for-T.V. movie. However, the grotesque here extends beyond the subject matter and content and even the visual style of the film. The grotesque here operates on a broader conceptual level in relation to Baise-Moi in that it not only challenged the boundaries and distinctions of art and porn, it collapsed the distinction to such an extent that only the intentions and motivations for making the film and its marketing and exhibition status are what distinguished it in the public domain as fictional narrative cinema from a porn flick. Another French exemplar of the grotesque, Irréversible, is a conventionally themed melodrama that deals with the various states of the relationship of a couple that is punctuated with two jolting moments. These scenes include a brutally graphic rape scene that lasts around fifteen minutes with virtually no cuts, and a murder that sees a character's face smashed by a fire extinguisher in a nightclub to the point of disintegration while an onlooker in the background masturbates. Both scenes supersede the conventionality of the genre and these emblematic scenes confer the film's grotesque status. These scenes inject a brutality and violence that are more typically found in exploitation or horror films rather than

the majority of commercially released art cinema.

Finally, *Dog Days* (Seidl, Austria, 2001) is probably the closest match to Clark's and Korine's films in the way that it chronicles, not only the characters, but the landscape that the characters populate and inhabit. Like the films that comprise this thesis, *Dog Days* chronicles the mundanely bizarre and banally odd inhabitants of the suburbs of Vienna. The film is a multiform narrative that chronicles the lives of several residents of a Vienna suburb during a particularly hot summer whose lives intersect periodically throughout the film. Moreover, the formal and stylistic aesthetics of the film are shot and assembled using the same verité techniques and devices found in *Kids*, *Ken Park*, and the majority of both *Gummo* and *Julien Donkey-Boy*. The gallery of grotesque characters, their idiosyncrasies, and their activities are not unlike those rendered in *Gummo*. The microcosm of the Vienna suburb is full of literal and figurative grotesques which illustrates just how extraordinary and grotesque the banal and ordinary is when if you take the time to look close enough.

All of these films are the products of grotesque imaginations that are motivated, at least in part, by a realist impulse. Investigating what their particular motivations and intentions for creating realist and grotesque films are, however, is not within the scope of this thesis. Aside from von Trier and possibly Seidl, however, their aesthetic approach lacks the perceptual realist strategies of Clark's and Korine's films, which significantly affects the intensity, if not the presence, of the grotesque elements that permeate their films, at least according to the framework that I have employed to explore cinematic realism and the grotesque here.

In his book, *From Antz to Titanic: Reinventing Film Analysis*, Martin Barker proposes that:

> *...a film analysis is valuable to the extent that it raises and clarifies questions, concepts, approaches, which indicate how that film might be researched in other, wider contexts*. This is the sense in which film analyses are of necessity preliminarily [*sic.*]. And they ought to be more persuasive when they signal clearly *how* that further investigation might

be undertaken.[2]

It should be pointed out that Barker's objective is to develop a formal approach that procedurally accounts for what he views as an otherwise implied audience and the presuppositions that entails in a given film analysis. The objective for a more transparent analytical process and its working mechanisms – methods and heuristics – ought be commended and indeed welcomed if we are to strive for theoretical and empirical rigor. Yet his proposition immediately raises two issues for me, one which is of more general concern and the other more specific to my endeavors in this thesis. The former is his insistence that a film analysis should lead to further research. While I in no way disagree with his assertion, I would argue that any worthwhile research project in the arts and humanities, regardless of its methodological framework, should facilitate further research endeavors and contributions to knowledge. My second point of contention, and this may be affected by my own endeavors throughout this thesis, is that film analysis is a worthwhile approach in-and-of-itself regardless of future research projects and agendas that may follow. I understand that Barker is motivated by audience studies and more of what can be described as cinema culture, but with a more object centered approach that looks to explore and address more art historical concerns of films – personal style and expressivity, style and form, historical interrelations to other films and art and all in which that entails (i.e. genres and cycles, traditions and heritages, movements, etc.) – the authority of knowledge starts and ends with the critic or historian. This is not to say that there are not implied presuppositions with regards to the spectator or audience, especially when it comes to intended meanings and affects, but this is secondary to the creative intent, construction, and manifestation of the film object itself.

I have demonstrated that one of the fundamental components in furnishing the grotesque aesthetics that I have identified as shaping Clark's and Korine's films is as much about *how* the content of their films are visually rendered – technically, stylistically, formally – as it is *what* the content entails. I have demonstrated that the

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[2] Op. Cit. barker and Austin 186. Emphasis in original.

stylistic and formal strategies of these films impress a sense of reality and objectivity commonly associated with various non-fiction and documentary forms of filmmaking, including home movies, surveillance footage, and direct cinema and cinema verité filmmaking. I have argued that this enhances, if not constitutes, their grotesque content. Moreover, I have shown that, while somewhat ironic, it is Clark's and Korine's romantic predilection for experimentation and their maverick attitudes that facilitate and confound their perceptually realist aesthetic styles. This is something that is even more dramatically apparent when contrasting their films with films that share similar subject matter, but whose content and visual style differs significantly.

While the methodological framework that I have employed is formalist, as Buckland illustrates in his concise yet succinctly erudite survey of formalist approaches in Film Studies, other formalist approaches would yield quite different output. Indeed, as I point out in the summation of the last two chapters, one could approach the films of Cark and Korine from a formalist perspective that situates Clark's and Korine's films amongst avant-garde rather than realist traditions of filmmaking. Likewise, a framework led by the gothic rather than the grotesque may also bear fruit in developing a richer appreciation of the literary heritage from which Clark's and Korine's films are situated. Similarly, while I have touched upon some of the influences and inspirations – filmmakers, artists, writers – that have contributed to shaping Clark and Korine's aesthetic vision, a more detailed historical genealogy of the films that share the formal and thematic qualities of Clark and Korine's films would be useful in establishing a more panoramic view of the chronology of the grotesque and realist aesthetics that they employ. Moreover, a wider cross-cultural comparison of films produced and received from other national-cultural contexts in conjunction with the cultural factors that shape those films – the social phenomena and art and literary worlds from which they draw inspiration and influence – would also be productive.

Furthermore, a combination of grotesque and realist aesthetics is also not the sole remit of contemporary cinema. This has been demonstrated by my own explorations alone in which an array of filmmakers and films have influenced, inspired,

or in some way established aesthetic precedents for Clark's and Korine's films. Indeed a combination of the grotesque and realism can be traced throughout the history of cinema, and while the explicit and graphic nature of certain subject matter and content has become increasingly less restricted, there are key moments – films, filmmakers, and even movements – that incorporate both aesthetic strategies of realism and the grotesque that in some way still hold true today. This was cursorily demonstrated throughout my own exploration of Clark's and Korine's films which sees familiarity in the films of Bunuel, Godard, Herzog, Waters, Morrissey, Eisenstein, Wiseman, Morris, and Blank to name only a few.

Moreover, an archaeology of what discursively constitutes the grotesque and how that contributes to the reception of a film being critically referred to as grotesque or subsumed under the grotesque as an aesthetic category would also contribute to further elucidations of the grotesque in cinema. Although a slight shift in focus, this would be a useful endeavor for better understanding the concept of the grotesque, and hence the appropriateness of its extension to particular films and the classification of particular films as qualifying as grotesque. This would in turn establish the foundations for a broader exploration of other channels of discourse and the status of the grotesque in other domains of film scholarship, such as audience response, reception studies, and the critical use of the concept in film journalism.

My ambitions were modest. I wanted to find a balance and broach the gap between the literal, nonspecific formal analyses and the more conceptually led analysis of the films of Clark and Korine through what I called a close descriptive analysis of their films. In doing this I took an intimate look at the creative intentions and motivations of the two filmmakers as well as the formalized expressivity of their aesthetic visions by examining the constructional components and dimensions of the form, style, themes, and subject matter of the resultant film objects. However, this was motivated and led by a conceptual framing logic, that the above is indicative of broader aesthetic traditions in the history of art and cinema. The stylistic and formal strategies of these films are one of the overwhelmingly fascinating dimensions and, ultimately, ironies of these films. The

various devices and techniques employed to impress a sense of authenticity and verisimilitude commonly associated with nonfiction and documentary forms of filmmaking are the products of aesthetic expressions and aesthetic ideals which are themselves the result of extremely romantic imaginations. The prevailing motive of these films seems to be an attempt to create an impression of the grotesque not only *through* realism but *as* realism. Ultimately, what I hope to have shown is that while the aesthetics of the grotesque are still most commonly associated with more hyperbolic genres and modes of representation, through the films of Clark and Korine if you take moment to stop and look around you, you'll see that the grotesque is everywhere. It encompasses our daily lives and it is often blended amongst the fabric of the banalities and mundaneness of everyday life.

With that being said, I do hope that my research will lead to future contributions and elucidations of knowledge and even revisions where and when appropriate. There are a number of directions and variations in approach that would provide useful additions to the contribution of knowledge not only to studies of Clark's and Korine's films but also the status and presence of the grotesque in cinema. Indeed there are a variety of alternative directions that can be taken or further contributions that can be made from my research endeavors and output.

APPENDICES

DOGME '95 DECLARATION[1]

DOGME '95 is a collective of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995, DOGME '95 has the expressed goal of countering "certain tendencies" in the cinema today.

DOGME '95 is a rescue action!

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby ... false!

To DOGME '95 cinema is not individual!

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratisation of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the media becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase "avant-garde" has military connotations. Discipline is the answer ... we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

DOGME '95 counters the individual film by the principle of presenting an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticised to death, they said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded.

The "supreme" task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? Is that what the "100 years" have brought us? Illusions via which emotions can be communicated?...By the individual artist's free choice of trickery?

Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance. Having the characters' inner lives justify the plot is too complicated, and not "high art". As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise. The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.

To DOGME '95 the movie is not illusion!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGME '95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

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[1] http://www.martweiss.com/film/dogma95-thevow.shtml (Retrieved: 18 February 2006).

THE VOW OF CHASTITY[1]

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).

2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).

3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).

4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).

5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.

6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)

7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)

8. Genre movies are not acceptable.

9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.

10. The director must not be credited.

Furthermore I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a "work", as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.

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[1] http://www.martweiss.com/film/dogma95-thevow.shtml (Retrieved: 18 February 2006).

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2001: A Space Odyssey (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1968)

Accattone! (Pasolini, Italy, 1961)

The African Queen (Huston, U.K., 1951)

Aguirre: The Wrath of God (Herzog, Germany/Peru/Mexico, 1972)

The All Nighter (Hoffs, U.S.A., 1987)

Amarcord (Fellini, Italy/France, 1973)

Amateur (Hartley, U.S.A./U.K./France, 1994)

American Beauty (Mendes, U.S.A., 1999)

American Graffiti (Lucas, U.S.A., 1973)

American Pie (Weitz, U.S.A., 1999)

American Pie 2 (Rogers, U.S.A., 2001)

American Wedding (Dylan, U.S.A./Germany, 2003)

Angels with Dirty Faces (Curtiz, U.S.A., 1938)

Animal House (Landis, U.S.A., 1978)

Another Day in Paradise (Clark, U.S.A., 1998)

Army of Darkness (Raimi, U.S.A., 1992)

Bad Taste (Jackson, New Zealand, 1987)

Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1975)

Barton Fink (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A./U.K., 1991)

Base-Moi (Despentes, France, 2000)

Batman Returns (Burton, U.S.A./U.K., 1992)

Baywatch (Berk, Bonann and Schwartz, U.S.A., 1989-2001)

Beetlejuice (Burton, U.S.A., 1988)

Beneath the Skin (Condit, U.S.A., 1981)

The Big Lebowski (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A./U.K., 1998)

Blade Runner (Scott, U.S.A./Singapore/Hong Kong, 1982)

The Blair Witch Project (Myrick and Sanchez, U.S.A., 1999)

Blood Simple (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A., 1984)

Blow Job (Warhol, U.S.A., 1963)

Blue in the Face (Auster, U.S.A., 1995)

Blue Movie (Warhol, U.S.A., 1969)

Blue Velvet (Lynch, U.S.A., 1986)

Bonnie and Clyde (Penn, U.S.A., 1967)

Brazil (Gilliam, U.K., 1985)

The Breakfast Club (Hughes, U.S.A., 1985)

The Bride of Frankenstein (Whale, U.S.A., 1935)

Broken Flowers (Jarmusch, U.S.A./France, 2005)

The Brood (Cronenberg, Canada, 1979)

The Brown Bunny (Gallo, U.S.A./Japan/France, 2003)

Bubble (Soderbergh, U.S.A., 2005)

Buffalo '66 (Gallo, U.S.A., 1998)

Bully (Clark, U.S.A./France, 2001)

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Hill, U.S.A., 1969)

The Butcher Boy (Jordan, Ireland/U.S.A., 1997)

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Carrie (De Palma, U.S.A., 1976)

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The Celebration (Vinterberg, Denmark/Sweden, 1998)

Chelsea Girls (Morrissey and Warhol, U.S.A., 1966)

Chimes at Midnight (Welles, France/Spain/Switzerland, 1965)

Chinatown (Polanski, U.S.A., 1974)

Christine (Clarke, U.K., 1987)

Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger IV (Kaufman, U.S.A., 2000)

Class of Nuke 'Em High (Haines, Herz and W. a. k. a. Kaufman], U.S.A., 1986)

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Clerks (Smith, U.S.A., 1994)

A Clockwork Orange (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1971)

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Spielberg, U.S.A./U.K., 1977)

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Cool Hand Luke (Rosenberg, U.S.A., 1967)

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Days of Heaven (Malick, U.S.A., 1978)

Dead Alive (Jackson, New Zealand, 1992)

Dead End Kids (Wyler, U.S.A., 1937)

Dead Ringers (Cronenberg, Canada/U.S.A., 1988)

Death Becomes Her (Zemeckis, U.S.A., 1992)

Death Scenes (Bougas, U.S.A., 1989)

Deep Throat (Damiano, U.S.A., 1972)

Desperate Living (Waters, U.S.A., 1977)

Destricted (Clark, U.S.A./U.K., 2006)

The Devil in Miss Jones (Damiano, U.S.A., 1973)

Dimensions of Dialogue (Švankmajer, Czechoslovakia, 1982)

Dirty Dancing (Ardolino, U.S.A., 1987)

Dog Days (Seidl, Austria, 2001)

The Doom Generation (Araki, U.S.A./France, 1995)

Down By Law (Jarmusch, U.S.A./West Germany, 1986)

Drugstore Cowboy (van Sant, U.S.A., 1989)

The Easy Life (Risi, Italy, 1962)

El Mariachi (Rodriguez, Mexico/U.S.A., 1992)

El Topo (Jodorowsky, Mexico, 1970)

Electra Glide in Blue (Guercio, U.S.A., 1973)

Elephant (van Sant, U.S.A., 2003)

The Elephant Man (Lynch, U.S.A., 1980)

Empire (Warhol, U.S.A., 1962-1963)

Eraserhead (Lynch, U.S.A., 1977)

Even Dwarfs Started Small (Herzog, Germany, 1970)

The Evil Dead (Raimi, U.S.A., 1981) *Evil*

Dead II (Raimi, U.S.A., 1987) *Excalibur*

(Boorman, U.S.A./U.K., 1981) *The*

Exorcist (Friedkin, U.S.A., 1973)

Eyes Wide Shut (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1999)

Faces (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1968)

Fargo (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A., 1996)

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Heckerling, U.S.A., 1982)

Fata Morgana (Herzog, Germany, 1971)

Fatal Attraction (Lyne, U.S.A., 1987)

Fear, Anxiety & Depression (Solondz, U.S.A., 1989)

Fellini Satyricon (Fellini, Italy/France, 1969)

Female Trouble (Waters, U.S.A., 1974)

Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Hughes, U.S.A., 1986)

The Firm (Clarke, U.K., 1989)

Flesh (Morrissey, U.S.A., 1968)

Flirt (Hartley, U.S.A./Germany/Japan, 1995)

The Fly (Cronenberg, U.K./U.S.A., 1986)

Fountain (Mamin, U.S.S.R., 1988)

Frankenstein (Whale, U.S.A., 1931)

Freak Orlando (Ottinger, Germany, 1981)

Freaks (Browning, U.S.A., 1932)

From Dusk till Dawn (Rodriguez, U.S.A., 1996)

Full Frontal (Soderbergh, U.S.A., 2002) *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, U.K., 1987) *Germany Year Zero* (Rossellini, Italy, 1948) *Gleaming the Cube* (Clifford, U.S.A., 1989) *The Graduate* (Nichols, U.S.A., 1967) *Gummo* (Korine, U.S.A., 1997)

Hairspray (Waters, U.S.A., 1988)

Happiness (Solondz, U.S.A., 1998)

Heat (Morrissey, U.S.A., 1972)

Heaven Help Us (Dinner, U.S.A., 1985)

Henry Fool (Hartley, U.S.A., 1997)

The Holy Mountain (Jodorowsky, Mexico/U.S.A., 1973)

Holy Smoke (Campion, U.S.A./Australia, 1999)

Housing Problems (Antsey and Elton, U.K., 1935)

The Hudsucker Proxy (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A./U.K./Germany, 1994)

I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (LeRoy, U.S.A., 1932)

I Never Promised You A Rose Garden (Page, U.S.A., 1977)

I Was a Teenage Werewolf (Fowler, U.S.A., 1957)

The Idiots (von Trier, Denmark/Sweden/France/Netherlands/Italy, 1998)

In Cold Blood (Brooks, U.S.A., 1967)

In the Company of Men (LaBute, U.S.A./Canada, 1997)

Inland Empire (Lynch, U.S.A./France/Poland, 2006)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Kaufman, U.S.A., 1978)

Irréversible (Noé, France, 2002)

Jackie Brown (Tarantino, U.S.A., 1997)

Jaws (Spielberg, U.S.A., 1975)

The Jazz Singer (Crosland, U.S.A., 1927)

The Jerry Springer Show (M. E. N. U. Televison, U.S.A., 1991-Present)

Julien Donkey-Boy (Korine, U.S.A., 1999)

Ken Park (Clark, U.S.A./Netherlands/France, 2002)

Kids (Clark, U.S.A., 1995)

Kill Bill (Tarantino, U.S.A., 2003 and 2004)

The Killing (Kubrick, U.S.A., 1956)

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1976)

The King of Comedy (Scorsese, U.S.A., 1982)

Kytice (Brabec, Czech Republic, 2000)

L.I.E. (Cuesta, U.S.A., 2001)

La Jetée (Marker, France, 1962)

The Lady Eve (Sturges, U.S.A., 1941)

L'Age d'Or (Buñuel, France, 1930)

Land Without Bread (Buñuel, Mexico, 1933)

The Last Broadcast (Avalos, U.S.A., 1998)

Last of England (Jarman, U.K., 1987)

The Last Trick (Švankmajer, Czechoslovakia, 1964)

The Limey (Soderbergh, U.S.A., 1999)

Little Caeser (LeRoy, U.S.A., 1931)

Little Fugitive (Ashley, Engel and Orkin, U.S.A., 1953)

The Living End (Araki, U.S.A., 1992)

The Lizards (Wertmüller, Italy, 1963)

Lolita (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1962)

Looking for Mr. Goodbar (Brooks, U.S.A., 1977)

Los Olvidados (Buñuel, Mexico, 1950)

Lost Angels (Clifford, U.S.A., 1989)

Lost Highway (Lynch, U.S.A./France, 1997)

Love & Anarchy (Wertmüller, Italy, 1973)

Love Meetings (Pasolini, Italy, 1965)

Lovers and Lollipops (Engel and Orkin, U.S.A., 1956)

Luna (Bertolucci, Italy/U.S.A., 1979)

Made in Britain (Clarke, U.K., 1982)

Mala Noche (van Sant, U.S.A., 1986)

The Man Who Laughs (Leni, U.S.A., 1928)

Marathon Man (Schlesinger, U.S.A., 1975)

Mask (Bogdanovich, 1985)

The Matrix (T. W. Brothers, U.S.A., 1999)

Meet the Feebles (Jackson, New Zealand, 1990)

Mifune's Last Song (Jensen and Kragh-Jacobsen, Denmark/Sweden, 1999)

Miller's Crossing (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A., 1990)

Minnie and Moskowitz (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1971)

Mirror (Tarkovsky, U.S.S.R., 1975)

Misery (Reiner, U.S.A., 1990)

Mondo Trasho (Waters, U.S.A., 1969)

Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Gilliam, U.K., 1975)

Monty Python and the Holy Grail (G. a. Jones, U.K., 1975)

Mr. Arkadin (Welles, France/Spain/Switzerland, 1955)

Mulholland Dr. (Lynch, U.S.A./France, 2001)

Multiple Maniacs (Waters, U.S.A., 1970)

My Beautiful Launderette (Frears, U.K., 1985)

My Man Godfrey (LaCava, U.S.A., 1936)

My Own Private Idaho (van Sant, U.S.A., 1991)

The Mysterious Skin (Araki, U.S.A./Netherlands, 2004)

Mystery Train (Jarmusch, U.S.A./Japan, 1989)

Naked (Leigh, U.K., 1993)

Naked Lunch (Cronenberg, Canada/U.K./Japan, 1991)

Natural Born Killers (Stone, U.S.A., 1994)

Neptune Festival (Mamin, U.S.S.R., 1986)

Network (Lumet, U.S.A., 1976)

The Night of the Hunter (Laughton, U.S.A., 1955)

Night of the Living Dead (Romero, U.S.A, 1968)

Night on Earth (Jarmusch, U.S.A./France/U.K./Germany/Japan, 1991)

Nowhere (Araki, U.S.A./France, 1997)

October (Eisenstein, U.S.S.R., 1928)

October: Ten Days that Shook the World (Aleksandrov and Eisenstein, Soviet Union, 1928)

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman, 1975)

The Opposite of Sex (Roos, U.S.A., 1998)

Out of the Blue (Hopper, Canada, 1981)

Palindromes (Solondz, U.S.A., 2004)

Paths of Glory (Kubrick, U.S.A., 1957)

Permanent Vacation (Jarmusch, U.S.A., 1980)

Pi (Aronofsky, U.S.A., 1998)

The Picture of Dorian Gray (Meyerhold, Russia, 1915)

Pink Flamingos (Waters, U.S.A., 1972)

Pixote (Babenco, Brazil, 1981)

Plain Clothes (Coolidge, U.S.A., 1988)

Play Misty for Me (Eastwood, U.S.A., 1971)

Poison (Haynes, U.S.A., 1991)

Polyester (Waters, U.S.A., 1981)

Porky's (Clark, Canada/U.S.A., 1982)

Possibly in Michigan (Condit, U.S.A., 1983)

Pret-a-Porter (Altman, U.S.A., 2002)

Pulp Fiction (Tarantino, U.S.A., 1994)

The Queen Bee (Ferreri, Italy/France, 1963)

Rabid (Cronenberg, Canada, 1977)

Raising Arizona (T. C. Brothers, U.S.A., 1987)

Rebel Without a Cause (Ray, U.S.A., 1955)

Reservoir Dogs (Tarantino, U.S.A., 1992)

Revenge of the Nerds (Kanew, U.S.A., 1984)

Ricki Lake (T. G. A. C. C. T. Television, U.S.A., 1993-2004)

Road House (Herrington, U.S.A., 1989)

The Road to Wellville (Parker, U.S.A., 1994)

Roadracers (Rodriguez, U.S.A., 1994)

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (Sharman, U.K./U.S.A., 1975)

Roma (Fellini, Italy/France, 1972)

Rome, Open City (Rossellini, Italy, 1945)

Rosemary's Baby (Polanski, U.S.A., 1968)

Rumble Fish (Coppola, U.S.A., 1983)

Safe (Haynes, U.S.A./U.K., 1995)

Sally Jessy Raphael (MCA/Universal, U.S.A., 1985-2002)

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (Frears, U.K., 1987)

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Reisz, U.K., 1960)

Sauve Qui Peut (Godard, France/Austria/Germany/Switzerland, 1980)

Schizopolis (Soderbergh, U.S.A., 1996)

Scum (Clarke, U.K., 1977)

The Seduction of Mimi (Wertmüller, Italy, 1972)

Seven Beauties (Wertmüller, Italy, 1975)

The Seventh Seal (Bergman, Sweden, 1957)

Sex, Lies, and Videotape (Soderbergh, U.S.A., 1998)

Shadows (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1959)

She-Devil (Seidelman, U.S.A., 1989)

The Shining (Kubrick, U.K./U.S.A., 1980)

Shivers (Cronenberg, Canada, 1975)

Sideburns (Mamin, U.S.S.R., 1990)

Simple Men (Hartley, U.S.A./Italy/U.K., 1992)

Sixteen Candles (Hughes, U.S.A., 1984)

Slacker (Linklater, U.S.A., 1991)

Sleep (Warhol, U.S.A., 1963)

Sliding Doors (Howitt, U.K./U.S.A., 1996)

Slumber Party Massacre (Jones, U.S.A., 1982)

Smoke (Wang, U.S.A./Germany/Japan, 1995)

Smoke Signals (Eyre, Canada/U.S.A., 1998)

Solaris (Tarkovsky, U.S.S.R., 1972)

South Park (Parker and Stone, U.S.A., 1997-Present)

Stalker (Tarkovsky, U.S.S.R./Germany, 1979)

The Story of Adele h (Truffaut, France, 1975)

The Story of the Kelly Gang (Tait, Australia, 1906)

Storytelling (Solondz, U.S.A., 2001)

Stranger Than Paradise (Jarmusch, U.S.A./West Germany, 1984)

The Strong Man (Meyerhold, Russia, 1917)

Surf Nazis Must Die (George, U.S.A., 1987)

Sweet Sixteen (Loach, U.K./Germany/Spain, 2002)

Swept Away (Wertmüller, Italy, 1974)

Tales from the Crypt (Francis, U.K./U.S.A., 1972)

A Taste of Honey (Richardson, U.K., 1960)

Taxi Driver (Scorsese, U.S.A., 1976)

Teenage Caveman (Clark, U.S.A, 2002)

Teenage Caveman (Corman, U.S.A., 1958)

The Tenant (Polanski, France, 1976)

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Hooper, U.S.A., 1975)

The Thing (Carpenter, U.S.A., 1982)

Thirteen (Hardwicke, U.S.A., 2003)

This Is Spinal Tap (Reiner, U.S.A., 1984)

Too Late Blues (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1961)

*Totally F***ed Up* (Araki, U.S.A., 1993)

Touch of Evil (Welles, U.S.A., 1958)

The Toxic Avenger (Herz and W. a. k. a. Kaufman], U.S.A., 1984)

The Toxic Avenger, Part II (Herz and Kaufman, U.S.A., 1989)

The Toxic Avenger, Part III: The Last Temptation of Toxie (Herz and Kaufman, U.S.A., 1989)

Toy Story (Lasseter, U.S.A., 1995)

Trainspotting (Boyle, U.K., 1996)

Trash (Morrissey, U.S.A., 1970)

Tricia's Wedding (Miron, U.S.A., 1971)

Trust (Hartley, U.S.A./U.K., 1990)

Twin Peaks (Lynch, U.S.A., 1990-1991)

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (Lynch, U.S.A./France, 1992)

Two Seconds (LeRoy, U.S.A., 1932)

Un Chien Andalou (Buñuel, France, 1929)

The Unbelievable Truth (Hartley, U.S.A., 1989)

Vereda Tropical (Andrade, brazil, 1977)

Videodrome (Cronenberg, Canada, 1983)

The Wanderers (Kaufman, U.S.A., 1979)

Wassup Rockers (Clark, U.S.A., 2005) *Weddings*

and Babies (Engel, U.S.A., 1958) *Welcome to the*

Dollhouse (Solondz, U.S.A., 1995)

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (Aldrich, U.S.A., 1962)

Wild at Heart (Lynch, U.S.A., 1990)

A Woman Under the Influence (Cassavetes, U.S.A., 1974)

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Almodóvar, Spain, 1988)

Your Friends & Neighbors (LaBute, U.S.A., 1998)

Zelig (Allen, U.S.A., 1983)