CHAPTER FOUR

SPIRAL[1]

I recall the fine film *Uzumaki* (translated into English as "Spiral," or "Vortex"). A Japanese, grade-B, horror movie, but a fine film nonetheless.[2] Based on the manga trilogy by Junji Ito,[3] *Uzumaki* is part of a growing number of contemporary horror films from Japan and Korea that, while masquerading as exploitation films, present social commentaries on contemporary life. Many of these films, such as Kinji Fukasaku's *Battle Royale* (2000), are explicitly concerned with the politics of individuation and the "lesson in survival" of hyper-disciplinary or, exceptional societies.[4] *Uzumaki*, subtitled *Spiral Into Horror*, directed by Higuchinsky, belongs to this relatively new genre of film. Narrated by a teenage girl, the film concerns the mysterious emergence of, and obsession with, spirals in the small island town of Kuruzu-cho. Like the films *Peeping Tom*, *Vertigo*, and *Strange Days*, it begins with a close-up shot of a disembodied eye. Over this shot we hear the following narration: "Kuruzu-cho, town of my birth. Let me tell you the story . . . of a strangeness that happened here." The next shot we see is of a dead male teenager lying at the bottom of a spiral staircase, his body twisted into the shape of a spiral. The camera pans upward from a close-up of the boys twisted body, itself spinning around and around in a spiral, as we move up the seemingly never-ending spiral staircase. The camera movement eventually morphs into a spiral graphic which then spins into the films title. We later learn that this staircase is in a high school, and that the eye at the beginning of the film, the eye of the narrator, belongs to a teenage girl who is bearing witness to the strange "spiral obsession" that "takes" her town. The image of the spiral, which is

everywhere in everyday life, eventually "takes" the lives of all those who peer into it, absorbing them within it and turning them into human spirals.

Among the examples of this "taking" of life in a spiral, we see a man who obsessively collects spiral art, ceramics, and objects, and films spirals of all kinds (including snails) with a digital movie camera: we even see him eating spiral noodle soup. Eventually, he climbs into a washing machine and ruins his spine, turning his body into a spiral. Later, as his body is being cremated, the smoke from the crematorium billows out of the smokestack into a black spiral cloud. This image clearly reminds us of the camps. A teenage girl in the bathroom of the high school where the young man died in the spiral staircase, shown at the opening of the film, comments (because he had a smile on his face when he died): "He died happy . . . it doesn't matter how, so long as you're noticed, yes?" Another girl says, "If you're not noticed, it's like you're not alive." A third girl says "I love it when people look at me." The narrator of the film interjects that this boy has died. The first girl replies, "Because it's the only way to be noticed. I too want to be noticed, especially now. I want to be seen in the truest possible way." (These exchanges clearly reminds us of the relation between spectacle and subjectivation.) Later, we see one of these girls walking down the hallway of the high school, apparently being lead by her giant, almost tree-like, hair, which consists of unmanageable spiral curls that go off in all directions. Of course, now, people can't help but notice her. At one point, human-snail spirals are literally climbing the walls of the school. We see one student, the butt of jokes from more popular students, slowly and painfully being turned into a snail. Another woman, the wife of the man consumed by the washing machine, is so horrified by the spirals (because of what the obsession did to her husband) that she has to destroy every spiral she sees: including those of her fingerprints, and, after seeing a chart in a hospital, the cochlea of her inner ear. Thus, in the very

act of trying to destroy or, counter the spirals, she is "taken" by them. "Come into the spiral" as the last chapter of the film reads. The film ends with the same shot of the disembodied eye of the teenage girl who bears witness to these events, and the same statement: "Kuruzu-cho, town of my birth. Let me tell you the story . . . of a strangeness that happened here." As in the three famous filmic examples cited above, *Uzumaki* references the fact that the filmic image is experienced and registered as a bodily sensation before it is cognitively processed: in other words, the relation between body and image, film viewer and cinema screen is one of radical immanence. As Deleuze put it, "the brain is the screen."[5] It doesn't do this in a particularly sophisticated way, but it does do this, in a B-movie sort of way, through the disembodied image of the eye (which is also the citation of a past filmic experience, a point I will return to below), the filming with digital image technology of spirals by one of the characters (which the audience also sees and experiences) and in the manga by Junji Ito, in which the image of the spirals are recorded directly into the brain of one "victim" (as if burrowing a tunnel). The spiral is an image of immanence, but *Uzumaki* is unique in its use of this figure in relation to the problem of bearing witness and subjectivity in the exception. The image of the spiral in this film can be seen to be playing, in some rather serious ways, with the problem of the exception.

The spiral is also an image of the eternal return: perhaps *the* image of the immanence of that thought. As I have already pointed out, this paradigmatic image is problematic precisely because it excludes the problem of the exception. This is particularly the case with regard to the problem of subjectivity. The abyss of the return can be thought of, in this context, as a kind of vortex or, whirlpool in which subjectivation and de-subjectivation occur in the exact same moment: in the encounter with the world (the outside), the abyss. This is a problem, however, precisely because this "abyssal" moment allows subjectivation (subjection) to "take"

desubjectivation (self-production). *Uzumaki*, I think, depicts this experience of the "taking of the outside" of individuation as a stylish horror film. The encounter with the outside in the global state of exception can be compared to that of an encounter with a spiral. In this sense, this grade-B horror film invites us (or, perhaps, only me) to think about our present image of thought—which can identified with the eternal return (the thought of our time)—and the experience of the exception as a spiral. This is the problem of the prior movement of the exception analyzed by Agamben, particularly in relation to Primo Levi's "gray zone." The image of the disembodied eye, which appears at the beginning and ending of *Uzumaki*, is something we have seen before, something we have seen in other films. It is an experience that we have "had" in the past. This citation of a past filmic experience is instructive. It gives us one answer to the question of how we can have an a-subejctive "experience" with filmic meaning (the encounter between brain and screen, the immanence of seeing and thinking, looking and being), in the context of the exception when we remain radically disassociated from our experiences, encounters, and relations. As Agamben argues in relation to the work of Guy Debord and Godard's film *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, perhaps, in the society of the spectacle, when we remain separated from the experience of spectacle itself, one strategy for its interruption may be to give us an experience with the spectacle itself: that is, by giving us an interruptive experience, encounter, or relation with images we have seen in the past.[6] With past experiences. This is precisely, I think, how the concept of the failed encounter, which I developed in Chapter One, can help us to think affect and film in the context of the exception, particularly with respect to thinking filmic experience or, spectatorship. In order to pursue this project, which I think can only begin here, I would like to first draw attention to the history of post-war narrative film, and the example of film noir as a narrative cinema of the exception. I will then consider the question of affect and the failed

encounter—a cinematic theory of bearing witness—with respect to spectatorship and mise-en-scene,[7] drawing on the example of the neo-noir film *Strange Days*. I will then further illustrate the applicability of the concept of the failed encounter to narrative cinema by looking at the films of Tsai Ming-Liang, particularly *The Hole*, and his unique use of the "long take" as an effort to interrupt the power of the exception.

Cinema and the Exception

> [G]ood books and good film noirs keep very close to current events and constitute an excellent testimony of our times
> —Marcel Duhamel

Perhaps no image more accurately defines the genre of film noir than that of the spiral. (For literal examples of this image in the genre, see, for example, Otto Preminger's *Whirlpool* (1949) and Richard Siodmark's *The Spiral Staircase* (1946)). This is instructive. The spiral in noir has been most closely associated with memory and the event (such as one finds in the work of Deleuze, Hitchcock and that of Chris Marker).[8] The flashback is the device used in noir to present literal images of the spiral as a stand-in for memory (see, for a delirious example, *The Locket*, which features flashbacks within flashbacks within flashbacks).[9] But there is also an affective experience with respect to noir: the heightened mood, feeling, or experience of life in the post-war era spiraling out of control or, altogether policed out of existence. Noir is all about post-war ethics: a world that is no longer trustworthy, where your best friend can turn on you within a moments notice, and where people are seemingly forced to do whatever they can (get away with) just to survive (see, for example, the effort to chronicle this change in ethical relations in post-war Germany in *Fassbinder's BRD Trilogy*).[10] Many noirs, for example Jean Negleusco's *Road House* (1948).[11] present this problem as one intimately connected to love by

showing how even the simple act of loving another person has become hyper-disciplined. It is here that the noir spiral, as memory, proves to be most instructive. A memory of the ruins of the present.

The term film noir was originally coined by the French in 1946 to describe the emergence of something new in American films during the war: a cinema that corresponded, according to these French critics, with their recent experience of the Nazi occupation.[12] These critics were unable to see these films—for example, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Laura,* and *Murder My Sweet*—until *after* the wars end. Curiously, it was this uniquely American genre of film—viewed by these French critics of the time (the first of whom were socialists and surrealists) as a mix of realism, German expressionism, and surrealism—that best expressed, perhaps, what they had just gone through in the occupation: that is, their experience with fascism. The ethical elements of noir include a blurring of the line between good and evil: "Good and evil often rub shoulders to the point of merging into one another."[13] The corresponding zone of indistinction between "right" and " wrong," is reflected in the "ambiguity" of ceaselessly shifting power relations in noir.[14] As Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumeton describe the "denizens"[15] of noir, "If they're often victims, it's because they haven't managed to become executioners."[16] Or, as they sum this relationship up, "Who'll do the killing and who'll get killed?"[17] Noir's treatment of the new ethical relations in the post-war era mirror Primo Levi's remarks about the camp as constituting an ethical "gray zone." The connections, of course, do not end there. Orson Welles' 1962 film noir version of Kafka's *The Trial* presents a post-war updating of the biopolitical novel, filmed in a suburb of Paris, with modern high rises, expansive, anonymous office spaces (filmed in an abandoned railway station), and one memorable scene that is telling as a post-war

noir. K goes to the interrogation offices as part of a trial and an interrogation that coincides with life. As described in Orson Welles' screenplay to the film:

> 125. Exterior shot. It is night. In low angle, medium shot we see a statue completely covered in a sinister, loosely-hanging shroud. Camera tilts slowly downwards. Around the statute, at its feet, a number of people are sitting motionless, for the most part old and nearly naked.
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> 126. Low angel shot of several groups of people standing in silence. Behind them towers a vast, bleak building. They are clutching their clothes and a few personal possessions in their bare arms; large numbered cards hang from their necks. K enters from the left and makes his way amongst them.[18]

The images of these people are ones of hallowed out beings, dressed like concentration camp inmates, standing in front of a bleak, bureaucratic building with numbers (like the tattoos of the camps) hanging from signs around their necks. These beings wait outside the office of interrogations: interrogations for trials that coincide with life. Jules Dassin's *Brute Force* openly compares a post-war prison (the old space of disciplinary confinement, according to Foucault) to a concentration camp. And even Guy Debord named one of the Situationist projects after a noir film: *Naked City*.[19]

Noir can be productively thought as a cinema of the exception. In noir we find an immediate relation to the productive abstraction of the image, the theme of radical failure and, I think, less acknowledged, bearing witness in the post-war era. Two films can serve as examples

of these relations. What is often regarded as the very first noir, *The Maltese Falcon*, concerns the search for a fetishistic object (the search for objects, as has long been known in narrative, is also a search for knowledge). The object of desire, a gold statue of a falcon, an object over which much violence and bloodshed has been spent (sadistic violence, with a great deal of comical "bitch slapping" of men by Humphrey Bogart's character). The object in question, of course, turns out to be a fake. That is, a copy or simulacrum. The connections of the beginning of noir with post-war thought are immediate and direct. Curiously, the search for the object ends, as it often does in noir, in failure. Perhaps noir is telling us, here, that the secret to unlocking the power of the image—of simulacral and virtual thought—can be found in failure?

In *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), a film that can be described as the mirror image of *The Maltese Falcon* (and is often viewed as the last noir, with the period of "high noir" book ended between these two films) a naked woman, wearing nothing but a trench coat, fleeing a mental asylum, is running along the center line of a two-lane blacktop road, trying to flag down a car. Desperate for a ride, she stands in front of a speeding sports car (carrying detective Mike Hammer), as it comes careening down the road. The woman is picked-up by Hammer ("You nearly wrecked my car. Get in!"). The next shot is a rear shot of Hammer and the woman sitting in the front seat of the car. The woman, whose face is not shown, can be heard breathing heavily, loudly gasping for breath, almost crying, against the sound track of the car radio playing, Nat King Cole's "Rather Have the Blues". Almost immediately, the problem of bearing witness is raised. The woman says, "I have to tell someone. When people are in trouble they need to talk. But you know the old saying." Hammer quickly replies, "What I don't know can't hurt me?" With this they pull over to a gas station. Returning to the car from a trip to the restroom, the woman gives the attendant a letter and asks him to mail it for her. We later learn that the letter is

sent to Hammer and that it contains two words: “Remember me.” Back on the road, the woman enters into a feminist dialogue with her ride, a detective who is described by a police interrogator later in the film this way: “His specialty is divorce cases. He's a bedroom dick.” The anonymous woman in the car says to her ride, “Ah, Woman, the incomplete sex. And what does she need to complete her? Why man, of course, wonderful man.” After this exchange, we learn that this woman loves poetry and that she was named after the poet, Christina Rossetti.[20] She tells Hammer: “If we don’t make that bus stop . . . ” (she’s trying to get back to L.A., which is the main location for the film). Hammer replies, “We will.” She continues: “If we don’t,” and here she pauses for dramatic effect, “remember me.” With that the car goes careening off the side of the road. We then hear a woman screaming as if she is being tortured, and the next thing we see is a pair of woman’s legs dangling from the ceiling as she continues to scream. These are obviously Christina’s legs (which we saw running along the blacktop in the opening shot). She’s hanging in a room (we don’t see her face or upper body, just her legs) and Hammer is passed out by a bed in a room. Two unknown and unseen men have a conversation that reminds us of a story by Primo Levi and the ethics of the “grey zone”[21]: “She’s passed out. I’ll bring her to.” The other one says, “If you revive her, do you know what that will be? Resurrection. And do you know what resurrection means? It means raise the dead. And just who do you think you are that you think you can raise the dead?” The first man replies, “Put him in the car too?” “Naturally,” the other man says. The car is then pushed over a cliff and Christina is killed. Hammer survives. Christina’s last words to Mike Hammer turn out to be “remember me.” And with these words, she hides a secret *in* her body. Not just the letter she has already mailed to Hammer: she has also swallowed a “key,” a that key opens the locker that is holding the object being searched for in this particular noir, the “great whatsit.” This key is discovered (during an autopsy) after her death

(the clue that sends Mike Hammer to her dead body is found in one of Rossetti's sonnets, "Remember," which he discovers in Christina's L.A. apartment). In this film, then, a woman escaping a mental hospital bears witness to her fate through the ruins of her own body. The object of knowledge, in this case, turns out to be the bomb, and it explodes—the result of another woman's desire to "know" what the object is that everyone is after—at the end of the film on a beach in Malibu! (The sexual politics of this film are ambiguous, at best, but nevertheless, I think, prove far more interesting than is often thought). The point of Aldrich's delirious nuclear *noir,* as quoted by Martin Scorsese: "the ends never justifies the means."[22] (This apocalyptic noir is, I think, quoted in Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*, which I will discuss further in the text below).

While these examples can be extended and multiplied, I believe that this is enough to argue that noir is the original cinema of the exception, and that the relation of noir to biopolitics is deserving of further study and analysis (for example, a more through analysis of the biopolitics of noir could include the problem of gender in these films and, more broadly, of gender as predicated on relations of separation and exclusion in the post-war era). (The sadistic "bitch-slapping"—this term is applied by me to men being slapped by men—is exactly the same in both the *Maltese Falcon* and *Kiss Me Deadly*: the detective brutally slaps the information he wants out of his subjects. In the latter film, the fact that Hammer is a "bedroom dick" reminds us of *The Trial* (and the intimacy of life and law). For now, it is merely important for us to look at this relation in the context of our present concerns. Film noir presents an exemplary image of life in a state of ethical abandonment: of deferral, delay, and suspension. *Life in the spiral of the exception*.

Among important post-war narrative films that deal in explicit ways with the theme of the exception, it is worth noting the example of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Saló* (1975). Most of the action in *Saló* takes place in a declared space of exception. As soon as the Libertines arrive at the Villa, with their kidnapped victims in tow, they immediately declare: "You are beyond the reach of any legality. No one on earth knows you are here. As far as the world is concerned, you are already dead. Here are the laws that will govern your lives." Thus, the beginning of the sequence known as "The Circle of Manias," begins with the creation of a space of exception (the film itself begins with the Libertines signing a book of laws, one of whom declares, in a line from Sade, "All is good if it is excessive"). In filming *Saló*, Pasolini made use of a rigid formalism that was a radical departure from his usual style. The shots, intended by Pasolini to remove all sympathy and traditional emotional, filmic, resonance in the viewer (primarily of identification) have a kind of "architectural" quality to them; almost as if one is watching a film version of an Albert Speer building. The concluding sequence, as is well known, deals with the theme of filmic and spectacular complicity, in which the film viewer if forced to see, and thus participate in, the Libertines murderous regime of vision (a scene which resonates with *Peeping Tom*, and *Strange Days* in more ways than I have the time to go into here). We should also note that Pasolini chose to make *Saló* instead of his previously proposed film on Saint Paul.[23] And among the "high cultural" references that the Libertines cite in the film (to demonstrate the "high culture" of the Nazi's) is included the "Letters to the Romans". Agamben, of course, was associated with Pasolini, appearing in *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Perhaps this film is a "secret text" that Agamben is making use of in his work on the exception.

These observations enable us to begin to look at cinema and the exception from the point of view of film narrative. But what of the relation between cinematic experience and the

exception: that is between filmic "meaning" and the exception? The experience of life in the state of exception is one of a radical separation from affect—from life and thought as a-subjective experiences, encounters, and relations with the world. Yet, curiously, this "experience" of the exception has been excluded from our thinking on affect, including in our theories of film and the image. What does this exclusion mean and how can we think about the experience of radical separation in regard to cinematic experience? Cinematic experience, as is by now well known, is predicated on a relation of radical passivity and vulnerability.[24] When we watch a film we sit passively in front of a screen. And on that screen is projected a series of still images which, projected at 24 frames per second, present the illusion of movement. There is nothing (literally) *there*, on the screen. Yet cinema has the power to make us feel a wide range of emotions and experiences; even what can often be the most intimate of moments. It is capable of moving us in extraordinary ways, including—as an example, the real-life events recently parodied on an episode of the *Simpsons*—the power to induce seizures in the body. [25] And all of this just by looking at and seeing something that isn't "really" there. This is, of course, the power of the filmic image: like the body, it is something that is both "there" and "not there." Filmic perception is an experience with affect: with the unknown and unknowable space between body (one kind of abstraction) and image (another kind of abstraction). To "experience" film is to encounter this abstraction, to under go an encounter with the "outside," with passivity, vulnerability, and exposure themselves. In short, it is to encounter affect.

But how can we "have" an experience with the outside, with passivity, vulnerability, exposure, when it is precisely "having" such experiences (or having access to the experience of having *had* such experiences) that is excluded (or, eventually "taken") in the exception? This is the problem of affect and film in the exception. Affect, properly speaking, is that which happens

prior to experience (prior to both cognition and emotion as traditionally defined terms). And yet, for all of this, it is the very basis on which those "other" events can be said to "happen": the non-essential foundation for feeling, desire, experience, subjectivity, and thought. What does it mean, then, to speak of "owning" or "having" an encounter with affect: with this non-place where brain meets screen? And what does it mean within the context of the problem of subjectivity in the exception? How can we bear witness to a filmic encounter that did not take place insofar as we remain separated from that very experience of de-subjectivation (that we are somehow separated from it). (If the encounter with film is an encounter with affect, and film has been one of the most popular mediums of the 20th century, why then have there not been more substantial revolutions of "everyday life" based on this encounter? I am not saying that there haven't been such micro-political changes, I am saying that what changes have taken place, with respect to these encounters have, clearly, not been enough. For example, I use the very descriptions I made of film and filmic "meaning" above in teaching film to undergraduates. And it is a revelation to them to consider the possibility that the abstraction or, potentiality, on the screen could also be a way for thinking the abstraction or, potentiality of their own bodies with regard to subjectivity. If we were not separated from this experience of desubjectivation in film spectatorship. which, despite the decline of the film industry, is still something widely experienced, then we should expect to be a bit further along in the "revolution of everyday life" than we currently are.) These problems, I think, can be productively highlighted by looking at Kathryn Bigelow's 1995 neo-noir *Strange Days*; an exemplary film about the spectacle.[26] This film is, also, instructive for the thought of affect and the exception precisely because of its reception among post-Deleuzian scholars, none of whom seems to have noticed that it is a film *about* the spectacle.[27]

"A Piece of Somebody's Life"

> Memory cannot give us back what was; that would be hell. Instead, memory restores possibility to the past
> —Giorgio Agamben

Strange Days is an exemplary film about affect and the spectacle. (For a definition of the concept of the spectacle, see the "Appendix" to this chapter, "The Persistence of the Spectacle.") The action takes place on the eve of the millennium, December 30th and 31st, in the year 1999, set against the backdrop of a "future-present" Los Angeles that has imposed martial law as a kind of permanent state of emergency. Road blocks are standard, as are riots, looting, and racial and class discrimination; and in this "future," gas is over $3.00 a gallon. The films narrative centers on the relationship between an interracial friendship: the ex-cop and slightly sleazy Lenny (Ralph Fiennes), and the tough, but vulnerable valet, Mace (Angela Bassett). Lenny is a dealer, not of drugs, but of black market "clips" or "playbacks." Playbacks are a fictional digital technology (like the internet, originally developed by the military) depicted in the film. Playback is slang for SQUID (Superconducting Quantum Interference Device), which allows visual images to be recorded directly onto the cerebral cortex, using the optical nerve as a "lens." (The SQUID device fits over the skull, and is hidden from view, by those who use the device, either for SQUID porn, for making memory "clips" or, for surveillance, by discretely placed wigs.) This makes possible the recording, circulation, exchange, and consumption of human sense experience: "you think it, you can have it." As Lenny, making a sale, says, in words that clearly invoke the spectacle: "This is not like T.V. only better. This is *life*. It's a piece of somebody's *life*." The technology is developed to such an extent that the consumer of "clips" can experience

literally anything within the entire range of human sense perception possible at this point in time. "I sell experiences," crows Lenny. The most intimate experiences of sense perception, not just sight, but the emotional experience and life of the one wearing the SQUID-device at the time of the recording, can be separated from that person and sold to others: can be "taken" and experienced, separately and for their own ends, by those with an interest in "taking" and reliving that experience. These clips are alluded to in the film, in some specific scenes, as memories. Moreover, we—the film viewer—always experience "playback" as a past experience. Thus, what we are confronted with is a future-present world where memories, feelings, and emotions—but also, and the film does not say this, but it must be the case if we take Deleuze's thought seriously, thought itself, insofar as it is tied directly to affect—can be bought and sold; can be separated from the one who experiences, and even creates, that unique and different life. The "playbacks" are, I would argue, an image for the taking of life in the state of exception.

This taking of life, I think, has to be viewed within the larger context of the film, both with regard to its narrative and its filmic meanings. As a viewer of the film, our "experience" of playback takes two predominant forms. The SQUID, or "playback" sequences are shot to resemble point-of-view (POV) sequences, such that the viewer of the film comes to assume the perspective of the person wearing the SQUID-device and recording the clip. However, we have no idea who the "author" of these experiences are (many of these clips are simply anonymous). These clips involve a cinematic experience that can be compared to that of affect because of the subjectless way in which we, the viewer, experience the playback sequences (i.e. as pre-personal, cinematic images without subject or object).[28] While it would be a mistake to ignore the potential meanings of this aspect of "playback" in the film, it would be problematic if this interesting idea or, relation to the film were separated from all of the films other narrative and cinematic

meanings. Moreover, doing so does not, in and of itself, involve a privileging of narrative and filmic meaning over an affective meaning of the film. This is because the film is about the spectacle and the proliferation of relations of separation and exclusion. To read this film separated from those aspects of this meaning would, I think, be to continue the very separation that the film is trying to interrupt or, at least, point to.

The second way in which we experience playback is "within" the mise-en-scene and written narrative of the film. In this context, the experience of playback is presented in an almost entirely negative manner: as an experience of radical separation from the self and from life (a separation, I believe, that is too complex to be reduced merely to "alienation"). Framed against the backdrop of a fictional variation on the Rodney King beatings and the L.A. riots of 1992—events which point directly to the spectacle[29]—Bigelow's L.A. is a burnt out police state; an updated noir with references to the end of the world, end of the millennium, and films like *Blade Runner* and *Peeping Tom*. The main character, Lenny is something of a broken man. A former cop, he lives his life in an unredeemed past as mediated through "playback," endlessly watching "clips" of his life with his former girlfriend, Faith (Juliette Lewis). In fact, Lenny is so consumed by the effort to remain in his literal, and linear, experiences of the past—a past that has really passed—that he completely ignores what is happening in his own present; particularly his friendship, and possible romantic connections, with Mace. In one scene, we see Mace stop her limo and throw Lenny out because she told him "no wire-head shit" is allowed in her car. More importantly, towards the end of the film, Mace argues with Lenny about his obsession with playback: "This is your life, right here, right now . . . This is real. These [playback tapes] are used emotions . . . Memories were designed to fade for a reason." In this narrative sense, the film

is all about separation, and the multiple ways in which life is reduced, as in most great film noir, to mere survival.

The first playback clips we see are a snuff clip and two porno clips. The first clip we see that has a connection to the characters in the film is the fourth one, which is of Lenny playing an old tape of his former life with Faith (Juliette Lewis). Lenny speeds the tape up to get to the sex scenes. The "reverse" or, "reaction" shots[30] of Lenny in the present, show an ecstatic Lenny as he plays back the clip, reaching out to touch Faith (sitting in his apartment, on his couch, alone) as he fucks her in the clip. Then the clip ends and the first thing we see is a look in Lenny's eyes of disorientation and loss. This is followed by a pained expression on his face that shows a sense of complete loss, as if he is about to start crying. He has come back to the present, which is an experience of separation from what he wants, needs, loves, or desires. In this way, the playbacks show us *separation from the present*. This is a recurring feature of all playbacks that involve a memory or experience of love. Re-experiencing such memories, or even the experiences of what "you can't have" (as Lenny sells his clips) is always presented, in the present-time of watching the film, as an experience of loss. This is why "playback" is closer to the "hell" Agamben describes above than affect in Deleuze: it is a literalization of the past, emptied out of all potentiality, precisely because it gives us the past "the way it really was" and repeats that "fact" endlessly.

This cinematic experience of separation is further expressed in a scene that takes place at the fictional club in the film, the "Retinal Fetish." Lenny gives a special clip he made to a DJ at the club. The DJ happens to be a double amputee (he has no legs). The clip Lenny made for him is of a man walking on the beach, looking down at his feet in the sand, feeling his bare toes in the sand and the surf. The clip is in slow motion. As we watch the clip playback, the POV shots are

interrupted with shots of the DJ responding to this experience of playback in the "present" (for the duration of the playback). We see his euphoria and happiness at the sensations and experiences of walking on the beach, no longer handicapped, feeling the cool water and squishy sand in his toes in the sand and surf. Then, suddenly, when the playback is over, we see a look of complete and total loss come over his face: he is still in the dingy "Retinal Fetish," still in a wheel chair, and still with no legs. Once again, the experience of the playback is not presented as something affirmative, or even expansive of potential, within the *mise-en*-scene of the film, but as a separation from life. The clip is over and all one is left with, once again, is separation from what one wants, needs, loves, or desires. A separation that corresponds to life in the historical present.

The most disturbing example of playback in the film is the one that famously quotes Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*.[31] This "clip," I think, needs to be considered within the context of another playback within the film. We are shown these playbacks out of their temporal order, so I will begin with the one that the audience sees first. Lenny is riding in Mace's limo when he watches a clip that someone, anonymously, has left for him at the Retinal Fetish (and which the above mentioned DJ passes along to him). Lenny has no idea what he is about to watch when he watches the "clip" nor do we, the audience. We experience it, again with the desubjectified POV shots, but also as Lenny is watching it in Mace's limo in the "reaction" shots of Lenny viewing the clip. The clip begins with a breaking and entering in a hotel room at the Sunset Regency. We see the gloved hands of the person who has recorded the clip. We have no idea who this person is. Very quickly, the scene turns horrific. Iris (Brigitte Bako), a friend of Lenny's who is a prostitute, is being violently pursued. A stun gun is used to subdue her. She is handcuffed and her arms raised above her head, all the while being repeatedly shocked with a stun gun. In the

reaction shot Lenny yells at Mace to go to the Sunset Regency hotel "now!." We then return to the POV shot of the clip and see that the rapist is putting a SQUID-device on Iris' head: as Lenny describes what he is watching, "he's jacking it into his own input. She's seeing what he's seeing." Iris is not only seeing herself as she is being raped, she is also feeling what the rapist is feeling as he rapes her. Iris is now blindfolded as she is penetrated and slowly chocked to death by her killer. She is forced to not only watch her death, but to experience it from the perspective of her killer: feeling what he feels as he fucks and kills her. The next shot outside the POV clip is of Lenny throwing up outside Mace's limo from having experienced this too. The audience, of course, participates in all of this just by watching.

This scene has been analyzed extensively in the context of its quotation of *Peeping Tom*. That is, as a feminist statement about "regimes of vision" with regard to women.[32] What I am more concerned with here is how this scene means within what I am calling a cinema of bearing witness (which, of necessity needs to include what I think is the "second part" of this clip), and how it has been interpreted within the discourse on affect and immanence. Patricia Pisters writes of the immanence of the scene: "There is no longer a distance between *having* the image and being the image."[33] This, Pisters points out, creates a critical perspective that "implicates the audience to the point where we ourselves become the rapist and victim."[34] This is fine, as far as it goes, but *Strange Days*, I think, can be more properly thought of, not as a film about the loss of critical distance, nor of the loss of the subject, or even the "real," but of immanence in the state of exception. It shows us that the loss of critical distance, our immersion in the world of things, the immanence of viewer and screen, can also be used for destructive ends. And this clip shows that experience very well, I think, precisely because it is all about the rape and murder of a woman and the "taking" of even that experience of her life: that is, she must be forced to be

complicit in her own death and destruction (just as in the concentration camp system). I have had to field a lot of questions from students over the years about this film. One student, a woman and self-described feminist, strenuously objected to this scene because the technology was fictional and it would never happen in "real life." She said that Bigelow didn't need to bring this vision "into the world." I have to explain to these students that what this clip shows is precisely the situation of the concentration camp system, as well as the numerous ways in which women in our society are forced to participate in, and become complicit with, their own destruction simply as a means to survive.

The "second part" of this clip concerns why Iris was killed. It seems a simple thing to connect this with the first part, the one that quotes *Peeping Tom* in interesting and theoretical ways, but important aspects of this connection, I think, remain unthought in the critical reception of *Strange Days*. Why was the prostitute, Iris, killed? To fully answer this, beyond the theme of "regimes of vision" already analyzed by other critics, we need to look at another clip: one which we see after the rape and murder of Iris, but which was recorded, within the films narrative, before it. That is, a clip (and, perhaps, a problem) that *precedes* this one. *Iris is a witness*. She witnesses the execution-style killing of a popular black rapper, named Jericho One (Glenn Plummer), at the hands of the L.A.P.D., in the course of a routine traffic stop. Iris is "wired" (wearing a S.Q.U.I.D. device) when this event happens and is the only one to escape. She seeks out Lenny's help, but is unable to reach him in time (per noir conventions). So she leaves the memory of her body, a copy of the clip, in Lenny's car. In this way, Iris plays the role of the witness that we know from an earlier apocalyptic *film noir*, also filmed and centered in L.A., *Kiss Me Deadly*. Iris was killed because she was a witness to, and her body recorded, the spectacular murder of a popular black rapper killed during a routine traffic stop. Iris, it turns out,

was not murdered by the L.A.P.D. but by her boss, Philo (Michael Wincott), who was trying to protect his business as a manger of recording artists (including Jericho One). Philo, it turns out, is the one who had Iris wear the SQUID-device in order to do surveillance on Jericho One.

The poststructuralist response to this film certainly points to these aspects of the narrative of the film, however it seems to me that it relegates the most problematic aspects to the realm of the "negative" (the dialectic). Although none of the critics of this film use this language, it's almost as if the effort to think seriously about these "disturbing" aspects of the film is summarily excluded as an engagement with *ressentiment*. It seems to me that this line of thought in Deleuze has been used (or misused, depending your perspective) to shy away from analyzing these aspects of the film in any coherent way (other than self-referentially within the history of film, or in relation to technology), including grasping the larger context of the film as one of the spectacle (as one of separation and exclusion). Instead, there is a focus on how the SQUID playbacks can be used as an example of affect in Deleuze's philosophy. While the playbacks certainly can be viewed in this way, I think a much fuller account of this line of thinking would have to ask, to use Deleuze's language, of what forces and relations are these "pre-personal," "pre-individual," singularities composed? This points to a kind of split, or excluded, reading of the film: one which points, I think, to a separation between thought and life. As Deleuze wrote on affect in his *Cinema 2:*

> The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it has to plunge into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life will no longer be made to appear

> before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures.[35]

Today, we live in an era in which all thought, all affect, all life is radically policed. Thus, from a Deleuzian perspective, the post-Deleuzian critics reading of this film is incomplete, because it ignores the work that is necessary to reach affect today—that is, thought; the incorporeal transformations necessary to touch and reach affective experience itself, in a world that, as Deleuze himself was well aware, is radically policing such potential. [36] This would imply interrupting the spectacle or, alternately, the exception in some way, as a work that would *precede* any experience, encounter, relation with, or *usage* of, affect itself. To ignore this is to run the risk of ignoring the existential "experience" of life in the state of exception. If we take the thought of the Deleuzian critics cited above seriously, and I think that we should, then we have to go "all the way" with this thought. Affect *is* thought. What that means, in the context of *Strange Days*, is simply noticing that the film could very well be pointing to the separation of thought from itself, which also means from life, in the historical present. However, *Strange Days* is also, I think, about the redemption of affect in the historical present.

This is the context in which I view the second ending of the film. (In the first ending, which is widely regarded as a political "cop-out," the memory of Iris' body, her clip of the execution of Jericho One, is given to a white, so-called "honest," policeman who "saves the day"). It is in the second ending, perhaps, that we can view *Strange Days* as a film about the separation and redemption of affect: as a potential that we can make use of in the historical present. That potential, according to the film, is found in a simple gesture of love. The scene take place at the Hotel Bonaventure, outside on the street, on the last day of the millennium, literally

minutes before midnight. A spectacular party is raging in the streets. Immediately before the white cop "saves the day," and after she successfully eludes and then captures the two white cops who killed Jericho One, Mace is brutally beaten by the police in a scene that is reminiscent of the Rodney King beating. Mace is on the ground pleading for help. A young black boy jumps on the cop who is beating her, while she is down, and yells "leave her alone." This vulnerable figure starts a riot against the police. The scene is brutal, Bigelow shows us overhead crowd shots intercut with close-ups of Mace on the ground, and the riot police being called-in in line formations. Enter the white cop who "saves the day" by showing the two "bad" cops that he has the playback of the murder of Jericho One, and orders them under arrest. He barks, almost as an afterthought, "Get this woman some medical attention." One of the "bad" cops grabs a gun and commits suicide. The other "bad cop," upon the loss of his partner, grabs the gun and, in a sequence that is partially shown in slow motion, with incredible purple, blue and red lighting, with a look of complete rage and hatred on his face, which is lighted in red, charges for Mace with the gun and calls her a "nigger bitch." Again, the montage juxtaposes images of "normal" movement with images shown in slow motion, and features incredibly exaggerated lighting, such as one finds in old Technicolor films. The body of the bad cop is riddled with bullets from the police who, just minutes earlier were beating Mace. As the spectacular countdown to the year 2000 occurs, we see a juxtaposition of slow motion and regular motion shots of people kissing in the crowd. Lenny and Mace are being escorted into police cars so they can go down to the station and testify. They say goodbye and get into separate cars. There is an incredible montage of images in this sequence, with blurry colors from the streamers used in the Y2K celebration obscuring the view of the camera (and the film viewer). It is a blur of images and crowds that only heightens a sense of the search for "belonging." Lenny goes back to Mace's car, which is

moving through the crowd, pulls her out, and looks straight into her eyes, and kisses her. The kiss is interrupted by the use of slow motion, in close-up, in a manner continuous with the montage of images before. Then, as Lenny and Mace stand and kiss, we see in an overhead crane shot that moves slowly up revealing the crowd and the confetti, the entire street scene, which is a mass of people kissing and hugging each other. An assemblage of love. The film ends.

This moment, this kiss, which is immediately preceded by what can only be described as a traumatic event (trauma upon trauma, to be more accurate), is what everything in the film, as a critique of radical separation and exclusion, has been building up to. In this moment, as the song on the soundtrack says,[37] two people—in a world that is spiraling out of control with relations of radical separation, preventing people from touching their "selves," as well as each other— found a way, for one moment, to interrupt that power and actually touch each other with a kiss. It is a moment that interrupts the spectacle with a gesture of love between two beings: not two "races", because that very language, the language of race, according to this film, is the language of the spectacle, the language of separation. This is not about a "recognition" on Lenny's part of his romantic longing for Mace (because we have no idea what will happen after this one kiss). No, this scene is only a simple gesture of love and connection (something we have seen that these characters have struggled to achieve throughout the film).

Strange Days, and the problems of its analysis within the concept of affect in Deleuze, powerfully suggests that we need to begin to rethink affect and film according to the concept of bearing witness. Perhaps we can begin to think filmic experience, with regard to the spectacle and the exception, as a failed encounter: bearing witness to a filmic encounter that did not take place (and precisely because of this, that encounter is more problematic than the pure "fact" of the immanence of brain and screen, or of the mere existence of "pre-personal" and "pre-

individual" images without subject or object). To inhabit this failure to "have" an experience requires something more than the pure fact of the passivity of spectatorship: a transformation, an activity, if you will, a "performative" that we would call "bearing witness". Perhaps this presents us with a better perspective from which to think affect and film than one that takes affect for granted, as something that is simply there, like the "facts" of Bigelow's playbacks. Such an image of affect as a "fact" would be completely emptied of all potentiality. This idea of bearing witness to a filmic encounter that did not take place is not simply about film narrative (e.g. documentary and/or narrative films *about* trauma and memory),[38] though it can and should include this, but the experience of trauma and film: film viewing as bearing witness to an affective experience that is always in danger of being lost: of being "taken" in the exception and the spectacle (including while we are watching the film).

Mise-en-scene, I think, contains this possibility within itself precisely insofar as it points to the "experience" of subjectivity (the film-viewer's participation in creating the meaning of the film) as part of the non-essential foundation for cinematic thought. Mise-en-scene is not simply about how the director controls everything the viewer sees and experiences on the screen (as per a famous image from *A Clockwork Orange*), but also how the spectator fills in the image, the empty space of the screen, with what we love, want, need, or desire: in short, with the potential of our lives. And this includes the radically exterior experience of our bodies in their encounter with the image itself. Perhaps there is no greater example of this aspect of *mise-en-scene* than in an extraordinary scene in Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*, where Jane Wyman (playing Cary Scott), simply looks down with her eyes and conveys a world of meaning that is neither in the narrative (literally, as far as I know) nor literally "there" on the screen, but in how we relate to, encounter, and experience this simple gesture. This is the scene ("*Walden* Clambake" on the

DVD), that takes place at Mick (Charles Drake) and Alida's (Virginia Gray) place. Cary reads a quote from *Walden* about the "self-made man (a concept Sirk is critiquing). In conveying the "lesson" of the quote to Cary, Alida says: "to thine own self be true." When Alida reads this line, the scene cuts to a reverse shot of Cary, and what she conveys with a simple look in her eyes is remarkable: it is as if the statement "to thine own self be true" is a confrontation with Cary's self. That she is being confronted with what she does not have, nor ever will be allowed to have, in a male-dominated, subject-centered, society, for her "self." Wyman's incredible performance conveys a sense of complete loss—a loss of the self, as it is socially circumscribed—in this scene. It is as if you can see her heart sink (which, of course, cannot be literally shown). And all of this with the smallest of gestures: simply with a look in her eyes, and the movement of those eyes looking down. This is, of course, a gesture of failure: the failure to be a subject as defined by society. (It was this gesture that inspired me to look at the eyes of those experiencing "playback" in the Bigelow film.) Bearing witness to this failure as a *transformative* filmic encounter—in other words, as a *non-encounter*—may point to one direction for thinking the problem of cinema and the exception. In this way "cinematic meaning" and the thought of radical exteriority can perfectly coincide.[39]

It is here that Agamben's essay on the cinema of Guy Debord, "Difference and Repetition," proves instructive. Agamben begins his essay by stating that he will "purposely avoid the notion of 'cinematographic work' with respect to Debord because he himself declared it inapplicable."[40] It seems simple to point this out, but this is not the same thing as declaring that *all* cinematic technique is meaningless or, unimportant in thinking the relation between cinema, history, and the spectacle.[41] The present work has other relations, other connections to make than those presented by Agamben in this short essay. I am concerned with the philosophical relation

between affect, cinema, and the exception. Moreover, I am interested in exploring this through reference to the use of both mise-en-scene and the "long take" as expressed in specific examples from narrative film. I believe that a more thorough consideration of the relations between gesture (as Agamben defines it, following Benjamin) and cinematic language or technique is not only possible, but desirable with regard to the thought of the exception.[42] Here we could point to some rather obvious and simple connections in the history of cinema: Georges Méliès, Legar/Murphey (the figure of Chaplin appears at the beginning and ending of *Ballet Mecanique*—perhaps the most erotic mise-en-scene ever created through the use of simple, everyday objects), Chaplin, and Vertov (and, of course, Muybridge, Marey, and the Lumiere's). Among the excluded in Agamben's text is Méliès, who practically invented mise-en-scene. This seems curious to me, given the fact that Méliès cinema is perfectly in keeping with the concept of cinema and "de-creation" that Agamben articulates, following Deleuze, in this essay. As Agamben writes, "What does it mean to resist? Above all it means de-creating what exists, de-creating the real, being stronger than the fact in front of you. Every act of creation is also an act of thought, and an act of thought is a creative act, because it is defined above all by its capacity to de-create the real."[43]

Méliès' experiments with mise-en-scene are experiments with imagination. In his "Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," Benjamin argues (following, I think Vertov) that cinema has the power to expand human sense perception by showing us "what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of the what really goes on between hand and metal and still less how this varies with different moods."[44] Méliès films, specifically his usage and invention of the concept of mise-en-scene, expose the power of the imagination (including, I think, something close to what Deleuze called the "powers

of the false").[45] In 1900, people could not *literally* go to the moon. But Méliès took his spectators to the moon through the "pure means" of imagination. Pure imagination. Mise-en-scene is an *Impossible Voyage* precisely because it shows us what cannot be seen.[46] Vertov shows this with montage, whereas Méliès exposes this with mise-en-scene. Exposing imagination in this way means entering into what does not exist: entering into what has the status of both existing and non-existing, of being there, on the screen, and not being there, in a material sense. It is in this sense that Méliès gives us an experience *with* cinematic abstraction, one which can be compared to "those little books, forerunners of cinematography, that gave the impression of movement when the pages are turned over rapidly."[47] And it is precisely the extreme artificiality of the mise-en-scene that accomplishes this. It is in this sense that the completely fake sets of Méliès and, later, Douglas Sirk, can also be compared to a "pure means . . . that shows itself as such. The image gives itself to be seen instead of disappearing in what it makes visible."[48] This could be a description of the cinema of either Douglas Sirk or, Georges Méliès. And, yet, such a statement seems shocking precisely because nothing is more closely associated with "pure control" in cinema than mise-en-scene.[49]

Three important examples from narrative film that stand out as especially important for analysis in this respect are Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, and Todd Haynes' *Far From Heaven*. This last film quotes the other two precisely as a way of interrupting the power of separation (from affect) in the present: because we "have" experiences with these other films, Haynes chose to use these past cinematic experiences as a way to "make the audience cry" in the present.[50] In other words, this is a usage of past filmic experiences in order to give the film viewer an experience with affect in the present. Moreover, all three of these films make extraordinary use of mise-en-scene to articulate

and disrupt the separations and exclusions of gender, race, and sex. I think that the work of explicating a cinema of the exception can be done along side Agamben's work on gesture (and Godard's work on the *Histoire(s) du Cinema*).[51] But I also believe that a vital task to accomplishing this is to continue to think the relationship between mise-en-scene and philosophy.[52] To conclude this investigation into cinema and the exception, I want to look at Tsai Ming-Liang's unique cinema of failed encounters. In particular his use of the long take as a means of suspending time and relation in filmic experience, specifically in order to gives us "a unique experience *with* the past," and the problem of modernity and the state of exception.[53]

A Cinema of Failed Encounters[54]

> Sometimes I really wish there would be no more progress
> —Tsai Ming-Liang, Interview.

> The image of the 20th Century that drifted out of my eyes was one of unending rain . . . I think the world environment, particularly that of Asia, was destroyed in the 20th century. Whether I am in Taiwan or in the country of my birth, Malaysia, I feel that the situation is at its most serious in these two developing countries. Why am I so pessimistic? If you live in Taiwan, you will naturally feel pessimism. We paid a heavy price for the take-off of the Taiwan economy over the past 10 years. People have to live with crime, violence, political conflict and corruption, the serious pollution of the environment, alienation and growing friction in personal relationships. All these are almost permanent fixtures of people's daily lives . . .
>
> This is my thought: Modern man does not know how to communicate, indeed, they do not know how to learn to communicate . . . the biggest hope of my characters is that there will be someone who will extend a hand to them or offer them a glass of water
> —Tsai Ming-Liang, *Production Notes to The Hole.*

In Tsai Ming-Liang's *The Hole* (Taiwan, 1998), an epidemic of unknown origins rages in Taiwan. There is quarantine, evacuation, and their inevitable result, refugees. A state of emergency has been declared. As the opening credits roll against a black screen, we hear the anonymous voices of "man on the street" interviews (sometimes women, sometimes men), along with the equally anonymous voices of TV announcers and "officials," coming from an unseen television.

> First Voice: The government is going to call off all garbage runs. We are being driven out of this place. This is not fair to the people who live here. If the epidemic is really prevailing in this area, they should have done something a long time ago, but they didn't do a thing about it. They didn't try to protect us. Now look at us. The disease is widespread and everyone is sick. Now they want us to move into tents and schools like refugees. Why should I cooperate with them?
>
> Second Voice: With no prevention, the epidemic will break out. What if we were carrying the virus?
>
> Third Voice: You can't just move us anywhere you want to. Some people have lived here for generations. The government can't make us leave our homes.
>
> Fourth Voice: I'll just dump my rubbish anywhere. To hell with our government.
>
> Fifth Voice: I'll dump my garbage where I can't see it, or where other people can't see it. Or I'll just put them wherever other people put them.
>
> Sixth Voice: They should burn us all, together with the garbage.
>
> Voice of TV Commentator: Taiwan's Government has issued a statement in response to sharp criticism from WHO (World Health Organization). Though we haven't been able to identify the name of the epidemic or its origin, we are very confident that we can take care of it in the shortest time.
>
> The water company also announced that starting in the year 2000, it will cut off the water supply to all quarantine zones. And now here's our report.
>
> Voice of Water Official: After thorough consideration, we have come to this painful decision. In compliance with the government's all-out evacuation, this company will cut off all water supplies to quarantine zones starting midnight, January 1st, 2000. For all those who live in the quarantine zone, please leave. Do not hesitate. It would be foolish to assume one can live on rainwater.

Voice of TV Commentator: Seven days to go now until the year 2000. [55]

So begins Tsai Ming-Liang's self-described "love story for the millennium;"[56] a love story that centers on the space of a hole—an image, simultaneously, of absence, abstraction, connection, and eroticism—that opens up between two people living their lives in a quarantined zone in a declared state of exception.[57] The unknown virus alluded to in this opening sequence, we later learn through various media accounts, is dubbed the "end-of-the-millennium-virus" or, "Taiwan virus." This virus is one of the present. The symptoms of this virus initially include flu-like symptoms (strangely like the on-set of HIV/AIDS)[58], followed by cockroach like behavior—a propensity for dark, isolated spaces, and an inability to tolerate human contact. The virus of the present produces an absence of belonging: that is, separation and exclusion from simple, human contact. *The Hole* is a love story of life and belonging in the state of exception. It also continues what I would describe as Ming-Liang's unique cinema of failed encounters—of failed desires, loves, and absolutely vital connections that remain inaccessible to the characters, and the viewing audience: of connections and encounters that are always "just out of reach." And, yet, Ming-Liang's films are also an intervention: an effort to interrupt the force of separation, if even for a moment, of the exception. This intervention allows us to have an *experience with* this failure, this separation, this exclusion, this loss, this fleeting modernity that is our present. This experience is the result of Ming-Liang's unique cinematic language, which makes excessive use of the long take. My strategy in the following is to be as descriptive in my treatment of this film as possible. What I want to do is *simply describe* some of the main cinematic and narrative techniques that Ming-Liang uses in his work and how the example of *The Hole*, in particular,

illuminates the cinema of the exception and the possibilities for thinking cinematic experience as a failed encounter.

In contrast to his previous feature films, the two main characters in *The Hole* are completely anonymous. They are identified only in the credits for the film as "man upstairs" (Lee Kang-Sheng) and "woman downstairs" (Yang Kuei-Mei), respectively. We see the "man upstairs" and the "woman downstairs" engaged in the banal activities of everyday life: eating, watching TV, shitting, pissing, clipping toe-nails, taking a bath, shopping (for toilet paper, no less), and sleeping. In short, we see their everyday lives as they live them: *life reduced to mere survival*. The very anonymity of these characters—continuing to live their lives *within* a declared state of emergency and a zone marked literally as a space of exception—only highlights this "everyday" or, "everyman" aspect of the film, particularly as a meditation on the present. Of course, a life reduced to mere survival is not all we see in *The Hole*. We also see the one of the anonymous characters (the "woman downstairs") desires for love, and for life, for happiness, expressed in the form of musical numbers that are pantomimed and lip-synched, as in drag performances, at key moments in the film. (These musical numbers are discussed further in the text below).

The sets and cinematography employed in *The Hole* highlight the experience of "everyday life" presented in the film. *The Hole* is shot entirely in the confines of enclosed spaces, with most of the "action" taking place in a large tenement building (which actually houses approximately 500 *families*). Even the market place, where the only other scenes in the film take place, is in an enclosed space. Ironically, the Chinese word *dong* or, hole has an original relation to such claustrophobia in its meaning as "tunnel."[59] As Ming-Liang comments on these spaces of enclosure within the film:

> My sets are realistic, a bit run down and murky. And it's always raining, which makes my characters somewhat aloof from their environment . . . They are romantic but the environment is out of key with this romanticism. They believe they can hide themselves in a safe world behind the door and put the garbage outside which they don't see. But the world isn't so safe inside. Danger creeps in all the same, like the unending rain, the strange diseases etc. Doors, elevators, staircases are repeatedly seen, reflecting the hopes of the characters of escaping from their enlocked circumstances.[60]

This relation to space extends to Ming-Liang's cinematic techniques in the film, particularly his use of the "long take." Ming-Liang, like his fellow Taiwanese film-maker Hou Hsiou-Hsien, is known for his "ruthless use of the long take."[61] The long take is a cinematic technique in which the camera records the "scene" without any edits, such as "reverse" shots, or "counter" shots, which allow the film viewer a sense of relief from what is being presented on the screen.[62] One of the effects of the long take is a heightening of concentration and emotion in the viewer. As any viewer of the films of Andy Warhol knows (e.g. *Blow Job, Empire, Vinyl, Screen Tests, Kiss*), such films can be hard to watch. This is because the use of the long-take creates a space of intense intimacy between the viewer and the image. There is no "outside" to the space of the film frame/screen, and the viewer is forced (in a radically complicit way) to linger over, to enter into, and to share for what can seem like an interminably long time, in the space of the frame. Boredom and a certain anxiety often collide simultaneously in the viewer. Boredom because the use of the long take all but forces us to focus entirely on the events

happening on the screen, which in this case consist of very little. Anxiety, because the intimacy between viewer and image, their immanence, threatens our normal sense of time, as well as disrupting the conventions of identity and identification (produced through the combination of shot/reverse shot techniques) in traditional film. What is important to note in the case of Ming-Liang is his use of this cinematic space of immanence within the context of redemption and the exception.

The excessive use of the long take, almost to the point of minimalism, only heightens the affective experience of the viewer. And, in this case, that heightening of experience is one of watching two people simply eat, sleep, cook, go to the bathroom, shop—in short, survive—but who yearn for much more (hence, the faux drag numbers). In other words, Ming-Liang is giving us an *experience with* the exception. And he does this, curiously enough, by using the long take to "suspend" time (the seemingly interminable boredom of what is "happening" on the screen) as well as our relation to the image (which we are forced to enter into, rather than merely "identify" with). By suspending time and our relation to the image, by giving us an experience with "another time," Ming-Liang gives an experience with the relations of separation (and suspension) that mark our time. In other words, this suspension of time and relation (of our relation to the screen, which is happening in the present, as we watch the film) also constitutes an interruption of our present. This interruption of our "normal" sense of chronological time, as well as filmic space, is important in thinking about a film that deals explicitly with the theme of the exception. Ming-Liang's use of the long-take, I would argue, is what marks this as a film of *failed encounters*, and not just its narrative relation to the exception. By suspending our "normal" relation to time and filmic space, and using these techniques to show us life reduced to mere survival, Ming-Liang has incorporated the failure of experience that marks our present into a

work that seeks to use images *of that failure*, in order to give us an experience with it. In other words, it is only after Ming-Liang gives us an experience with failure that he is then able to give us an experience with the exception.[63]

Another example of Ming-Linag's use of the long take can be found in the penultimate scene to his *Vive L'amour* (1996). Yang Kuei-Mei's character is seen endlessly walking in a desolate urban landscape (actually a city park in Tapei that has been interminably under construction for many years; unfinished, it resembles a war zone more than it does a "public space"). The camera follows her around, seemingly walking in and to nowhere (there is no teleological goal in her walking, which seems to be taking place only and solely, for its own sake). This use of time, movement, and image produces a heightened sense of affect; an absolute intimacy between the viewer and the image. At the screening of the Seattle International Film Festival where I first saw this film in 1996, the audience was made so uncomfortable by the emotion in this scene, by the mere existence of affect (produced, in effect, between their bodies and the image), that it collectively resorted to Freudian resistance in the form of nervous and uncomfortable laughter (when, in fact, there was nothing "funny" happening on the screen). After walking to and from "nowhere," the woman sits down in a nearly empty amphitheater and begins to cry, sobbing uncontrollably. This lasts for several minutes (the entire scene lasts approximately 15 minutes). There is no dialogue other than the sobbing. Then, as abruptly as the sobbing started, the film ends.

There is little dialogue in Ming-Liang's films. As many critics have observed, "There are more words in the credits to his films than there are in the script."[64] This is part of Ming-Liang's effort to give us an experience with life in the historical present, in which people are radically disassociated from each other.[65] This marks Ming-Liang's cinema as one of modern failure. In

The Hole, as in almost all of his films, there is no musical score. All we hear as we watch these scenes of everyday life reduced to mere survival is the drone of unending rain. The only sex we see in the film is of phone sex (in which the woman downstairs fantasizes that she is talking to the man upstairs). There is also a scene in which an old man tries to find an expired brand of bean sauce. We see him standing in and wandering around a market for what seems like an interminably long time in his failed quest (a quest that has its very basis in failure) to find a brand of bean sauce that was “discontinued a long time ago.” After being told that the brand is no longer available, the man wanders around the deserted market place, looking at his empty jar of bean sauce. Eventually, he leaves the market.

It seems redundant to say that there is water everywhere in the films of Tsai Ming-Liang. The apartment in Ming-Liang's first feature, *Rebels of the Neon God*, is constantly and mysteriously flooded. This, in a film about the blank indifference and alienation of young adults in the time immediately after the so-called "economic miracle" of rapid, high-tech, modernization in Taiwan. It is also very gay, with a young Lee Kang-Sheng, who has played the lead in all of Ming-Liang's films, having an unrequited crush on a hot, young, hip motorcycle stud. In his *Vive L' amour*, water appears in the form of the endless tears that roll down the cheeks of Yang Kuei-Mei as she walks in a desolate city park in Tapei. In *The River*, a teenage man becomes seriously ill after briefly floating, as a replacement for a dummy in a movie shoot, in a badly polluted river (and we are never certain, throughout the film, if the illness is the result of physical pollution or the inability of the main characters in the film—a family—to relate to one another; that is, we are not certain which "pollution" is the problem). There is even an extraordinary scene in *The River* where, instead of fixing the leak in the ceiling of their apartment, the Father simply constructs an elaborate system of tubing and improvised viaducts to

divert the water outside (if you will, to “suspend” the water's entry into the apartment). In *The Hole*, it is constantly raining. In the very first scene, a plumber comes to the apartment of the "man upstairs" to ask if he has any leaks. The "woman downstairs" is apparently taking in a lot of water from above. While there are no visible leaks, in searching for them, the plumber opens up a hole in the floor between the two apartments. The hole gradually begins to function, throughout the course of the film, as an empty space—a point of contact and connection—between the two characters. (Here, we should remind ourselves that the space of the exception is perfectly empty.)

The function of water in Ming-Liang's films is, I think, intimately connected both to these films' critique of modernity and their effort to highlight affective possibilities for resistance within the present. In a sense, water *is* exteriority in Ming-Liang's films. It is the immanence of the exception and simultaneously the immanence of love and life. Thus, it is both the technologies and mechanisms of modern power (including the exception) that, everywhere and all the time, seep into the intimacy of our lives (thus, literally into our bedrooms as in Kafka's the *Trial*) and, at the same time, the very force of life, of resistance, capable of being mobilized, of being turned back against the hold placed on it by modern bio-power. [66]

As far as I know, Tsai Ming-Liang has never read the work of Walter Benjamin. However, I believe that his films are perfectly in keeping with Benjamin’s definition of history. In his liner notes to the British Film Institutes 1999 video release of *The River*, Philip Kemp writes of Ming-Liang, "So far, unlike his predecessors such as Hou Hsiou-Hsien and Edward Yang, he has shown no interest in dealing directly with Taiwan's history; instead, he focuses on the outcome of that history, the youth of present day Taipei." Kemp, I think, has it half-right. Ming-Liang is dealing with the present day, with everyday life in Taipei, but it is precisely

because of this that his work is, and should be considered, "historical." To point to the specificity of film production in Taiwan concerns not the valorization of it "national" status, but rather the singular field of force relations within which the production of this particular film, I think, can and should be placed.

For much of the 20th century, until 1945, the island of Taiwan was occupied by Japan. After World War 2, and the surrender of Japan, the island was handed back to China. From 1945 until 1949 there was considerable political turmoil, caused by political corruption and authoritarianism of the Chen Yi government (this was the time of the "February 28 Incident" or, 2.28 incident, in which some estimated 28,000 native Taiwanese were massacred by the government in 1947). In 1949, the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan after being expelled from the mainland by the Communist Party. On 20 May 1949, the Taiwan Military declared martial law. Intended only as a temporary measure (based on the pretext of the civil war), the imposition of martial law remained in effect for 38 years, until it was lifted in 1987. During this roughly 40-year period following World War 2, it was impossible to publicly discuss any form of oppositional politics or the incidents surrounding 2.28 and the establishment of martial law; that is, the past, the history of the present of Taiwan. Since World War Two it has remained caught, quite literally, between East and West (even today, Taiwan remains unrecognized as a sovereign nation by the international community.) This situation has only intensified the rapidity of economic modernization, amid the need to compete globally on this relatively small island. These transformations—in particular, the recent "economic miracle"—have come about at the expense not only of the traditions of the past, but also the quality of "everyday life" for those in the present. As Ming-Liang, himself writes in his *Production Notes to The Hole:*

> Why am I so pessimistic? If you live in Taiwan, you will naturally feel pessimism. We paid a heavy price for the take-off of the Taiwan economy over the past 10 years. People have to live with crime, violence, political conflict and corruption, the serious pollution of the environment, alienation and growing friction in personal relationships. All these are almost permanent fixtures of people's daily lives . . .[67]

To make films in Taiwan, if one does not obtain international financial backing, is to be beholden to the censorship of the State. With the exception of Hou Hsiou-Hsien, all of the current directors working in Taiwan have been educated in the West. As a result of all of these pragmatic circumstances, Taiwan films tend to be more about everyday life (even when they are more overtly "historical," as in the case of Hou Hsiou-Hsien) which means, I think, more directly about the problematic forces of modernization.[68]

"The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one." (Benjamin, Thesis 2). This relation to history, to politics—in which the shock of an image of the past enables the present to recognize itself, in effect, *giving potentiality back to the past*—is most evident in the musical numbers of *The Hole*. As we watch the banality of the two characters everyday lives, and as the hole assumes a space or, dimension all its own (as an empty space) we become witnesses to the affective life of the "woman downstairs"—we see her unfulfilled desires, her passions for connection and love, relations that, despite the imposition of an external life reduced almost entirely to that of mere survival, stubbornly remain. In an interview, Ming-Liang describes the importance of these musical numbers:

> The musical numbers play a different role here than they do in other musicals. For me, it's more like the statement of the inner world, particularly of the female character. This woman apparently is very cold, on the surface she has to be very fierce to fight her environment, she's very defensive. But her inner world is very passionate and she craves somebody to love her.
>
> On another level, the musical numbers are weapons that I use to confront the environment at the end of the millennium. Because I think that toward the end of the century a lot of qualities—such as passionate desire, naïve simplicity—have been suppressed. The musicals contain those qualities. It's something that I use psychologically to confront that world.[69]

This internal and, I think, utopian dimension of the film takes the form of what, for all practical purposes, constitutes drag performances: The "woman downstairs" performs—in contrast to her drab, everyday existence—colorful, animated, production numbers, lip-synching to the music of 1950's mainland musical singer and performer Grace Chang. There are 5 musical numbers in the film. These are, in order of their appearance, "Calypso" (*ka li su*), "Tiger Lady" (*yan zhi hu*), "I Want Your Love" (*wo yao ni di ai*), "Achoo Cha Cha" (*da pen ti*), and "I Don't Care Who You Are" (*bu guan ni shi shui*). All of the drag numbers, with one notable exception, occur in public spaces. The first four drag numbers appear, respectively and in order of appearance, in the elevator, the hallway, a staircase, and another hallway, (The confinement of public space is part of the style of the film itself, which was demanded by budget constraints and

the very confinement of life in the city of Tapei.) Nevertheless, these are public rather than private spaces. The last drag number takes place inside one of the apartments, but only after a transformative event has occurred: After the couple has been physically—that is, actually—united through the hole.

> Reflection shows us that out image of happiness is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us only exists in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, among women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.[70]

The image of redemption in *The Hole* follows Benjamin's theoretical formulation quite closely. And this is precisely the function of the Grace Chang numbers. The threshold of the film occurs after the "woman downstairs" begins to come down with the symptoms of the "end-of-the-millennium-virus."

> In terms of the cockroach symptoms, it's something specific to Taiwan and all Asian countries, because the development of technology, city life and modern society is very different there than in the Western world. Those Asian countries wanted to imitate what happened to the West and follow the path of being high tech and all that, and they adopted drastic methods. They destroyed the

> environment. And while you want to improve their economic situation, you don't see the quality of life being improved.
>
> One of the most prominent problems is the difference between the poor and the rich, the uneven distribution of wealth. And under those conditions a lot of people live in poverty, and try to adapt to the role, the living environment they have, and acquire the characteristics of a cockroach. Being adaptable to a bad situation. Living purely on survival instinct, with a lack of any dignity.[71]

As the "woman downstairs" roots around her apartment, reduced to the status and lifestyle of a human cockroach, (building a kind of fort out of her bedding and her seemingly endless supply of toilet paper), we see the "man upstairs" furiously banging at the hole with a hammer, then breaking down and sobbing. Finally, we see the disembodied hand of the "man upstairs" reach through the hole and offer the woman a glass of water. She takes the glass of water and slowly drinks it. Then, the disembodied hand returns, reaching out to the "woman downstairs," taking her up and through the hole. We then see the final drag number, "I Don't Care Who You Are," in which the couple embraces in a slow dance. The screen, once again, fades to black and we see the following words bearing the signature of Tsai Ming-Liang: "In the year 2000, we are grateful that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us."

In *The Hole*, it is only after the "woman downstairs" becomes sick with the virus, becomes completely weak in the face of a Modernity that is taking her life from her *without killing her*, it is only then that she is able to accept the glass of water from the man upstairs. It is this weakness that allows her to overcome her fear of the hole i.e. the empty space of belonging

it opens up. In *The Hole*, the "man upstairs" is shown lying down on the floor, cradled up next to the hole as if he were spooning it. He blows smoke from his cigarette into the hole. In a scene that is charged with sexual energy, he sticks his leg through the hole, throwing the weight of his entire body on top of it, as if he were making love to the hole. This, too, is an image of weakness and abjection. It is this weakness, this failure of connection and relation, which surrounds this entire film (as it does the cinema of Tsai Ming-Liang), that is the precondition for the messianic gesture that closes the film: handing the woman downstairs a glass of water. The entire film can be seen as a series of failed encounters leading up to this single gesture of kindness.

The word "sweet" comes from the Latin *swave*, meaning "persuasion."[72] The messianic gesture that closes the film *The Hole* is one of sweetness (*suavitas*); a character simply hands someone a glass of water. How is it that this *sweetness* not only marks an important point of entry into the political—in which a movement from the virtual to the real would then become radically possible—but, also, provides the "proof," if you will, the *persuasion* of the concept of the exception itself? The gesture that ends *The Hole* is one of sweetness. I chose this film for precisely this reason. Nothing could be further from the *political* thought of the movement from the real to the virtual (in other words, the use of Deleuze's thought to deny the importance of the exception), than a gesture of simple kindness, of simply *being nice.* Sweetness, the form-of-life called "being sweet," may be one of the most profound political acts of our time (and within our time, and within the time portrayed in the films of Tsai Ming-Liang), capable of disrupting the very experience of "being Modern"—which is increasingly one of ruthless survival; the ruthless survival and proliferation of the subject, which makes no room for weakness and failure, predicated, as it is, on their exclusion.

The gestures of love explored in this chapter point us in an, apparently, unlikely direction for a work that many consider to be on a "depressing" subject matter: life in the state of exception. But the politics of pure means (of means without end), as Benjamin seemed to glimpse in 1921 in his "Critique of Violence," is a politics of kindness, which is to say, perhaps, a politics of s*weetness*.[73] On the last day of the seminar on *Il tempo che resta,* a student asked Agamben about the "depressing" subject matter of his research. Agamben replied that the concept of the exception was "sweet". What is this *sweetness* of the exception? How is the thought of the exception bound up with an ethics, not simply of "happiness," but of kindness, of sweetness? The sweetness of the exception lies in what it enables us to do. It is sweet precisely because it is a conceptual tool that gives us a way of thinking about life, at once, separated from itself and, at the same time, filled with the potential of life itself. Sweetness points us to that hope, that belief, in the potentiality of a life lived without separation. This concern with separation, as I hope it is by now, clear, cannot be reduced to the work of the "negative." Under the influence of a certain reading of Deleuze's concept of "lines of flight," the thinking of the experience of radical separation that marks our era has been simply banned: that is, excluded. Perhaps *sweetness* is one kind of "proof" of the thought of the exception: the proof that a positive expression of, and foundation for thought, such as one finds in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (positive in the sense of non-dialectical, desiring, and as providing a non-essential foundation for belonging in the historical present) remains an important part of the thought of the exception, however "negative" its subject matter may appear to be on a superficial level.

CHAPTER FOUR: SPIRAL

[1] This chapter is dedicated to Therese Grisham.

[2] This is a paraphrase of the opening sentences of Deleuze and Guattari's chapter "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . . " in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 233.

[3] Junji Ito, *Uzumaki Volume 1*, (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2001), Junji Ito, *Uzumaki Volume 2* (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2002), and Junji Ito, *Uzumaki Volume 3* (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2002).

[4] See, for example, Kinji Fukasaku, *Battle Royale* (2001); Ataru Oikawa,*Tomie* (1999); Shusuke Kaneko, *Kurosufaia* (Cross Fire) (2000); and Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (Ring) (1998) and *Ringu 2* (Ring 2) (1999); and Noirio Tsurutu's *Ringu O: Bâsudei* (Ring O: Birthday) (2000), for just a few examples.

[5] See "The Brain is the Screen: An Interview with Gilles Deleuze," Trans. by Marie Therese Guirgis in *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* Ed. by Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 365 – 373.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films" in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2002): 313 – 319.

[7] Mise-en-scene means literally "putting in the scene" and is a French term originally derived from the theater, but applied to film by early directors with theatrical backgrounds, such as Georges Méliès. Traditionally, mise-en-scene includes all of the elements that the director places before the viewer in the film frame: not just lighting, staging (movement and acting), place, costumes, make-up, and props, but also how the film frame relates to time and space. See, for example, the classic textbook definition by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Seventh Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004): "Aspects of Mise-en-Scene," 176 – 228. However, as I argue in the text below, mise-en-scene also includes the subjective experiences of the film viewer: how we encounter and relate to the filmic elements placed before us in the frame. It is this aspect of mise-en-scene that needs to be drawn out, I think, in relation to the philosophy of the failed encounter.

[8] For Deleuze on *Vertigo*, see *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 21 – 22. For Chris Marker on memory and *Vertigo*, see his 1983 film *Sans Soleil* (Sunless). The text of *Sans Soleil* is available on-line at: http://www.markertext.com/sans_soleil.htm (Accessed October 16th, 2005). See also Thomas Carl Wall's essay, "The Time-Image: Deleuze, Cinema, Perhaps Language" available on-line at: http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol8-2004/n23wall (Accessed October 16, 2005). And B.C. Holmes' essay "The Deleuzian Memory of *Sans Soleil*" available on-line at: http://www.bcholmes.org/film/sansoliel.html (Accessed October 16, 2005).

[9] John Brahm, *The Locket* (1946). Not available on video or DVD in the United States.

[10] See Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (The Marriage of Maria Braun) (1979), *Lola* (1981), and *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* (Veronica Voss) (1982).

[11] This is, perhaps, my favorite *noir* because of Ida Lupino's performance as a lounge singer in a bowling alley located in a road house! Lupino, it should be noted, went on (after this film) to direct several *noirs* of her own, and was one of the few women in Hollywood to direct in the 40's and 50's, moving into television in the 1960's.

[12] See Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *A Panaorama of American Film Noir* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 2002).

[13] *Ibid*. 12.

[14] *Ibid.* 8.

[15] Compare Agamben's usage of this word in his "Beyond Human Rights," 23.

[16] *A Panaorama of American Film Noir,* 8.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] *The Trial: A Film by Orson Welles*, translation and description of action by Nicholas Fry (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970): 55 – 56.

[19] *The Naked City: Illustration des plaques tournantes en psychogeographique,* May **1**957; reproduced in black-and-white in *Documents relatifs la fondation de l'Internationale situationniste 1948 to 1957,* Editions Allia (Paris, 1985). I am indebted to the following bibliography of Debrod's work for this reference. Bibliography Guy Debord. HTML http://www.notbored.org/bibliography.html (Accessed October 16, 2005). The *Naked City* (1948) is the title of a noir by Jules Dassin.

[20] Christina Rossetti was a Victorian era poet. The film quotes her sonnet "Remember."

[21] See the recounting in Levi's *Drowned and the Saved*, 55 – 57, of the young woman who survived the gas chambers and her killing by the *Sodderkomando*.

[22] Martin Scorsese with Michael Henry Wilson, *A Personal Journey With Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*, 120. This is the text of the film series commissioned by the BFI (British Film Institute). Only the Scorsese film is available in the U.S. There were additional films for China (Stanley Kwan), Japan (Oshima Nagisa), France (Jean-Luc Godard) and many others. *Kiss me Deadly* is *the* apocalyptic L.A. noir, with references to the culture of the automobile (which can't help but remind us of Virilio's *Speed and Politics*), technology, and the bomb.

[23] See the interview with Pasolini, "Pasolini on de Sade" by Gideon Bachmann. HTML http://www.opsonicindex.org/salo/sagid.html (Accessed August 14, 2005). Consider, also, the following: "Pasolini was planning at the time of his death to make a film suggesting that the "spirit" that infused biblical Paul was phallic. Significantly, one of only two weekly columns during Pasolini's long association with the *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's most distinguished newspaper, that the paper refused to print is that in which he lambasted the self-

hating homosexuality of St. Paul." From the "Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture" HTML http://www.glbtq.com/literature/bible,8.html (Accessed October 16, 2005)

[24] See, for example, Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 25 – 55. For Benjamin on film, see "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (Third Version), particularly the thirteenth theses, with regard to the "optical unconscious" of cinema. In *Selected Writings: Volume Four: 1938 – 1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003): 251 - 283. Also, Dziga Vertov, *Kino Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Ed. by Annette Michelson, Trans. by Kevin O' Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For Deleuze on cinema see his *Cinema One: The Movement-Image*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbra Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *Cinema Two: The Time-Image*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbra Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[25] For a recounting of this incident, in which the jump cuts of Japanese animation invoked seizures in viewers, see Brian Massumi, "The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image" in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. by John C. Welchman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 18 – 40. For the episode of the *Simposons* where this incident is parodied, see "Thirty Minutes Over Tokyo" Episode number 226 (Season 10, episode 23). Original air date, May 16, 1999, Fox Television.

[26] As Bigelow discusses this film in an interview, "you're trapped in the spectacle . . . *Strange Days* is really about understanding power structures" 30. "Momentum and Design: Interview with Kathryn Bigelow" in Deborah Jermyn and Sean Redmond, Eds. *Hollywood Transgressor: The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2003): 20 – 31. In the same interview she states, "I always thought of it as a film noir thriller that takes place on the eve of the millennium, the turn of the century, and perhaps the end of the world—in one sentence!" 28.

[27] See Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working With Deleuze in Film* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003): 14 – 44, and Steven Shaviro, "Straight from the Cerebral Cortex: Vision and Affect in Strange Days" in *Hollywood Transgressor: The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow,* 159 – 177.

[28] On this point, see Shaviro, "Straight From the Cerebral Cortex."

[29] See the 1966 Situationist International text, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle Commodity Economy" for an analysis of the Watts Riots. It seems that the 1992 L.A. riots could and should be thought of along these lines. Available on-line at: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/10.Watts.htm (Accessed October 16, 2005).

[30] Shaviro, I think convincingly, argues that these are not "reverse shots" in the traditional filmic sense, but "reaction shots." See Shaviro, "Straight from the Cerebral Cortex," 166.

[31] Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom* (Great Britain, 1961). This film is about a serial killer who murders prostitutes with his camera: he has a spike on the end of his tripod, which is attached to his camera, and he films his victims as they die. Moreover, he has placed a mirror on the camera, so that the victims are forced to watch themselves—the look of fright and fear on their faces, enhancing the excitement for the killer—as they are killed while being filmed. The killer, however, is also a victim: of child abuse, in which he was completely objectified; an experience which he is compelled to repeat in these murders. This is a beautiful and complex film which has been much analyzed by feminist film critics. See, for example, Carol J. Clover, "Bulls Eye: Peeing Tom" in *Viewing*

Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, Ed. by Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 185 – 192, and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Brain Wallis, Ed. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: David R. Godine, 1994): 361 – 374. For Shaviro on *Peeping Tom* in relation to *Strange Days*, see "Straight from the Cerebral Cortex," 169 – 170.

[32] For Shaviro, see note 31 above. For Pisters, see *The Matrix of Visual Culture*, 22-33.

[33] *The Matrix of Visual Culture,* 30.

[34] *Ibid*.

[35] *Cinema Two*, 189. See, also, Jean-Clet Martin's comments on the intimacy of thought and image in Deleuze in his "Of Images and Worlds: Toward a Geology of the Cinema," in Flaxman Ed. *The Brain is the Screen*, 61 – 85.

[36] See his comments in his essay "Mediators" in *Negotiations*, 121 – 134.

[37] "Fall in the Light" by Lori Carson and Graham Revell from *Strange Days*, film soundtrack (Sony),1995.

[38] In addition to the Japanese films noted above, there is a notable (more literal) cinema of bearing witness emerging from contemporary Japan. Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Without Memory* (*Kioku ga ushinawareta toki*) (1996), *After Life* (Wandafuru raifu) (1998), *Distance*, (2001) and *Nobody Knows* (Dare mo shiranai)(2004), as well as Shiniji Aoyama's *Eureka* (2000). The first of these, *Without Memory*, is a documentary about a man who literally has no past: due to a rare condition he is unable to remember anything from the day before. Every morning he wakes up and his family has to remind him, all over again, who he is. It is a complete existential nightmare. The film is conceived by Kore-eda as an answer to certain "postmodern" theories about memory that celebrate the loss of memory and the past. Although I have seen the film, it is not available in the U.S. on video or DVD and has only played at film festivals.

[39]I have taught *Strange Days* with Guy Debrod's book, the *Society of the Spectacle*, for the past several years, yet I had an extremely difficult time writing this analysis. The ideas that I present here have been fully developed for several years. And yet, there was this difficulty in writing this portion of the text that I couldn't understand. It wasn't until I finally completed it on Sunday, October 16th, 2005, that I realized why writing about this film was so hard for me. I first saw this film with my friend, Steven Shaviro, when it was released in Seattle in the fall of 1995. At that time, I was homeless and living in a 1970 VW Van. Homelessness is a traumatic experience, which is marked, among much else, by "shutting down" emotionally and physically as a mechanism of survival. It is, of course, an experience that is simply "too much" to bear. This section, I realized upon completing it, was a way for me to bear witness to what I was unable to experience when I first saw this film almost exactly ten years from the date that I am now writing these words. Strange Days opened on October 13th, 1995.

[40] "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, edited by Tom McDonough, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2002): 313.

[41] Agamben's subsequent statements would seem to suggest that he, generally, agrees with this statement of Debord's. However, I believe it would be a mistake to read too much into what is a very short work on cinema and the spectacle.

[42] For Agamben on gesture see, "Notes on Gesture" in *Means Without End*, 49 – 60. Compare with Benjamin's comments on gesture in the first and second versions of "What is Epic Theater?" and "Studies for a Theory of Epic Theater," in *Understanding Brecht*, Trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso Books, 1983), 1 – 25, as well as Benjamin's fragment "The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression," in *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935 – 1938*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Others. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 94 – 95.

[43] "Difference and Repetition," 318.

[44] *Selected Writings Volume Four: 1938 – 1940*, 266. For Benjamin on Vertov see his *Moscow Diary*, 69. On January 5, 1927, Benjamin went to see Vertov's *Shestaya chast mira* (A Sixth of the World) (Soviet Union, 1926), and remarked that "there was much that escaped me" 69. This was during the time that Benjamin was thinking about film and Chaplin, in particular*, Ibid*., 54 – 55.

[45] *Cinema Two*, Chapter Six, "The Powers of the False." 126 – 155. Of interest are Deleuze's comments on mise-en-scene and Cassavetes, 154, and the zone of indistinction between the virtual and the actual,127..

[46] One of Mêliès' most famous films is *Le Voyage à travers l'impossible* (The Impossible Voyage) (France, 1904) is a kind of sequel to, and elaboration of the themes of *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* (A Trip to the Moon) (France, 1902).

[47] "Notes on Gesture," 54. Agamben is here paraphrasing Benjamin on the dialectical image.

[48] "Difference and Repetition," 318.

[49] In an early fragment, "Imagination," *Selected Writings Volume One*, 280 – 282, Benjamin presents a perspective of the imagination, including a concept of "pure imagination," that *seems* to be somewhat at odds with the one I present here. What is interesting to note about this fragment is that it describes "the manifestation of the imagination as the de-formation (*Enstaltung*] of what has been formed" 280. However, Benjamin conceives of this power in purely negative (dialectical) terms. He contrasts this with the fantastic (which certainly describes Méliès' work) which he correctly considers to be an element of the "constructive." This, however, is something that Benjamin rejects (because of the dialectic). He concludes by stating that "Pure imagination, therefore, is not an inventive power" 282. My own thinking of the term "pure imagination" follows from my consideration of psychedelic children's music in relation to the exception, as well as Deleuze's thought of singularity and affect ("Pure Imagination" is the title of a song in the 1971 film version of *Wily Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*). On this last point see my "Sweetness," forthcoming.

[50] "I really wanted people to cry" quoted in Dennis Lim's "Heaven Sent Todd Haynes and Julianne Moore Reopen Douglas Sirk's Melodrama Fakebook" in the *Village Voice*, October 30 - November 5, 2002. HTML http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0244,lim,39523,1.html (Accessed March 5, 2003). See also, Todd Haynes, *Far From Heaven, Safe and Superstar: Three Screenplays*, (New York: Grove Press, 2003), vii – xiv. And, "Movies are

Nothing Until We Bring Emotional Life to Them," an interview with Amy Kroin. HTML http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/int/2002/11/11/haynes/index.html (Accessed March 5, 2003).

[51] For Jean-Luc Godard on his *Histoire(s) du Cinema* see Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, (New York: Berg, 2005), and Jean-Luc Godard, *The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000 – 2001* (Bern: Verlag Gachnang and Springer AG, 2002). See, also, Godard and Anne-Marie Mieville's para-film to this work: *20x50 Years of French Cinema*, in *The Century of Cinema: France, Germany, and Scandinavia* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), PAL Video Tape, Connoisseur/Academy Video.

[52] See my "Mise-en-scene and Philosophy," forthcoming, where I expand on my work here, arguing for a mise-en-scene of partial objects: of body parts, eyes, mouths, faces, in relation to gesture, pornography, and narrative cinema. This work includes a close reading of the mise-en-scene of separation in the trilogy of works by Sirk, Fassbinder, and Haynes.

[53] Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 396 (thesis 16), *Selected Writings Volume Four: 1938 – 1940.*

[54] My reading of Ming-Liang's film *The Hole* was originally written in the Spring of 2001. Ming-Liang has made four feature films since this work was written. *Ni neibian jidian* (What Time is it There?) (2001), *Bu san* (Goodbye Dragon Inn) (2003), *Tian bian yi duo yun* (The Wayward Cloud) (2005), and *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006).

[55] Transcribed from the DVD of *The Hole*.

[56] Aruna Vasudev, "Interview with Tsai Ming-Liang: A Space of One's Own." *Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly* (No. 42. 1998): 1.

[57] I think an argument could be made that Ming-Liang has created the first art film about a glory hole, but I will leave that intriguing possibility to one side in order to explore the ways in which this narrative film can be thought as a film of the exception.

[58] Ming-Liang made a documentary for Taiwan Television about HIV/AIDS in Taiwan, *Wo xin renshi de pengyou* (My New Friends) (1995). The film centers on two HIV-positive gay men in Taiwan whose identities remain a secret, and whose faces cannot be shown, because of prejudice. For Ming-Liang on the difficulty of making this film, see the interview "Scouting" in *Tsai Ming-Liang*, Jean Pierre Rehm, Olivier Joyard, and Danielle Riviere (Paris: Dis Voir, no date given), 92 – 93.

[59] Thanks to John Wei, who pointed this out to me on 5/5/01.

[60] From *Production Notes to The Hole*, cited in, Toto Collective. "Love, Life, and Lies: The Films of Tsai Ming-Liang in the Context of the New Taiwanese Cinema." *Toto: Cinema Matters*. http://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~peteg/toto/tsai.htm. (Accessed April 16, 2001).

[61] Fran Martin, "Wild Women and Mechanical Men: A Review of *The Hole*." *Intersections: Gender, History, & Culture in the Asian Context*. Issue 4, September, 2000. HTML http://wwwsshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/holereview.html (Accessed April 16, 2001). As Ming-Liang states in his production notes to *The Hole* "Taiwanese films are the products of reflection and nostalgia by intellectuals in their 30's and 40's, hence they emphasize introspection and restraint, a lyrical style based on long takes and slow rhythm" Cited in "Love, Life and Lies," 3.

[62] In teaching Warhol's *Blow Job* and Ming-Liang's *The Hole* over the past several years, I have found that students find the excessive use of the long take nearly unbearable. This is true of most film viewers, insofar as the "normal" use of shot, counter-shot conventions in narrative film are designed specifically to make the viewer "identify" with specific characters in the film. In the case of *Blow Job*, there is no "outside" for the spectator: they remained "trapped" in the space of the frame. Viewers become frustrated, not only by the sheer boredom of what they see, but also by the inability to see the "act" described in the films title. The only relief for these students comes when the male lead (DeVerne Bookwalter) lights a cigarette, and then we know that the "act" has been completed. Showing the film to students without providing them with any "warning" of these aspects of the film has proven most uncomfortable to my students. In these cases, I have asked them to simply write down on a piece of paper how they experience this film. The disruption of normal time causes them to imagine all sorts of things, and to focus on details such as the shadows on Bookwalter's face as he contorts it while he's getting blown.

[63] It is worth noting, in these comments on interruption, that Ming-Liang comes from a theatrical background, which includes the influence of Brecht. See the interview "Scouting" in *Tsai Ming-Liang*, 114.

[64] "Love, Life, and Lies" 1.

[65] See the interview, "Scouting" in *Tsai Ming-Liang*.

[66] Ming-Liang confirms portions of what I've written above in the interview "Scouting," in *Tsai Ming-Liang*.

[67] *Ibid*., 5.

[68] My knowledge of the history of Taiwanese film has been greatly informed by the secondary articles referenced here. In particular, Yeh Yueh-Yu's "Narrating National Sadness: Cinematic Mapping and Hypertextual Dispersion," particularly helpful. *Cinema SPACE* University of California, Berkeley. 1994. http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/Papers/CityOfSadness/index.html (Accessed April 16, 2001). See, also, Peggy Chiao Hsiung-Ping,. "The Distinct Taiwanese and Hong Kong Cinemas." *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*. Ed. Chris Berry. Trans. Chris Berry. London: BFI, 1991. For more recent works, see *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. by Chris Berry and Feli Lu, (Hong Kong: HK University Press, 2005), and *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, eds. Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[69] Cited in David Walsh, "An Interview with Tsai Ming-Liang." World Socialist Web Site. http://www.wsws.org/arts/1998/oct1998/tsai-o07.shtml (Accessed April 16, 2001).

[70] Walter Benjamin, Thesis 2.

[71] *Ibid*., 1.

[72] I am indebted to James Martin for pointing me to the etymological meaning of *suavitas* and *swave*.

[73] It is worth quoting Benjamin at some length here. The discussion takes place over two pages, 244-245. Benjamin begins by asking, "Is any nonviolent resolution of conflict possible? Without doubt, the relationships among private persons are full of examples of this." He goes on to state:

> Courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, trust and whatever else might here be mentioned are their subjective preconditions. Their objective manifestation, however, is determined by the law . . . that says that pure means are never those of direct solutions, but always those of indirect solutions. They therefore never apply to the resolution of conflict between man and man, but apply only to matters concerning objects. The sphere of non-violent means opens up in the realm of human conflicts relating to goods . . . a policy of pure means. We can therefore point only to pure means in politics as analogous to those which govern peaceful intercourse between private persons (244).

Benjamin refers to the example of the conference and then continues, "This makes clear that there is a sphere of human agreement that is non-violent to the extent that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of "understanding," language," 245. Finally, he concludes, "We can therefore point only to pure means in politics as analogous to those which govern peaceful intercourse between private persons" 245. As much as I like my idea of "sweetness," it seems important to point out that "peaceful intercourse between private persons" is an increasingly rare commodity today. This problem will be further explored in relation to post-war music in my essay "Sweetness."

CONCLUSION

[1] "What is a Paradigm?" See, also, Kafka's parable "On Parables," in *Parables and Paradoxes*, 10 – 11, and Agamben's reading of this parable in relation to language in *Il tempo che resta*, 45 - 46.

[2] "What is a Paradigm?"

[3] *The Time That Remains*, 39 - 40.

[4] *Ibid.,* 40.

[5] Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 28.

[6] See my "Whatever Intellectuals: The Politics of Thought in Post-disciplinary Societies," *Symposium*, No. 4. 1998, 205 – 235.