Jiří Anger – Tomáš Jirsa

We Never Took Deconstruction Seriously Enough (On Affects, Formalism, and Film Theory)

An Interview with Eugenie Brinkema

Eugenie Brinkema is Associate Professor of Contemporary Literature and Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Trained in film studies and philosophy at Yale University (B.A.), and literary studies and psychoanalysis at the State University of New York at Buffalo (M.A.), she received her PhD from Brown University, where she expanded her expertise into the fields of critical theory and continental philosophy. Although her first book, *The Forms of the Affects* (Duke University Press, 2014), was published only recently, it has brought about a crucial impulse for turning the attention of cultural affect theory to what it largely neglected so far: close reading of aesthetic forms. In her work, subscribing to radical formalism, she combines close analyses of the film forms with a compelling theoretical discussion of such diverse fields as violence, affects, sexuality, and ethics, exploring mainly three areas: contemporary horror films, pornography, and the European modernist cinema that builds on the formal logic of both genres.

In addition to her book, which was awarded Honorable Mention for the Modern Language Association First Book Prize, and entered its second printing in 2015, her publications include numerous chapters and articles in renowned journals such as *Angelaki*, *Camera Obscura*, *Criticism*, *differences*, and *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Amongst the most cited are 'Laura Dern's Vomit, or, Kant and Derrida in Oz' (*Film-Philosophy*, 2011), 'Violence and the Diagram; Or, *The Human Centipede*' (*qui parle*, 2016), and 'Irrumation, the Interrogative: Extreme Porn and the Crisis of Reading' (*Polygraph*, 2017). Accordingly, she co-edited (with Caetlin Benson-Allott) a special issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture* 'The Design and Componentry of Horror' (2015) for which she wrote a substantial introduction about a "genreless horror." She is also a member of the editorial boards of the following distinguished journals: *The Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, and *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Between 2018 and 2019, Brinkema is Visiting Scholar in Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam, where she is completing a second book manuscript on the relation of radical formalism to the affective extremes of horror and love.

In marked contrast with the prevailing approaches in affect theory, which understand affect as an immediate, visceral experience, and against the widespread claim that concepts of affect and formalism are antithetical, Brinkema posits that affects have forms — in the sense of specific and unique aesthetic structures that must be read for. Unlike the common identification of affect with both intentional expression and bodily sensation *for* the spectator, she turns her attention to both the aesthetically and theoretically generative work of forms. Unthinkable without the distinctive style that echoes Roland Barthes' neological writing, Jacques Derrida's aporetic critique, and deconstructive fascination with etymology, her transdisciplinary close readings are made through the lenses of film, critical, and literary theory but also against the backdrop of Lacanian psychoanalysis, existentialist philosophy, and poststructuralism. Central to her theory is the concept of *formal affect*, i.e., a "self-folding exteriority that manifests in, as, and with textual form,"[1] which allows a theorist not only to analyze cinematic affects operating at the level of structure and composition but also to claim that specific film structures and genres resemble them. Offering an account of cinematic affects (such as grief in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* [1997] with its specific light, mise-en-scène, and temporality) outside of their usual associations with embodiment, expressivity, and spectatorship in film studies, Brinkema pushes formalism as a methodological tool past its conventional understandings toward its speculative, theoretical force. Since *The Forms of the Affects* and the "enjoyable audacity of its attack on contemporary film studies," as one of the reviewers articulated the book's polemical drive,[2] Brinkema's work has been strongly engaged in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics while moving from the affective turn toward a stronger accent on contemporary philosophy. Reducing forms to their structural principles, such as diagram or grid, aesthetic language becomes a speculative ground for thinking about the ethics of violence and love.

The following interview was recorded on the occasion of Prof. Brinkema's visit to the PAF — Festival of Film Animation and Contemporary Art, Olomouc, in December 2018, where she participated as a juror in the Other Visions competition of Czech moving image.[3] In her lecture entitled 'No Reason / Nothing to Express,' she presented a close reading of the toroidal form of the killer tire in Quentin Dupieux's 2010 film *Rubber*, arguing that the film stages a meta-formal thinking of two competing theories of affect: one bound to the anthropomorphic view of a diegetic chorus and the other attached to the vibrant life of non-correlated objects — only to disqualify both as providing the ground of an ethical critique of violence. Uncovering how violence is redescribed as being not catastrophic but *catamorphic*, she concluded that *Rubber* redefines horror as the terrain on which an ethical critique of violence is rendered good for nothing.[4] In this interview,

1) Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 25.
2) Julian Hanich, 'Review of Eugenie Brinkema: *The Forms of the Affects*.' *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2015), pp. 112–117.
3) For more on the activities of the cultural platform and the festival PAF, see http://2018.pifpaf.cz/en. Work on this interview was part of the research project JG_2019_007, funded by Palacký University Olomouc.
4) The lecture stems from Brinkema's chapter '(Nearly) Nothing to Express : Horror : some Tread : a Toroid,' in *How to Do Things with Affects: Affective Triggers in Aesthetic Forms and Cultural Practices*, ed. Ernst van Alphen and Tomáš Jirsa (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 81–98.

Brinkema explains her formalist approach to horror and other "body genres", the ethical dimension of violence, and the challenges of affective analysis for film theory, while offering a wide array of inspirational ways how to make thinking through film both aesthetically generative and conceptually enriching.

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When reading your 2014 book The Forms of the Affects*, which not only offers a revisionist critique of the recent affective turn but also presents an approach based on formalist reading so far neglected by the advocates of affect theory, a certain curiosity arises: How would you situate affect theory in your scholarly biography, and what was the impetus that led you toward the affective analysis of films? Was it in any way related to your own spectatorial experience, or rather to a discontent with a certain disregard of formal qualities in the work of affect scholars such as Steven Shaviro, Laura Marks, or Anne Rutherford?*

My background when I was an undergraduate at Yale University was in film studies and philosophy, and then I obtained a degree in psychoanalysis from the State University of New York at Buffalo. After having discovered that I was not a dogmatic Lacanian, I went to the Department of Modern Culture and Media Department at Brown University, where I worked with media objects, film history and theory, but I was also studying the history of critical theory and the philosophical canon. The main reason, however, why I went to Brown, was to work on feminist film theory. Studying with some famous feminist film theorists had a great impact on my writing between 2003 and 2005, when I made all sorts of references to desire, spectatorship, corporeality, and also embodied affect. Right around that time there were a lot of scholars in film and literary studies starting to talk about affect, and my first intention was to write a dissertation about affect in film theory. I was intrigued by the way many film theories, especially feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, turned to languages of grief and love; so if you read for instance Christian Metz or Raymond Bellour, you can easily see to what extent the theory and ontology of the medium is grounded in the language of affectivity. And that was what I thought my dissertation would be about.

So, I started reading a lot of contemporary affect theory and thought this would help me talk about the affects in film theory; Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005) has just come out, Laura Marks and phenomenologists were writing at that time, many scholars worked with Brian Massumi and Gilles Deleuze, and I also went back to Steven Shaviro's older book *The Cinematic Body* (1993).[5] But being the close reader I am, reading the works of affect theory and their actual readings of films got me really irritated: the films were actually used only as convenient examples of "affectively" doing the same thing. All genre and other differences were of lesser interest than a certain visceral intensity that those affect theorists kept returning to. Even though everyone was talking about affect, it seemed they all had in mind the same thing, which is the capacity for some kind of systemic

5) Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993).

excess, some residue, something ineffable that resists systems and pushes back. And I thought this was actually very boring.

So, I realized that rather than discussing the affects in film theory, I should perhaps explore affects in film. But I wanted to talk about differences, about what makes a work by Michael Haneke different than a work by Peter Greenaway, different than a music video or an object of televisual seriality. I love specificity, and since I started thinking about films and affects, I found myself returning to the methodology I have been working on since I was 18 years old, which is *close reading*. I was using less and less a kind of intentional line of thought, less and less a line that was about spectatorial and embodied reaction, while thinking much more about the formal and textual construction of both the films and film theory, but also about philosophical thought on affects. Hence the methodology in some ways emerged out of a dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction is also an affect. Whilst a theoretical dissatisfaction with Screen theory is what led to affect theory, my dissatisfaction with affect theory, analogously, is what led to a formalist rejoinder to affect theory. And ultimately, the book that resulted from my dissertation was written as a polemic, and a polemic is also an affective form: a form of anger. There is something about affect that is theoretically renewable and conceptually invigorating, but what I had to do in order to make sense of why we should even be concerned with affect was bound to textual specificities: they make the ground of speculative questions.

Affect theory has faced a severe backlash in recent years by art and media theory — and mainly for the reasons you just indicated: for being conceptually vague, abstract, negative, not giving enough attention to form, sometimes for being too obsessed with sensuality and embodiment. Yet affect remains a crucial term in your work. So, what makes it such a fascinating and important concept for analyzing cultural and social phenomena, and why are affects still important, even with all those reservations in mind?

It has to do with the double sense that is always imputed to affect; in other words, affecting and being affected. Affects always move two ways, in a mutual interaction of something, be it objects, forces, other affects, or bodies. The dissatisfaction with emotion as a term in the affective turn came from the etymological problem of *emovere*, which signifies a moving out, an expression of some pre-existing inner state, and I always liked this reciprocity but also the symmetry that has something to do with mutual forces relating to each other. I am not a Deleuzian, but I read a lot of Deleuze, and what Deleuze is quite astute about is the way that mutually affecting forces always give rise to a new concept. And so the affect of the mutual interaction of color and rhythm, or color and line, in his book on Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation* (1981),[6] is what gives rise to some kind of new concept, of sensation. This is why I hold on to the word 'affect' — because of the mutuality. But I also pluralize it, and the reason why I always talk about *affects* is that I am always trying to find more particulars, more specificities, and more differences.

It seems that the one thing where Deleuzians really betray the spirit of Deleuze is that they turn affect into something that eludes difference; they offer "repetition with no difference": as a result, affect became a general universal term, a negative signifier for resistance,

6) Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London and New York: Continuum 2003).

something ineffable that evades systems of representation. Nevertheless, even Deleuze in the *Logic of Sensation* points to this approach when he says that although there is a violence of representation, the monsters, and crucifixion, sensation does something different. But it seems to me that it is not *one* violence, one sensation, one resistance; it really becomes interesting only if there is *plurality*, many different affects, and if they work differently. I also want to see how much we could pin down differences between, for example, grief and disgust, disgust and joy, joy and ecstasy; I love minor differences because I think they are the closest thing we have to Deleuze's appeal to generate concepts, proliferate specificities, and produce something new, something surprising.

I think one of the problems with the early moments of the affective turn is that there was nothing surprising about it. If you say there is something disturbing and provocative that addresses us in a problematic and desubjectivized way, this a far cry from a shocking statement; but linking it to specificity has the potential to bring out something that we didn't see coming, and this very encounter with something not-yet-known is what affect is supposed to be naming. This is where close reading comes back to become a speculative ground: not to describe something that is already in the text — received as a commodity by the audience — but rather to talk about how the form itself is surprising and speculative, the form which might not be already there but is produced and unfolded through active close reading.

Speaking about joy, disgust, anxiety, grief, and other affects definitely means that you do not stick to Brian Massumi's claim that once affects are named, they are tamed, transferred into meaning, and thereby become mere emotions.[7)]

I totally disagree and, in fact, this is going to be a moment of tension. There is a real problem taking a Deleuzian theory of affect seriously; in many ways, the turn to affect struck me as a regressive move that really wanted to pretend the linguistic turn never happened. It seemed to me they tried to avoid some provocations that deconstruction really brought to the question of language. So no, naming something is by no means closing it down; the problem of language and representation is that naming something is an *opening up* of the infinite deferral of signs and hence the beginning of speculation. I love the histories of words, their textures, the play of signification, not because they lead to a final signified, not because there is a disgust-in-itself, but because it is a generative unfolding of further problems. And this is why we have to keep reading for affects.

Massumi and I don't share a theory of language, and I think that's fair. My argument about film theory is we never took deconstruction seriously enough. We never took poststructuralism seriously enough. And, actually, a lot of the history of film theory is choosing certain critical moments and saturating their implications. The corrective that poststructuralism tried to offer to film theory, especially in the late days of apparatus theory, was exemplified in Stephen Heath's idea of the spectator as a textual effect that is con-

7) For Massumi, the key difference lies in that whereas affect is a virtual and pre-subjective intensity, "unqualified", "not ownable or recognizable" and "thus resistant to critique", emotion is "subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience (…). It is intensity owned and recognized." Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect,' in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 27.

structed through the narrative progress.[8] And this was absolutely an anathema to the 1980s cultural studies' interest in identity, bodies, politics of difference, so we just ran over that, concluding that we really want to think about female, queer, marginalized spectators because there is politics behind it. That's fine and important, but it seems to me that we never took the pressure of poststructuralism as seriously as literary theory had to.

Your critical approach draws heavily from continental philosophy, and mainly French theory; Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, but also Sigmund Freud, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger are among the most quoted figures in your works. In which ways is this philosophical background fruitful for the affective analysis of films? And would it be out of line to note that your critical and formal readings are dominantly informed by European philosophy and psychoanalysis rather than American film and literary scholarship?

Continental philosophy and psychoanalysis is definitely the tradition that I'm operating within, but for a few reasons. On the one hand, it's pure election: we all work within some critical tradition, and we choose certain ways of reading and certain people we cling to. The turn to affect was also about a privileged set of interlocutors; there is a cybernetic tradition based on the reception of Silvan Tomkins, then there is Massumi's popularized version of Deleuze, or more specifically a kind of Deleuzian-Guattarian reading of *affectus* that became popularized through Massumi and then got disseminated. But I was also really interested in who got left out of that turn. Psychoanalysis was the continual bad object in the affective turn, especially in film theory, because psychoanalytic film theory was all about a phobic relation to pleasure, suspicion of a surface of the image, and so film theorists from Giuliana Bruno through feminist film theorists to Deleuzians, including Shaviro, quite strongly stated that we have to get rid of psychoanalytic film theory, that psychoanalysis does not have a theory of affect: it's about cold analytic structures of perversity and desire, and it's not actually about warm or hot visceral experience. And this drove me crazy because as someone who spent two years of my Master's degree doing nothing but reading Jacques Lacan's *Seminars* and who thought that Lacan was talking about affect all over the place,[9] discussing affect on a structural level, offering topologies of affect and diagrams of affect, it seemed to me that it was really strange to say psychoanalysis has no theory of affects. I mean, what is Freudian psychoanalysis but a study of anxiety; what is the uncanny but the study of negative affect in the history of aesthetics?

So, I really wanted to go back and ask who has been included in the affective turn as the interlocutor and who's been excluded — and why. And what I wanted to do in the book was to move both ways and say: look, if these different theoretical traditions help us think about affects and their formal and textual details, maybe it's also the case that philosophy and psychoanalysis, which themselves are textual fields, also have a kind of formalization

8) Heath's poignant actualization of the psychoanalytically based concept of *suture* made possible to acknowledge the role that specific formal and narrative features play in continually immersing — or *sewing* — the spectator into the fictional world. See, for example: Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 19–75, 76–112.

9) The 27 books of Jacques Lacan's *Séminaire* are based on his weekly lessons he gave at different places in Paris between 1952 and 1980; the majority are translated into English and edited by Jacques-Alain Miller.

of affect in their own thinking of these terms. This is what allowed me to bring a very robust discussion of anxiety back to the centre of Lacanian and Freudian thought as a formal problem — for Freud, it's a problem of interruption and repetition; for Lacan, it's a problem of the relationship to movement and enervation. It therefore struck me that psychoanalysis could end up being rehabilitated as essential to affect theory if we formalize affect; and if we do so, then we see it's something Freud and Lacan thought about just as much as specific works of art.

And since for me the history of philosophy and psychoanalysis, but also aesthetic objects, are all doing the work of thinking, I don't make distinctions between them: films are thinking and philosophy as well; films are texts and philosophy is text; you can read all of them, so I wanted to read for homologies between the two.[10] It's something about the problem of anxiety and movement that philosophy and psychoanalysis is working out, that horror films are working out as well; they have their own specific languages and forms, but they think together. *Thinking things together* has been my project since I was old enough to keep track of my intellectual project, and in part it goes back to the question of *affectus* and interest in things that mutually affect each other. I'm very uninterested in using psychoanalysis or philosophy as a master signifying system that reveals some truth in the work of art, but I'm also very uninterested in using art as a way of discontinuously simplifying or clarifying philosophical concepts. The only point in thinking them together is through an encounter during which they both become foreign to us and so then we have to engage them anew.

I will also point out, however, that you have very different traditions presented here. First, there is a tradition of existential phenomenology: I work a lot with Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, who is an unusual interlocutor, but the Kierkegaard that I love is also radically impersonal, radically formalist. I'm actually using him a lot in my current work on love, because one of the things that Kierkegaard does is that he abstracts and depersonalizes love in his philosophical work. There's also a psychoanalytic tradition from Freud to Lacan up through the New Lacanians like Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek. And then there's another tradition, because I would say that people like Roland Barthes operate a kind of third term. Barthes is always the intruder, and I think part of the reason is that he moves between structuralist and poststructuralist phases, but by the time you get to *Camera Lucida* (1980) and the late works,[11] you see that he really turned to a naïve phenomenology that he's made his own, so there's something about Barthes that can be employed to think with almost any model of thought that was dominant in the second half of the 20th century. I feel in some ways closest to him as somebody who moves between the systems of thought that allow him to make an expression at a given time, and he's also someone who's deeply attentive to language; Barthes always thought of himself as a writer as much as a thinker, and definitely not a philosopher. There are times when I also think

10) This is also a conceptual premise of the forthcoming book to which Brinkema has recently contributed. See Eugenie Brinkema, 'Colors without Bodies: Wes Anderson's Drab Ethics,' in Bernd Herzogenrath (ed.), *Practical Aesthetics* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

11) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); for the later works, see esp. Barthes' published lecture courses at the Collège de France from 1976–1979 (*The Neutral*; *The Preparation of the Novel*; and *How to Live Together*).

of myself as a writer about film, and this is also one way in which form and language play a role in my writing of film theory.

Fig. 1: *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1989), © Miramax

One of the main arguments elaborated in your formalist approach is that affect theory did not pay sufficient attention to form. *Your notion of form may, however, seem quite broad and somewhat tricky. On the one hand, it involves traditional properties of film form, such as light, color, rhythm, and duration; on the other, by form you also mean the toroidal shape in Quentin Dupieux's* Rubber *(2010), or even abstract concepts as, for instance, death's design in the film* Final Destination *(James Wong, 2000). What exactly constitutes a form that interests you, be it the form which is "auto-affectively charged", or a formal affect that "takes shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures", as you put it?*[12)]

I need to disentangle two phases in my thinking, because on the one hand there's the way that I treat form in the first book, *The Forms of the Affects*, and then some other works you have just described that will be in the second book, where I actually push my relationship to form quite a bit. In the first book, all I really meant by formalism was the negative prohibition against reducing the act of reading to either a question of theme or to a presumption of a general textual encounter with the spectator. So, I hewed quite closely to the usual suspects of close analysis (line, color, mise-en-scène, montage, rhythm, duration) that are grounded in very traditional notions of formal analysis. How can we formally analyze the structuralist grid of color in Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989)? This is something that somebody in 1968 or 1938 would have recognized as a formal reading of the film. And then what became interesting to me was how those formal qualities change over time in ways that are homologous to a kind of gastronomic thinking of qualities and the way it relates to disgust. In *Open Water* (Chris Kentis, 2003) I was interested in the problem of blocks of space, being inspired by Noël Burch's writing about Japanese cinema,[13)] and again, this is something anyone would have recognized

12) Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 37.

13) See esp. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*. Rev. and ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

from the history of film theory. The book was trying to be quite polemical about affect but somewhat conventional about how we read form: the way I read ellipses, formlessness, and other problems of textual specificity would be recognizable to someone from 50 years ago who was also thinking about the form of a specific work of art.

In the second book, I'm actually trying to push the problem further, and what I've done is taken form as a broad problem for a dialectic between appearance and essence. What really interests me about the word form is something that Raymond Williams talks about in *Keywords* (1976): he says the problem with form is that it spans a whole sense of something that is external and superficial, i.e., the form of an object, or an external shape that is given to it, but in the history of philosophy the term form has also meant the essential, eternal, and determining substance and principle of something.[14] He claims the tension is between form tied to the superficial and inherent to appearance and form that is fundamental. Something that I'm thinking about in the new book is how we can go back to the history of formalism in the history of ideas, the history of aesthetics, and actually recover a formalism that would be the ground of speculative thought.

I used the expression radical formalism in the first book, but I'm really doubling down on it in the second book. The root of radical is *radix*, it means the root, the same that Martin Hägglund talks about in relation to radical atheism;[15] so what is the root of formal thinking? What kind of roots could it offer for speculative questions? What I'm trying in this book is to expand form to include other problems of visual and textual appearance, and so in *Final Destination* it's also about the idea of design, in *The Human Centipede* (Tom Six, 2009) it's about the diagram, in *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2012) it's about the relation between the grid and the table. These problems of aesthetic form appear in a specific aesthetic manifestation, they have shape, they can be analyzed in terms of line and space, but they are also forms in the sense that they are structures, give rise to ideas, and play with tension.

In some ways, I'm being slipperier with the term, but I also try to expand what it means to read films formally. It involves both reading the form of the films, light, montage etc., but also thinking about how abstract forms such as toroid, list, design, diagram, or grid operate as a kind of thinking as well. I've been able to go back to a bunch of different formalist theories, e.g., from the history of art, and one of my favorites is the definition by the neoclassicist painter Maurice Denis from 1890: he reminds us that before a picture is a battle horse, it is essentially lines on a plane, a flat surface.[16] Before something is a representation of horror and ecology and the devastation of the Earth, it's also a toroidal shape, also a darkness and lightness, a problem of spacing, of the graphic and the morphic.

14) Raymond Williams, 'Formalist,' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 93–95.

15) Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008).

16) "It is well to remember that a picture — before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote — is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." Maurice Denis, 'Definition of Neotraditionism,' originally published in the journal *Art et Critique* (August 1890). Cited after Herschel Browning Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1968), p. 94.

So, part of my effort is to reduce things to forms. If in the first book the idea was that we need to pay attention to form, in the second one I'm looking at the way specific forms like the diagram or the grid can actually open up really complicated relationships to ethics and violence.

One of the provocative gestures of your critique of what you call "intentional affect" is to stress that affects should not be identified with spectators' or critics' embodiment, let alone an emotional expressivity. And yet the body still plays a significant role in your analyses (e.g., the corpse and cannibalistic meal in Greenaway's The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover *or the body as a catamorphic object in* Rubber*). Under what circumstances can the body operate as an affective form?*

I often get asked: Yes, but really, how do you feel when you watch film XY? How do you feel when you watch *The Human Centipede*? How do you feel when you watch *Funny Games*? And usually I try to read what's implicit in that question: I talk about Foucault and our desire to produce confession as a mode of truth telling, and I also think there's a gender component to that question, because what it's really asking is to make a testimony of your subject position as an embodied creature, which is overlaid with lots of interesting and complicated histories. So, I usually refuse to answer it and give a really obnoxious reply, trying to deconstruct the question. Of course I have wept at movies, I have shuddered, and have had embodied reactions; I just don't think these reactions are that interesting. I don't actually think they're speculatively generative; I would be intellectually mortified to produce a kind of diaristic account because I just can't imagine that anyone else would be that interested in what my body does. And I think it's a very strange thing to keep calling certain intellectual positions to account for producing such a record. So that's the not smart way I get asked that question about what I really think about bodies.

The smart way of asking it is the way you phrase it. Which is to say: what is a body in a formalist thinking of affect? And the answer for me would be that the body is also a form. What happens when we read the body? To me, this is the history of psychoanalysis; the figure or the symptom is a reading of the body. The body is a profusion of signs that have to be interpreted, and Freud tells us that analysis is basically interminable: we do not get out of the hitches and ticks and the symptomatic cacophony of the body, not because the body is the locus of meaning but because the body is the locus of sublime potential in the world. So, I talk about the body a lot, but the body for me is always a question of form.

And then the interesting thing to me is what different genres and fields do with the body. For example, horror, pornography, and melodrama are always taken as the preeminent *body genres*, because we have all read Linda Williams, and that's been a really useful heuristic for thinking about genres addressing the body and its mimetic responses.[17] But what's important for me is that melodrama, horror, and pornography work very differently with the body. Even on the etymological level they are obviously distinct: melodrama refers to music, sound, and the sonic; pornography refers to writing; horror refers to a transformation of the body. The melodramatic body is one of enclosure and leakage, one

17) Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (1991), pp. 2–13.

that can't be profuse enough with erotic expression, so it leaks between the seams, in tears that come out at inappropriate moments or sobs that escape the lips. To me, that's not about a body but about a system that has moments of leakage, that has possibilities for excess.

Horror is the genre that treats the body as a form that can be creatively destroyed. What *Rubber* stages is the maximal destruction of bodies as aesthetically generative possibilities. Hence the question is: Wherefore can we read that as a problem for an ethics of violence? If the chorus is there, we can; but if it's not and we lose the anthropocentric perspective, can we still talk about that? Horror formalizes the body in order to subject it to maximal formal modification, i.e., destruction. But from the point of view of form, it is a generative modification and as such a real problem for ethics.

And pornography strikes me as the most deeply invested in the formalizing of bodies — what a body is to pornography is a field of planes and holes, and the pornography that interests me the most to write about is extreme gonzo, which continually plays with the plasticity of the body and posits the body as a problem of apertures. I recently wrote a long essay about Max Hardcore, who is engaged in taking women's bodies and doing things like putting a tube that has an end connected to a funnel inside them, making them vomit into the funnel, using the funnel to piss into their bodies, playing with a speculum to open their bodies, etc.[18] That is nothing but a regard for the body as a formal field that can be opened and reconstructed and moved around, and what intrigues me about pornography is not that it makes people come in the audience, but that it is an effort to think of the body as something which is infinitely and renewably formally modifiable in order to target any specific fetish or reconfiguration someone might desire to see.

In some ways, I talk about the body all the time, but I think that the formalist approach also allows you to see the way in which the body is one thing among many others, and that certain genres are obsessed with it not to resituate subjectivity, not even to invest it with materiality, but, instead, to invest the body with the topology of a specific form. And the feminist theory that I've been influenced by is talking about the body as a form, a form of discourse, a form of scientific research, a form of performance. I tend to be more interested in the aesthetic concept of the body as a form, but generally it seems to me that once you get away from embodied affect, you get to talk about the body in a more surprising way.

So, to think the body as a form leads rather to its conceptual unfoldings and aesthetic operations than to an exploration of its visceral effects and affective transmissions?

When we talk only about affect and embodied experience, we are missing a more complex model of the body. Precisely because we think, for example, that discussing horror means talking about *horrere* — hairs bristling on the back of the neck. But even a rudimentary reading of psychoanalysis would tell us that the moment we scream is actually a release from horror — it's the catharsis, the thing we can do, a possibility of draining the affect away. When actually horror is in the moments when something doesn't happen,

18) Eugenie Brinkema, 'Irrumation, the Interrogative: Extreme Porn and the Crisis of Reading,' *Polygraph*, vol. 26 (2017), pp. 130–164.

when something fails to arrive. I just think that when we record what the body does by using received vocabulary, we happen to domesticate a truly disturbing encounter. We're doing it to reify and also commodify affective payoffs, so I think horror becomes a lot less scary when we talk about *horrere* and screaming the same way porn becomes a lot less interesting when we talk about orgasms. These days, it seems so sexy in academia to talk about bodily fluids and shivering, but I think it's just a way of familiarizing something for which we don't have a name yet.

Fig. 2: *Rubber* (Quentin Dupieux, 2010), © Magnet Releasing

Let us move to your analysis of the horror film Rubber*, which is based on the relationship between a specific affective mode (horror) and the concrete form (toroidal shape of the killer tire). How would you describe the logic that binds these figures together? And how important is the notion that* Rubber *is perhaps more on the side of a highly grotesque deconstruction and parody of the horror than a film that would follow the horror genre conventions and the emotional effects this genre produces?*

One thing I had to grapple with early in the horror project was whether I wanted to talk about genre or not. Genre is a disastrous conceptual problem, so I went to Derrida's 'The Law of Genre' (1980), where he says that genre is a mark of a participation that is not a belonging, a participation that is not exhaustive.[19] And I decided that the problem of genre was never going to be done away with. I use the word 'horror', so I'm already naming the genre, I cannot get away from its overloaded history, but also I didn't want to end up with the empirical circle where we only talk about horror as what's already been de-

19) "Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging." Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre,' trans. Avital Ronell, in Derek Attridge (ed.), *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 230.

fined by the properties of the genre that have been determined in advance. What I've been playing with is the idea of a relation between the genre and the general. Genre is connected to the idea of gender, genus, and belonging, so I'm trying to counterpose it to the idea of *generality,* which would not be about belonging to some sort of collection but rather about irreducibility.

One way I'm thinking about horror texts as having something in common is that horror attests to an irreducibility of violence. And this allows me to talk about *Rubber*, which is a film that may not *horrere*, provoke shuddering and screaming, but is nevertheless involved in this irreducibility. It just happens to take that violence as a problem of this toroidal interaction with the world. Such an approach allows me to talk about *Final Destination* and *The Human Centipede,* but also about avant-garde works that we would never generically treat as traditional horrors. And I don't really care what one puts under that rubric; you could say that *Funny Games* is a horror film, and Haneke himself said it was a parody of the horror film; it doesn't interest me whether that's true from the point of the genre, but it's definitely true from the point of view of the irreducibility of violence.

Rubber poses a real problem of what we do with violence after the end of the human, whether it is the literal end of the human from the anthropocentric perspective, but also what you do after the end of the human in critical theory. If we turn to object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, new materialism, or vibrant matter, if we want to be posthuman, what's your critique of violence, what kind of ethics of violence can those systems of thought actually offer, or can they do nothing? What intrigued me was whether we could retain the critique of violence even after the end of the human. *Rubber* posed a question about the interaction of objects in the world that does not allow us to speak about violence, whereby the destruction of the human form is just a creation of a new and different forms, but also doesn't require us to keep the human alive. This led me to return to the question of shape, something that is both there and not there, something that is constantly reminding us of its presence, that is, in fact, voiding the film of a critical position, allows it to be *nearly* nothing, neither a critique of violence nor a total absence of a critique, a kind of almost critique of violence, a thinking of the ethical without a return to the humanist language of ethics that the chorus is constantly doing. I am interested in horror putting pressure on a critique of violence, and the film *Rubber* literalizes that.

Not just horror but negative affects in general — grief in Michael Haneke's Funny Games*, disgust in the films of Peter Greenaway and David Lynch, anxiety and pain in* Open Water *— receive a huge amount of attention in your works. Is there something that makes them particularly suitable for your method of formalist analysis? Or is it more a question of your spectatorial preferences, fascination with violence, or the ethical concerns?*

Sometimes when I have to describe to deans what I do, I say I work on the ethics and aesthetics of extremity. I often talk polarities — horror and love, disgust and joy; in other words, a conventional understanding of extremities. But I also tend to work on other extremities: on the one hand, I focus on European modernist art cinema, like Haneke and Greenaway; on the other, I'm also fascinated with the lowest of the low, low-brow horror and extreme gonzo pornography. I have never written about a film that was nominated for an Oscar: I just don't tend to work in a middle cultural register, and nor do I work in

a middle affective register, although there's no reason you couldn't do that formally. For example, I know that some scholars have used my theory of a formal affect to talk about boredom and cringe and awkwardness and other more minor affects.[20] When we think about the extreme, it's simply something brought to its furthest conclusions, something put under pressure or restricted by a system. That is one reason that it makes no difference whether it's extreme gonzo or modernist art cinema: they both have to push something to a kind of aesthetic limit. And likewise, anxiety and joy are not interesting to me for being limit cases of an ecstatic subject, but for being structures that push to the limit a certain formal thinking.

But that having been said, this question about fascination is really intriguing because there are two ways of answering. On some level, we all write about what fascinates us in an ordinary language sense, but I'm actually writing now about fascination in a more theorized sense, and it's a really interesting problem. While doing research on the topic, I randomly discovered a preface Derrida wrote to Alain David's book *Racisme et antisémitisme* (2001), wherein David does a reading of racism and antisemitism in relation to visibility and visible shape.[21] Derrida actually says that the author's phenomenology of racism and antisemitism comes down to a fascination with form, to an over-fascination with a visible shape, with an *eidos*. So, I started to explore violence and its fascination with form, which is also a real problem for thinking art and horror, and I wondered if there is also a way in which philosophy's own fascinations with forms, with ethical and metaphysical ones, with forms of thinking, is a kind of violent reduction to principles (the violence of metaphysics leads to formalization of certain types of problems, for example).

One thing that reading for form demands is to be attentive to whether there is a violence in that methodology; there are things formalism does not let you talk about, and there is an aggression in such reductive reading. I happen to think it's necessary, it's the ground of speculative thinking, but one has to own that. The fascination with form is something shared across different ideological, political, and ethical commitment, and we should take that seriously.

What comes as another striking aspect of your method is a continual emphasis on the etymology of words and concepts (e.g., how the contemporary meaning of horror is determined by its evolution from the Latin word horrere*). Where does this fascination with language and its roots stem from, and how does it relate to formal details in supposedly 'non-textual' media such as film?*

One of the reading reports I got for *The Forms of the Affects* said: "I really love the book, but I can't stand that she writes text instead of film." Yes, you'll hear me say text instead of film, and textual details instead of filmic details. A poem by Anne Carson, a novel by Beckett, a play by Shakespeare, an advertisement by some anonymous collective, it's all text. On some level, it has to do with my semiotic training: it makes me comfortable talk-

20) For one of these conceptual elaborations, see e.g., Nick Salvato, *Obstruction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

21) Jacques Derrida, 'La forme et la façon (plus jamais: envers et contre tout, ne plus jamais penser ça "pour la forme"),' in Alain David, *Racisme et antisémitisme: Essai de philosophie sur l'envers des concepts* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001), pp. 7–28.

Fig. 3: *Funny Games* (Michael Haneke, 1997), © Wega Film

ing about texts because it opens up a more promiscuous set of objects, but it also allows me to read philosophy and theory in my own way.

When I started writing about film as an undergrad, I always tried to argue something that the professor hadn't heard before. I found myself unsatisfied with this need for translating time-based moving images into words on a page, and the active translation struck me as frustrating but also challenging. Around that time, I also started reading Raymond Bellour's *The Analysis of Film* (1979), which is still one of my absolute favourite works of film theory.[22] The book begins with the problem of writing about film: Bellour describes films as "unattainable texts" and says that film theory can produce only an inadequate shading of the work itself. What he meant by this statement was that critics and theorists go to the cinema to watch a film they might never see again, and yet they have to write about it. And when you're doing a detailed symbolic analysis like he was trying to do, that seems impossible.

So, you get this whole moment in film theory when people misremember things. At the beginning of his *The World Viewed* (1971), Stanley Cavell notes something like: I will misremember my films, but my mis-memories are part of what the film meant for me.[23] This idea of film theory existing in an oblique relationship to the film object was incredibly exciting to me. Because if the text was unattainable, then such obliquity presented an opportunity for film theory to be more than a text, to be its own aesthetic positive object that exists not to explain the film, not as its adjunct but rather as another *thing that thinks with* the film. Even before I had the vocabulary to explain this, before I read Deleuze and

22) Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

23) "I mention this as […] an apology for the off memories that may crop up; and as a confession that a few faulty memories will not themselves shake my conviction in what I've said, since I am as interested in how a memory went wrong as in why the memories that are right occur when they do." Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. xxiv.

thought about philosophy as a generation of concepts, I found the idea that my work of film theory could be its own generative aesthetic object deeply intriguing.

Nevertheless, treating films as texts means taking language very seriously, and to this day I don't allow students to embed clips in their essays. I force them to take a stand on how they use language to talk about time-based image objects, and some of them really hate that. They want to drop in a still, an entire clip, and not have to do a close analysis that is a *translation*, or improvisation at translation, that has etymologies and histories and deferrals of potential meanings. They don't like that… I *love* that; I think it's the coolest thing in the world, and I try to be experimental in my writing to make that acute. I use such restraints in my theoretical writings all the time: for instance, my essay 'Sophie Calle's *Secrets*,' which was written as a homage to Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* (1977), is conceived as an alphabetic and highly poetic encyclopedic entry of problems, using the alphabet as an arbitrary restraint to think about problems of secrecy and love.[24] And in my essay on Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* (2009), which is all about the problem of paradigm, of the example, I constantly introduced examples to complicate the argument as I was making it.[25]

I also attend to the specificity of words because we cannot help being stuck in language. Many scholars are trying to get us out of the linguistic turn, but the words that we choose determine what we think about the world and how we interpret it. I just happen to love etymologies because we tend to spin out the complications and deferrals of words as we use them; even if it's just the first or second level of unpacking, there is a kind of etymological debt that is important to expose. I also try to play with rhythm: sometimes copyeditors are deeply frustrated with me because I like long accumulative sentences that constantly restate and slightly rephrase or permute things. I probably spend more time reading Samuel Beckett and Anne Carson more than most film theorists do, because I really want to think about language as performative thought, and not as a neutral or quasi-scientific or descriptive document.

The strategy of 'reading for form' that you both advocate and elaborate may seem somewhat paradoxical when considered in the context of the evolution of film studies and affect theory's original anti-textual, anti-representational, and anti-semiotic impetus. Is there any fundamental difference between your reading of Rubber *(and other films as* texts*) and the approach of Screen theory scholars of the 1970s and 1980s? And, if so, in which ways do these readings precisely differ?*

I'm more than happy to repudiate decades of film theory — what happened in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of phenomenology and the received version of Deleuzian film theory. I'm more than happy to bracket that and say that what was valuable about Screen theory was that it was really *Theoria*, a way to see differently. The question whether we can still have such theoria in our times is really important. Screen theory was an ef-

24) Eugenie Brinkema, '26 more or less: Sophie Calle's *Secrets*,' in Henriette Huldisch (ed.), *An Inventory of Shimmers: Objects of Intimacy in Contemporary Art* (Munich, London, New York: DelMonico Books / Prestel), pp. 28–37.

25) Eugenie Brinkema, 'e.g., *Dogtooth*,' issue on *Distance*, *World Picture* 7. See online: <http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_7/Brinkema.html>.

fort to generalize a theory of the cinematic apparatus that would work in any situation, that would account for the spectator as an effect of specific texts, and that would also be specific in, for instance, how a melodrama differs from a western. What happened in the 1980s and 1990s was a mix of David Bordwell and Noel Caroll's cognitivist post-theory movement, in addition to a lot of phenomenological work, which in its own way was also post-theory. A lot of cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, and disability studies took up what actually became post-theoretical. People were saying it's the end of Grand theory and big explanatory paradigms. But now what's happening is that the affective turn is becoming a Grand theory, an ostensible explanation of how everything works — yet without connecting it to the textual specificities that allow us to tell the difference between a melodrama and a western, or to account for the work of color in a specific aesthetic object, or to think from and with rhythm as an interesting problem in its own right.

Now there's an interest in speculative realism, which also aspires to an overriding theory of everything. I have no problem with grand theories, but the question is: if we try to think with the vocabulary of OOO, how do we keep asking questions, how do we keep going as a discipline, how do we continue having conversations? Do you really need films to show that they are demonstrating a prior theory of the Anthropocene? Or any other artworks to claim that they are demonstrating accelerationism? No, so there's no point then in making things and writing theory, because then you can just do a digital humanities description of how object A matches with the traits of theory B. This is very boring and not how creative life works, nor would we want to live in such a world.

I think what happened with Screen theory was that there was not as much theoretical promiscuity as there could have been. There was the dominant Lacanian/Althusserian line, but it could have gone other ways, too. Metz opens up Freud and follows through a certain strand of psychoanalytic thinking, but had he opened up Donald W. Winnicott, we might get a different history of psychoanalytic film theory. We began with the premise that the spectator stands for an effect of the text, but if we really put the text under more rigorous deconstructive pressure, we might have been able to resuscitate the idea that apparatus theory was not a totalizing theory but a general exploration of things that went in many surprising directions. Maybe the body could have been thought of as a form under a more capacious apparatus theory, and then cultural studies would not have had to discard talking about form altogether.

Nevertheless, what I wanted to do with my first book was not to recycle Screen theory but to go further into it and ask: what happens if we push the insights of psychoanalytic or poststructuralist thinking? We should stop being so neoliberal with our theoretical commitments. It's not enough to say, "Today I'm a queer theorist, and tomorrow I'll be a new materialist," and choose what is locally convenient. We have to take theory seriously and see where it leads, not as a set of tools or as a way of making things simple but as something that opens up things we don't know yet.

Let's get back to your overall approach that divorces affects from the issues of expressivity, embodiment, and emotional responses, and explores them as textual details and 'self-folding exteriorities.' With this definition in mind, can affects be localized beyond or somewhere else than in the inflections of nothing *— as your analyses suggest in relation to the non-expres-*

sive tear in Psycho *(Alfred Hitchcock, 1960),* mise-n̈en-scène *in* Open Water*, or the flat circle in* Rubber*?*

Yes, and in fact in the horror book I end up talking about a language of positive attestation quite a bit. What interests me about *Rubber* is *this* toroid, while in *The Human Centipede* it is *this* attestation of a diagram, while in *The Cabin in the Woods* it is *this* grid and *this* table. Although I'm still attentive to the generativity of negative formulations, the language of attestation plays a distinctive role in this project. I try not to use the word presence without being aware of the overloaded problems with the term, but I do take seriously the way that a visible thereness and "inthewayness" are problems of form. And *Rubber* both hystericizes and literalizes that by making violence resonate with a morphic shape which is constantly moving across the frame, constantly framing its own excision that gives us a big nothing that is also a something. I used the language of nothing and the 'not enough' and the 'non-scene' in the first book, while in my second book I talk a lot about attestations of something; but it is always a formal something such as diagram or grid that gets in the way.

What really fascinates me about horror is its overreliance on the figure of the monster, which etymologically links to the words *monstrum* and *moneo*, signs of wonder — the monster shows something. It is compelling to see what happens when we talk about what this form demonstrates, displays, what kind of signs does it attest to. For example, something is missing in *The Final Destination*, and that something is death, but it turns into a kind of ontological fact of existence in the horror franchise, and it's linked to design. In *The Human Centipede*, the mad scientist, oddly enough, is constantly apologizing for having to do this, but it's a process of research and experimentation, so the violence is on the side of this diagram of scientific enquiry. In *Rubber*, something is literally missing — causality, interiority, subjectivity —, and yet it is there. I'm interested in what happens when horror loses the monster, as a return of the repressed or as something that threatens normalcy, and becomes, instead, about a monstration itself, a demonstration of a formal process. I don't completely lose the monstrative, I just lose the monster.

Fig. 4: *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2012), © Lionsgate

What comes as a refreshing surprise for a reader of contemporary affect theory is your concern with speculative realism in your text about Rubber. *Which benefits come from thinking speculative realism and specific affective modes, especially horror, together? Do you find some of the theorists and philosophers who wrote about horror from the object-oriented and related perspective — be it Graham Harman, Eugene Thacker, or Dylan Trigg — inspirational for your work?*

Opening up the question of what it is really like to be a killer tire, *Rubber* demonstrates the "secret lives of things", as Ian Bogost would put it.[26] But the film itself is a critical rejoinder to these theoretical models because it's posing the question of human and non-human perspective in the duality of chorus and torus. For me, *Rubber* is thus a lot more interesting than most speculative realist thinkers. What's interesting is how horror films can actually intervene in theoretical debates and gridlocks, especially about materiality and things, but offer some kind of a rejoinder — and *Rubber* does just that. If tearing up my lawn is the same as tearing up my child, do we really have no problem with that? If we want to invest in a theory of materiality so that we can talk about the destruction of the environment, about the vitality of stones and lawn, does it actually mean that we're willing to void certain philosophical theories of violence and ethics? The film's posing a question that such philosophical systems should work with. And likewise, right now I'm working on *The Cabin in the Woods,* and the film also speculates about the very same operations that govern accelerationist thinking. It asks questions about extensibility, about a model for acuteness of systems of late capitalism, and what that would actually look like if it were pushed to the limit; and it does so through the reduction of its world to one of Ancients and Bureaucrats, and then through a variety of hypotactic narrative levels. The work is therefore a kind of thought experiment about these philosophical problems. And I find it very productive to think of films as thought experiments about philosophical problems as long as we also regard philosophy as a series of thought experiments about aesthetic problems. As long as both these aspects are held at once, then some generative work can come out of it.

Speaking of horror, many OOO scholars are talking about H. P. Lovecraft; see, for example, Graham Harman's book *Weird Realism* (2012),[27] but I find Lovecraft's work itself much more thought-provoking than the uses to which it has been put. From the thinkers you mention, Thacker is my favourite: I teach his *Horror of Philosophy* trilogy quite a bit, and I also like his book *Cosmic Pessimism* (2015).[28] Thacker sets out a conceptual homology between horror and philosophy, and then he reads horrors as works of philosophy and philosophy as works of horror; he lets it move both ways, which is methodologically very beautiful and compelling. Although he does not talk about aesthetic specificity very often, when he does, he does so in a productive way that I find very formalist. When he discuss-

26) Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

27) Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012).

28) Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy, vol. 1* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011); *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy, vol. 2* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015); *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy, vol. 3* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015); Eugene Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism* (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2015).

es Dante's *Inferno* (1304), he focuses on topology, layers, and diagrammatic arrangements of space, on a specific philosophical problem of the void, etc. My favourite thing to do with Thacker is to take seriously his typologies; his distinction between the world-with-us, the world-for-us, and the world-without-us is an incredibly useful heuristic for discussing horror films, which themselves talk about the same kind of typology. My only problem is that just as he's getting very radical in his reading of horror and philosophy together, he falls back on a very conventional understanding of the genre. His version of horror is for the most part Gothic, metaphysical, Lovecraftian, and he would probably not recognize *Rubber* as horror in this language. Horror only works for him when it deals with tentacles, but not so much when operating with diagrammatic arrangement. Overall, treating horror as a negative metaphysics is stimulating (another work that points in this direction is Andrew Culp's *Dark Deleuze*);[29] nevertheless, when you only take horror as purely negative dimension of philosophy, as a void or nothingness, you also potentially appropriate horror into predetermined binaristic categories, and that can be a problem.

Let us now turn to your forthcoming book, which you are finishing as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Amsterdam. To what extent is this going to be a follow-up to your previous arguments and methodology? What are the conceptual gains of The Forms of the Affects *you would like to develop further; and are there, in contrast, any previous pitfalls you wish to avoid?*

The Forms of the Affects seemed to be about affect, but it really was my love letter to form. The new book is supposed to be about form, but it really is an effort to think about the ethical, a commitment to aesthetic language as a speculative ground for thinking about ethics. It takes up the previous argument, but it's also trying to push it in further directions. In the first book, I talked about formalism simply to reclaim close reading for the affective turn. In the new book, I argue that radical formalism also involves not talking about conventional ways in which we think about violence and, instead, demands that we take seriously a certain kind of reduction to bare principles, and then tease out what it means to think about the maximal destruction of the body, or, in case of love, a kind of maximal indebtedness of figures to each other. I don't talk a lot about affect theory, though, as I'm presuming people have read the first book and know where I stand. My interlocutors for this book are Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847), Bernhard Siegert and other German media theorists writing about the grid, architecture and design theorists who deal with the diagram, but also some of the OOO scholars.[30] I am also indebted to Derrida's thinking of genre and generality. The book is actually much more engaged with contemporary philosophy than with affect theory.

The other difference lies in the fact that the first book was a positive project: I end with the insistence that we don't yet know what form can do. The second one is much more polemical and asks what we can say about the ethical from a radical formalist point of view.

29) Andrew Culp, *Dark Deleuze* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

30) Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

The net result is that we cannot say all sorts of things about the ethical: for example, Richard Rorty's accusation of Levinas' ethics of alterity was that it was merely an "empty formalism", and Theodor Adorno's criticism of Kierkegaard's theory of love is that its cold cruel formalism acted "towards all men as if they were dead".[31] These constitute really hard ethical positions that formalism makes visible in works of horror and love and philosophy. And in the affective polarities and extremes, we see a kind of ethical demand which is very hard to live with. One example would be Levinas' suggestion that we have a debt to the Other, which a film like *The Human Centipede* literalizes and radically concretizes. What does it mean to have a debt to the Other? It means you'll be sewn to the Other, you'll live and die attached to them, you're diagrammatically bound to the Other. It is the irreducibility of violence that is present not only in Levinas' philosophy and in the history of metaphysics but also in the horror film as a visual attestation manifested in the diagram. And that should make us really uncomfortable.

Fig. 5: *The Human Centipede* (Tom Six, 2009), © Six Entertainment

31) Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love,' in *Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), pp. 22–23.