

Introduction: Early Modern Horror

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1. Graziella Margherini, *La Sindrome di Stendhal* (Ponte alle Grazie: Florence, 1989).

The conjunction between early modern art and horror is best encapsulated in the disturbing opening sequence to Dario Argento's *The Stendhal Syndrome* (Fig. 1). The film is a conventional *giallo* (detective story) and the title is based on a psychosomatic condition, identified in 1989 by the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Margherini, in which victims experience dizziness, nausea, hallucinations, and fainting episodes triggered by the sight of too much art and beauty.¹ As the movie begins, we find ourselves in the suffocating streets of Florence in the summertime, where we follow Anna Manni, a young female police detective, to the Uffizi where she is chasing up an anonymous tip regarding a serial rapist. From the claustrophobia outside, the spectator is then led through the lofty corridors and porous galleries of the museum in a series of vertiginous panning shots, which speed up and slow down with the soundtrack in order to visualise and externalise Anna's increasing sense of dislocation and anxiety. Before Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*, Anna suddenly becomes spellbound by the violent vista – the sound of the soldiers and horses being massacred on the battlefield escape from the painted surface and seep into her embodied experience of the artwork. The monocular and machinic gaze of a tourist with a camera breaks her hallucinatory state pulling her out of the pictorial space and back into the actuality of the everyday. However, as Anna moves through the rooms, the tenuous membrane between representation and reality begins to dissolve.

Entering a second room, Anna is confronted by Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. As she cranes her neck upwards to confront the silent gaze of the goddess who towers above her, she experiences another aural fantasy and begins to hear the breath of the winged Zephyr blowing Venus to shore. The temporary disorientation causes her to bolt into another room where in front of Botticelli's *Primavera* she has another breakdown. Frantically scanning the spectacle before her, she gets caught up in her own reflection on the protective glass surface and unknowingly conflates it with a disfigured blue face within the painting. The jagged boundaries between the embodied and the depicted become sutured together as Anna reaches out towards the painting in an immersive gesture only to have the piercing sound of the alarm throw her out of her hallucinatory delirium.

In the final part of this opening scene, Anna is confronted by the severed, bleeding, screaming head of Caravaggio's *Medusa*. Argento provides us here with a casebook illustration of the Stendhal Syndrome: the intensity of competing referents spinning around in the victim's head and the visual shock of the Medusa's scream cause her to unravel. Turning around, Anna suddenly sees Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Fall of Icarus* hanging on the opposite wall and, in her psychosomatic flux, becomes synaesthetically pulled into the painted fiction. She faints and the audio track exaggerates the sound of her tooth hitting the edge of a marble pedestal as her lip starts to bleed from the impact. In an unsettling dream sequence, Anna dives into the choppy waters



Fig. 1. Asia Argento as Anna Manni in *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), Dario Argento/Medusa Film.

of *The Fall of Icarus* and encounters a grotesque blue fish whose facial features become increasingly human as it approaches. The horror of this scene is increased when the creature's status shifts unexpectedly from monstrous threat to erotic Other, as the humanoid entity kisses Anna on the mouth and

2. On monsters and horror, see Noel Carroll, 'Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbiotic Biology of Fantastic Beings', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1981, pp. 16–25 and Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke University Press: Durham, 1995).
3. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books: New York, 2010), p. 18.
4. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1988).
5. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991); Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Wilhelm Fink: Munich, 2001), now in translation: *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2011). See also Chris Wood's review of Belting in *Art Bulletin*, vol. 86, no. 2, 2004, pp. 370–3.

then lets out a moan as she leaves it to resurface. This touches upon a horror studies staple: the theory of monsters, which addresses the horror of alterity and the unformed.² Emerging from unconsciousness Anna is again confronted by the machinic gaze of a tourist photographing her and in the process capturing her, silencing her, and turning her into an image.

This scene gives us an immediate, visceral idea of what a history of Early Modern Horror might look, feel, sound, smell, and taste like. Moving beyond the moralising discourse of beauty and the edifying context of humanistic learning, the essays in this issue will consider instead the ghostly spectre that underlines representation: to witness a Botticelli in its haunting hysteria; to feel the bloody brutality embedded within Uccello's battlefield; to be chilled by the scream of the Medusa caught in a moment between life and death; and to sense the force of the image upon us.

While Michael Baxandall's seminal *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (1988) provided a much-needed materialist way into the study of Italian art, the tripartite bind of artist/patron/object has incorporated itself into a predictable formula for much of the work that is traditionally done in the Renaissance/Baroque field. 'The only time-bending agency made available to the historical work by a materialist approach', it has been argued recently, 'is one that reproduces its token-like existence in the symbolic economy of luxury and taste'.³ The work that focuses on patrons, courts, and commodities takes its lesson mostly from Baxandall's first chapter on the 'Conditions of Trade', while paying relatively less attention to the subsequent two sections on the 'Period Eye' and 'Pictures and Categories'. This social historical research is crucial, valuable, and must continue, but there should also be room for methodological experimentation so that new areas of investigation can be charted. What if we return to Baxandall and reconstruct a history of the earlier periods that is focused on the affective force of 'eyes' and haunting nature of 'pictures' rather than on 'trade'?⁴ David Freedberg's *Power of Images* (1991) offered an early example of how this might be done and Hans Belting's exploration of *Bild-Anthropologie* (2001) has attempted to reinvigorate this area in different ways, but how can we mobilise these concerns more forcefully as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century?⁵ Moreover, is there a means to take into consideration those works that often slip into art history's blindspots as well as those celebrated works at the centre of the field without flattening these objects into a morphological continuum? In other words, can we speak co-terminously about 'Art' (with its proud capital A) and 'visual culture' (with its equally insistent lower case v/c) without denying the critical and contextual specificity of each? Moreover, can we speak about their historical condition in relation to their distance from *and* proximity to our own moment? Was this not, after all, the moving lesson of Baxandall's 'period eye' – to embrace chronology as the shared logic or discourse of a given time (i.e. *chronos*) rather than as a clear timeline of intention and causality plotted in retrospect?

Early Modern Horror is driven by a conflicted dialectical urge to see history theoretically and to see theory historically. Such an enterprise is not meant to provide a happy union between two different approaches, but to strengthen the perspective of each through its confrontation with the other. The bifurcated vision of Early Modern Horror pushes the art historian to gaze upon the objects of his/her scrutiny with one organ taken from Baxandall's 'period eye', with its emphasis on the historical specificity of contemporary visual cultures, and another from Georges Bataille's 'pineal eye', with its violent aggression upon the arrogant presumption of objective vision so as to unveil

the historical blindspots of Western rationality and to see the discourse of ‘beauty’ and Art, on the one hand, and ‘reason’ and Science, on the other hand, as defence mechanisms and containment strategies rather than as universal and scientifically proven truths.⁶ From a thematic perspective, Early Modern Horror opens up a larger conversation about how images move us, change us, transform us, infect us, haunt us, and push us to think and to feel beyond ourselves. As a heuristic device, Early Modern Horror presents itself as a means to look awry, to look anew, and to look differently at the visual cultures of the distant *past* in ways productive for students and art historians in the *present*.

As the editor of this collection, I would like to make an unlikely confession here: I am not a big fan of horror films *per se*. There is something markedly suspicious about sitting in a darkened room with strangers and screaming because a combination of visual and aural effects has caused the audience to do so. I do not personally find great pleasure in being haunted by after-images of mutilated monsters, disfigured serial killers, psychological violence, or graphic gore that quicken the heart beat in the dead of night. I do not like being interpellated by spectacle, being sutured – stitched – into the representational phantasm, being reminded that in spite of our sophisticated post-Enlightenment (and post-Modern) shells, at bottom we have, as Bruno Latour pointed out so eloquently, *never been modern*.⁷

So, why study horror? Why examine a genre that aims to repulse and terrify? Why consider the response of spectators who are either disgusted and traumatised or (even worse) amused and entertained? Moreover, why Early Modern Horror? Horror shakes us to the core and reminds us not only of our own mortality, but also of the vulnerability of our coping strategies (whether they be articulated through the discourse of religion, medicine, science, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, phenomenology, etc.). David Cronenberg, a respected authority on horror, pointed out:

Most people have a certain understanding of what a horror film is, namely, that it is emotionally juvenile, ignorant, supremely non-intellectual and dumb. Basically stupid. But I think of horror films as art, as films of *confrontation*.⁸

Cronenberg is right about people’s low expectations of horror, but this uneasy confrontation with the unknown and the unpleasant is precisely why we have an ethical responsibility to not blink in front of such imagery, but to look with critical eyes wide open.

Horror apologists inevitably invoke the Aristotelian ‘catharsis argument’, which maintains that representations of horror steel us for the experience of horror in real life; this rationale is drawn from Aristotle’s defence of tragedy in the *Poetics*.⁹ In this model, horror becomes an extension of tragedy and is rendered morally instructive, but here we run the risk of moving dangerously close to an Enlightenment concept of the Sublime. The following discussion is *not* a pre-history of the Sublime that would come to be articulated in the eighteenth century. Early Modern Horror might, at best, be compared with a ‘failed sublime’, or – if one must formulate a working definition – Early Modern Horror can be thought of as *the Sublime without the heroism, an embryonic discourse of science still fully embedded in its fictions*.¹⁰ A history of Early Modern Horror, therefore, is *not* interested in transcendental moments out of time or in the supersensible triumph of reason; it is committed instead to a history of the immediate shock of endogenous, time-bound experiences as well as the lingering affect triggered by the spectator’s

6. Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 84, described the ‘pineal eye’ as a corrupted, wayward, obscene organ that unstitches the rationalist, objective responsibility of the eye to know and access truth, instead ‘suggesting or soliciting a nauseous malaise, the sickening despair of vertigo’.

7. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1993). Latour launches this polemic in his analysis of the foundational myths and purification rites of modernity that demand the redefinition of everything that came before – the ‘premodern’ – as ‘primitive’. Modernity, Latour argues, is itself a displaced form of faith even as it seeks to denigrate earlier belief structures and practices as being tied to superstition, fanaticism, religion, or other ‘primitive’ forms of thought. See Olson *infra*.

8. Cronenberg quoted in Cynthia A. Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead. Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Westview: Boulder, 2000), p. 1 [emphasis is mine].

9. Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetic*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts and I. Bywater (Modern Library: New York, 1954), p. 230: ‘A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; [...] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions’.

10. For a recent attempt to situate the Sublime between anthropological and aesthetic models, see Caroline Van Eck, ‘Living Statues: Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime’, *Art History*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2010, pp. 642–59. The ‘failed sublime’ is a category identified by Patricia Yaeger, ‘Towards a Female Sublime’ in Linda Kauffmann (ed.), *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), pp. 191–212, in her analysis of how French feminist writers appropriated the sublime to ‘create a new architectonics of empowerment’; I use the category here with caution for even a ‘failed sublime’ still grants authority to the very masculinist model it seeks to subvert. For an overview on the multiple historical formulations of the Sublime, see Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Routledge: London, 2006).

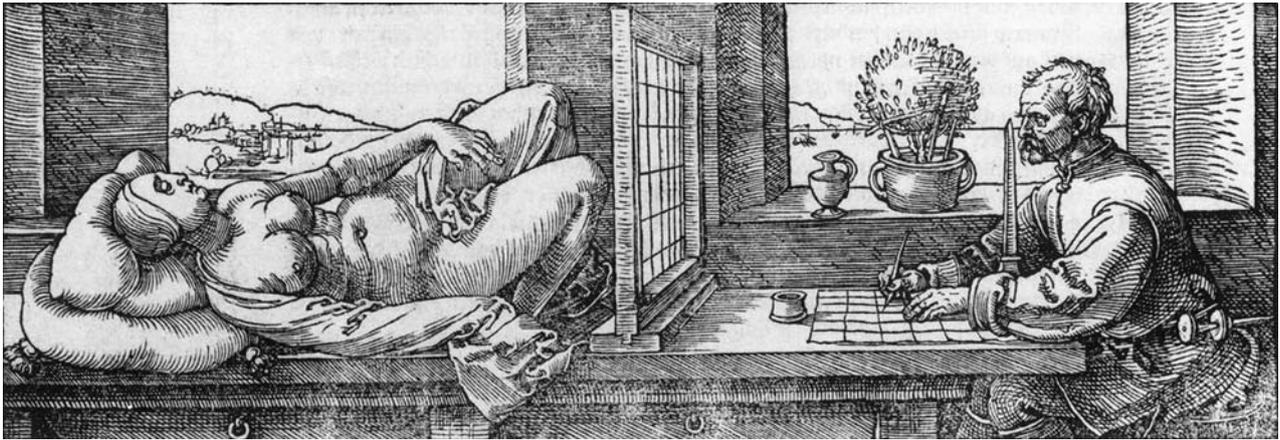


Fig. 2. Albrecht Dürer, *Illustration to the Work on Measurement, Showing an Interior Where an Artist Is Drawing a Nude Woman with the Help of a Special Measuring Apparatus*, woodcut, 1525, 76 mm (Photo: © Wikimedia Commons.)

11. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 2006), p. 210.

12. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge: London, 1993), p. 9 [the internal citation is from Kristeva's essay on abjection].

13. On the naked, the nude, and Dürer's print, see Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude. Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (Routledge: London, 1992), pp. 7–12.

immersive confrontation with the image – a somaesthetic model that collapses the hierarchical binary between absorption and theatricality. If the Sublime is a masculinist discourse about the external domination and transformation of the subject, driven by the authority of language and governed by a compensatory rhetoric of grandeur, Early Modern Horror is about the subject's internal confrontation and experience of the putrid corporeal reality of death and mortality. As Slavoj Žižek pointed out: 'the ultimate traumatic Thing the Self encounters is the Self itself'.¹¹ Rather than a 'failed sublime', Early Modern Horror is about *ipseity*; it is a way of seeing, directed (inasmuch as it can be) by the Delphic injunction to know thyself – 'nosce te ipsum'.

In this regard, horror approaches the abject. Drawing from Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, feminist film theorist Barbara Creed explained:

The place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses', the place where 'I' am not. The abject threatens life; it must be 'radically excluded' from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self.¹²

Albrecht Dürer's *Draftsman Drawing a Nude* (Fig. 2), it would seem, takes Kristeva's theory one step further by staging the need for separation in the violent moment of representation. The male draftsman peers through the protective screen in an attempt to tame, contain, convert, reify, and purify the dangerous, naked body of the abject Other into a culturally clothed 'female nude'.¹³ And here Dürer's print reminds us – or has always reminded me – that two of the most chilling horror films of all time are Bryan Forbes's *Stepford Wives* (1975; Fig. 3) with its parallel concerns over the colonisation of the resistant female subject and Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983; Fig. 4) with its concomitant anxieties about how the fantasy of power enabled by technology generates new forms of body horror for the male spectator and the female body. Horror, therefore, is not necessarily about blood and gore, it is (as Cronenberg pointed out) about confrontation. While Dürer's image is often read as a celebration of Cartesian perspectivalism, it can also be interpreted *à rebours* as the utter failure of total vision. As the monocular draftsman (in all of his compensatory sartorial regalia and with the aid of prosthetic technologies) gazes into the ominous vanishing point,



Fig. 3. Katharine Ross as Joanna Eberhart in *Stepford Wives* (1975), Bryan Forbes/Columbia Pictures.



Fig. 4. James Woods as Max Renn in *Videodrome* (1983), David Cronenberg/Universal Studios.

one cannot help but notice that his hand remains impotent, unable to draw, and he is frozen in his anxiety of the unknown.¹⁴

Writing on ‘The Epistemology of the Horror Story’, Susan Stewart explained:

What is at risk in these [horror] stories is our good faith in our ability to know the world by means of a socially given system of interpretation. Our hierarchies of relevance, our assumptions of the social, and our faith in the reliability of the self and its potential for apprehending the real are all suspended, put into brackets.¹⁵

And herein lies the critical potential of horror. Every confrontation with horror is in essence a confrontation with and contamination by an unknowable vanishing point – an overload of *punctum*.

14. I would like to thank Matthew Ancell for pointing this detail out to me in a discussion about his work on Jacques Derrida’s *Memoirs of the Blind*.

15. Susan Stewart, ‘The Epistemology of the Horror Story’, *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 95, no. 375, 1982, p. 48.

16. It is no coincidence that the successful revival of the horror genre in the early twenty-first century overlaps with a lost decade of war. On the affinity between war and horror films, Alexander Nemerov, *Icons of Grief: Val Lewton and the Home Front* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2005), p. 2, provides a moving account of what *New Yorker* columnist Edmund Wilson referred to as ‘homeopathic horror’. More generally on horror films as political allegory, see Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (Associated Presses: Cranbury, 1996); Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1996); Cynthia Hendershot, *I Was a Cold War Monster. Horror Films, Eroticism, and the Cold War Imagination* (Popular Press: Bowling Green, 2001); Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2005); Annalee Newitz, *Pretend We’re Dead. Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2006); Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (SUNY Press: Albany, 2007); Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations. Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2008).

17. For a dissection of the fundamental differences between Bataille’s *informe* and Kristeva’s abjection, see Rosalind Krauss, ‘The Destiny of the *Informe*’, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Zone: New York, 1997), pp. 235–52. On the fear factor, see especially Brian Massumi, ‘Fear (The Spectrum Said)’, *positions*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2005, pp. 31–48.

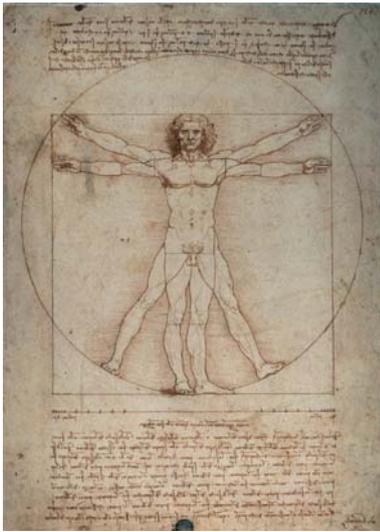


Fig. 5. Leonardo da Vinci, *Proportions of the Human Figure after Vitruvius*, c. 1490, pen and ink with watercolour on white paper, 34.4 × 24.5 cm, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia. (Photo: akg-images/Erich Lessing.)



Fig. 6. Ambroise Paré, Hermaphrodite from *Les oeuvres d'Ambrroise Paré*, Paris: Gabriel Buon, 1579, fig. IX. cxxxvi, London, Wellcome Library, no. b12850640. (Photo: Wellcome Library London.)

Horror tears at the skin, opening a wound where the internal space of the subjective viewer and the external realm of disembodied representation bleed into one. Horror externalises – makes visible – deep-seated anxieties. In its allegorical mode, it is a means of working through, but also of displacing and repressing our fears *through* representation. This accounts for much of the allegorical interpretation that occurs in horror and science fiction film studies, where Godzillas, zombies, vampires, serial killers, and other monsters are often identified as the undead anxieties of the Cold War, Reaganomics, 9/11, Iraq, and other historical events.¹⁶

To think in terms of Early Modern Horror is to grasp the visual and discursive strategies deployed to name the unnamed and to manage the fear of difference, for if the afflicted subject can visualise, externalise, and give form to his/her anxieties, then he/she can begin to reject, abject, and object – i.e. objectify – the formless fear. While the value and necessity of historicist analyses is undeniable, I would like to add a slightly different concern here. Contextualisation is a crucial aspect of the historian's task; however, taken to an extreme, an over-emphasis on the social and historical at the expense of the affective and representational normalises or explains away the strange, resistant beauty and horror of the historical past and of the visual image in and of itself. As such, the essays here hope to push beyond totalising contextualist explanations for why certain forms emerge in a given moment in time, to side-step the risk of privileging the grand narratives of causality, and to address the question of *how images work*.

The power of horror, to paraphrase Kristeva, reveals itself in those places where meaning collapses... or perhaps where the production of meaning is questioned and challenged in a constant state of flux. In this sense, our use of horror moves perhaps closer to Bataille's notion of the *informe*, as re-articulated by Rosalind Krauss, which resists the attempt to pin down the formless into a manageable system of knowledge and looks instead at the fear-driven violence of meaning production in and of itself (think again of Dürer's draftsman).¹⁷ At bottom, horror is a confrontation with *representation*, with an image that is placed before the spectator's gaze, a fiction which nevertheless demands an embodied and even visceral response from the viewer *as if* it were real. As such, horror is always-already a meditation upon the pathos of representation; it pokes at the vulnerability of the spectator's vision, cognition, and language while heightening his/her awareness of the affecting force of images.

What if instead of reading Leonardo's drawings (Fig. 5) always through the post-Enlightenment model of medicalised bodies, we situate his incessant activity as a means to grapple with the terrifying terrain of the body in a historical moment before someone like Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) had grasped the dynamics of image inversion and reversal in the retina or before William Harvey (1578–1657) had mapped out the motions of the heart and the circulation of blood? How different are Leonardo's experimental drawings from those of someone like Ambroise Paré (Fig. 6), the sixteenth-century French surgeon who was obsessed with understanding and documenting the marvels and monsters that seemed to transgress God's laws? Rather than containing such imagery within the rationalising discourses of Art and Science, this collection of essays hopes to provoke the reader to think instead through Early Modern Horror – to see Leonardo's 'Vitruvian Man' in the same vein as Paré's prodigy and vice versa.

Because horror is so often tied to the objectification and violation of the body by patriarchal systems of knowledge production (theology, philosophy,

medicine, technology, neuroscience, etc.), some of the most trenchant examples and studies of horror and science fiction have been written by women from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the strong tradition in film, literary, and women's studies in our own times.¹⁸ The feminist agenda that drives my own interest in this theme – let's call it 'Final Girl Art History' – is taken in multiple and varied directions by the authors in this Special Issue who seek *in their own way* to confront the suppressed, overlooked, and censured in a responsible, reflective manner in order to forge new paths for the field and the discipline.¹⁹ We begin with the excess of vision and the horror of mimesis (Kim) and proceed to a case study of images showing the death of the Baptist (Wilson). Both authors approach scenes of decapitation from two different angles, but both complement each other in trying to come to terms with the horror of the human subject that has become a still life. Their essays set up an exploration of how the face and the body attached to it can cause just as much separation anxiety as castration when the head becomes inverted (Clifton) and disfigured (Loh). The connection between facial distortion and figures in pain is pushed further in a consideration of monstrous bodies that emerge through the ancient myths of classical antiquity and through the modern myths of teratology (Lazzarini). The final two essays turn to the investigation of marvellous objects in the archive – the wax hands of an eighteenth-century female anatomist in a Bolognese medical collection (San Juan) and inventories of sacrifices from New Spain in the Vatican library (Olson) – that tell rather ambiguous stories about their creators and owners and about the those who must confront them again later in time.

Bringing together an abiding concern for what Noel Carroll defined as 'art-horror' and what Linda Williams referred to as 'the frenzy of the visible', the essays that follow will consider the way early modern audiences grappled with unknown entities and territories through the very process of *representation*.²⁰ Forcing ourselves to look with critical attention at representations of horror – works specifically designed to elicit fright, confusion, terror, pity, and/or pain from the spectator – each of the contributions seek to push beyond the staid clichés about the Renaissance/Baroque as a period of extraordinary beauty and classical order, as the first stop on the heroic *telos* to the equally problematic Enlightenment.

Horror, perhaps more effectively than beauty, reminds us of the historical specificity of vision and taste – what moved men and women in the past may no longer have the power to do so, or does so in a different way (this and not the rote motions of a naive historicism is the underlying lesson of Baxandall's 'period eye'). Why does *The Passion of the Christ* (2004; Fig. 7) move and repulse us in a way that very few paintings of crucifixions still manage to do?²¹ As Williams reminded us: 'Goose bumps, tears, laughter, and arousal may occur, may seem like reflexes, but they are all culturally mediated'.²² Hence, looking at representations of horror in a given historical context is a means to write a visceral history of knowledge and anxiety: an *ffective* time-based history of art rather than a hard-wired cognitive one; a *synaesthetic* one rather than simply an aesthetic one.

If the extreme gender brutality in Botticelli's *Nastagio degli Onesti* (Fig. 8) and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* reflects a strange sadism that seems specific to the ideological assumptions of a darker, distant age are we so confident that we have escaped the eerie shadows of this patriarchal past in our own time?²³ How does history dwell in us and to what extent have we transformed it? Rather than revel in the silent, still rapture of 'beauty' that prescribes most polite histories of

18. See, for instance, Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (University of Indiana Press: Bloomington, 1989); Linda Williams, *Hard Core. Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1989); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge: London, 1993); Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1993); Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1993); Judith Halberstam, 'Skin Shows' (1995); Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human. Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 2002); Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2004); Anna Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2005).

19. According to Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, chapter 1, Final Girl is the character who questions the status quo, is characterised by intellectual curiosity and foresight, and who survives to confront the killer and avenge the murders of her friends. In spite of the various critiques of Clover's optimistic progressivism, Final Girl remains a potentially empowering model that emphasises the importance of questioning the false consciousness of patriarchal systems of knowledge and power.

20. Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge: London, 1990), chapter 1; Williams, 'Hard Core' (1989), chapter 2. The utility of Carroll's cognitivist approach, which outlines categories and provides definitions, is supplemented here by Williams' more ideologically-focused intervention.

21. On this see Amelia Arenas, 'Between Pleasure and Horror: Watching Mel Gibson's "The Passion of Christ"', *Arion*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–15.

22. Williams, 'Hard Core' (1989), p. 5.

23. The story is recounted in Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (fifth day, eighth novella). When Nastagio degli Onesti is rejected by the aristocratic woman he loves, he comes across a surreal scene in a forest preceded by 'dreadful wailing and ear-splitting screams' in which another knight, the spectre of Guido d'Anastagio, is seen chasing down the woman he loved who caused him to commit suicide. Every Friday, Guido explains, he must hunt her down, eviscerate her, and feed her entrails to his dogs; their bodies are then reconstituted and the chase begins again. This, he tells Nastagio, is their conjoined punishment. Returning to town, Nastagio then recounts this story during a banquet held in honour of the woman who had previously refused him. She is terrified by the tale and



Fig. 7. Maia Morgenstern and James Caviezel as the Virgin Mary and Christ in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) Mel Gibson/Icon Productions.

immediately accepts his proposal. Horrifically enough, the Prado panel that depicts Guido's grisly eternal hunt was commissioned as a Florentine wedding gift. Think: *Stepford Wives*. The best analysis of this magnificent cycle is offered by Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Opening Up Venus: Nudity, Cruelty, and the Dream', in Thomas Frangenberg and Robert Williams (eds), *The Beholder: The Experience of Art in Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), pp. 42–4.

24. On the transformation of a specific critical concern with 'materiality' into the more generic art-historical sub-field of 'material studies' that reinscribes the needless binary of theory/objects and theory/history, see the comprehensive analysis in Michael Cole, 'The Cult of Materials', in Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (eds), *Revival and Invention. Sculpture through Its Material Histories* (Peter Lang: Oxford, 2011), pp. 1–15.



Fig. 8. Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (Horseman Ivo Appears to Nastagio Setting His Dogs on a Naked Girl), c. 1483, tempera on panel, 183 × 83 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado. (Photo: ak-images/Joseph Martin.)

Italian art from the fifteenth century onward, Early Modern Horror – by way of its insistently self-professed anachronism – seeks to return to the historical context of the earlier periods and re-experience the pathos and brute force of artworks that have since been etherised first by the enlightened rhetoric of grand style, good taste, and aesthetic disinterestedness and then by the academic gravitas of iconographical, patronage, and (now) 'material' studies.²⁴ It is not that these approaches need to be jettisoned, but new questions must be asked from within *and* without these areas in order to revitalise the field and to inject some much-needed iconophilia – a return to looking at images – into these shared conversations. Instead of overemphasising the intentional act of rational-agents (whether they be artists or patrons), instead of seeking causal or teleological explanations for how a work came to be the way it is, instead of treating images as commodities or

as material repositories for ideologies, we must also – i.e. *additionally* – speak of a more experiential history of visual representation.

This is not to suggest, however, that we aim to map out a universalising discourse for horror that collapses historical difference. Anachronism is used to enable history, rather than to level it into an undifferentiated field of relative sameness, whether we speak of the multiculturalism of globalisation, the hardwiring of neuroscience or indeed any other neo-universalist or neo-humanist posture. Early Modern Horror seeks to enable a history of art that explores affective contamination in opposition to aesthetic transcendence by challenging the project of cognitive aesthetics, which as Steven Shaviro explained, is always trying:

[...] to reduce the question of perception to a question of knowledge, and to equate sensation with the reflective consciousness of sensation. The Hegelian and Structuralist equation suppresses the body. It ignores or abstracts away from the primordial forms of raw sensation: affect, excitation, stimulation, repression, pleasure and pain, shock and habit. It posits instead a disincarnate eye and ear whose data are immediately objectified in the form of self-conscious awareness or positive knowledge.²⁵

What if in place of reflective judgments we were to emphasise ‘refractive’ ones. In the place of the agreeable, the beautiful, the sublime, and the good, what if we put forward horror as the foundation for sensation, horror as an ethical reminder that the individual does not always have free will and is not necessarily bound to moral law, horror as a means of detaching the beautiful and the good from judgment and genius, and horror as an indication that the *sensus communis* might be tied more to the particulars of the senses than to the universals of the common?

To be clear: we are *not* interested in establishing Horror as a totalising counter-aesthetic to Beauty. Nor is the aim here to map out an iconography of horror, a catalogue of horrific imagery. To establish an academically acceptable sub-field of ‘Horror Studies in Art’ would amount to a lobotomisation of the very critical potentiality of horror in this project for to substitute one hierarchy for another is to simply promote a new ideal, whilst replicating the master narratives already in place. We are not talking about disciplinarity or even interdisciplinarity but *undisciplinarity*, a rhizomic splintering of ideas that produces new concepts for our tired, weary discipline. Horror – like the *informe* – operates as a heuristic intervention. It is (and must be) a short-term modality that will allow us to see and feel differently about the visual cultures of the distant historical past; to focus on the poignancy and survival of particulars; to philosophise about art with Nietzsche’s hammer; and to stage a history of art through Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* (or distancing effect).²⁶ Horror is treated here *not* as a generic category, but as a methodological device that will enable us to do history anew, differently on terms relevant to twenty-first-century audiences.

Why should any of this matter? In the crowded, noisy din of the public museum *cum* cultural gift shop and in the profitable instrumentality of the newly rebranded AcademyTM where scholars are pushed towards providing crowd-pleasing spectacles of edutainment, we must make room for a critical history of art that speaks of uneasy responses and resistances rather than always imposing simple, reductive, positivistic modes of data collation that ultimately privilege the authority of word over the complexity of image, that reinforce the status quo over experimentation, that push quantifiable outcomes over qualitative speculation, and that bean-counts institutional impact over the rapture of intellectual curiosity. In the drive towards

25. Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1993) p. 27.

26. Yve-Alain Bois, ‘To Introduce a User’s Guide’, *October*, vol. 78, 1996, p. 29, would describe the *informe* as: enabling ‘taxonomic disorder’; ‘it’s a performative’; ‘The *informe* is an operation’.

hyper-efficiency, the affective force and poignant pathos of the unstable image are being silenced and distilled into infinitely digestible and marketable forms of thought-products and ideologically questionable scientific 'truths'. Early Modern Horror seeks to resist this downsizing trend. Horror will, in an ironic gesture, show us how to see the magical and beautiful strangeness of History once more. Now is the time for shock therapy; now is the time for Early Modern Horror.