



Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2017

The Monstrous Self: Negotiating the Boundary of the Abject

Katya Yakubov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Feminist Philosophy Commons](#), [Film Production Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Visual Studies Commons](#)

© Katya Yakubov

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/4815>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

The Monstrous Self: Negotiating the Boundary of the Object

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

Katya Yakubov

Bachelor of Fine Arts, New York University, 2009

Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

Director: Paul Thulin

Graduate Director and Assistant Professor, Photography and Film

Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, Virginia

May, 2017

Acknowledgements:

My parents, whose selflessness knows no bounds
My partner Daniel Hess, without whom I doubt this film would exist
My collaborators and friends; it is with you that community happens

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Text.....	1
Images	30
Bibliography.....	40

Abstract

THE MONSTROUS SELF: NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARY OF THE ABJECT

By Katya Yakubov, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

Director: Paul Thulin, Graduate Director and Assistant Professor, Photography and Film

Through the lens of the horror film and the fairy tale, this thesis explores the notion of the grotesque as a boundary phenomenon—a negotiation of what is self and what is other. As such, it locates the function that the monstrous and the grotesque have in the formation of a personal and social identity. In asking why we take pleasure in the perverse, I explore how permutations of guilt, victimhood, and desire can be actively rewritten, in order to construct a stable sense of self.

Introduction

The Watering Room is a 35-minute experimental-narrative film that plays with the idea of the abject as a boundary phenomenon—a rejection of what is ‘other’ so as to stabilize a sense of self. Through vomit, shit, and tears, we eject the ‘other’, and secure our boundaries from what is threatening. The film questions what happens when that boundary fails, when it is not the world that is rendered uncanny and strange, but when what is abject continues to remain within.

I am influenced by several films in which the lead woman character is simultaneously the protagonist and the terror-inducing villain. Her monstrosity is not self-contained, but rather functions as a reflection of larger social fears and acts of violent provocations towards women as a whole. Within these narratives, the presence of the male figure—as an individual or as a stand in for the patriarchy at large—becomes complicit in provoking or projecting the monstrous onto her. In looking at the fairy tale, the horror movie, and the ethics of S&M practice, I pose the question of why we take pleasure in the perverse, and how the relationship between fantasy and the taboo functions for the individual and the collective social-body. I hope to show that what is abject (what we fear), has a direct connection with what we desire (fantasize).

Shot almost entirely in a subterranean room, *The Watering Room* stages an oscillating power-play between two characters—Yaga, an old woman who lives alone amongst the squalor of her house, and the Surveyor, a bureaucrat working for an undisclosed agency, there to question her about a piece of property she owns. The seemingly straightforward dynamic begins to break down with the continued re-telling of the same story—the specifics of an encounter the

Surveyor had on his way to Yaga's house. As both meaning and guilt are actively re-written, the film presents a role-playing game in which a negotiation of boundaries between what is self and what is other, between who is victim and who is the aggressor, occurs. Towards the end, the Surveyor admits to doing a series of vile acts and has consensual sex with the older woman, in an allusion to incest.

The Abject as a Boundary Phenomenon

Philosopher Julia Kristeva's notion of 'abject' in her essay "Powers of Horror" is defined as the horror induced when the boundaries of what is self and what is 'other' are threatened.¹ It stands in complete opposition to its roots in the carnivalesque-grotesque, a phenomenon identified by semiotician-philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World*.² Practiced extensively in the Middle Ages in many regions of the world—North and South America, Europe, and the Caribbean—carnival started as a yearly celebration during which social values were reversed, political leaders were "de-crowned," and a fool or a madman was declared king. The festival was a collective cleansing ritual, entering a space of debauchery and madness, with an emphasis on power drawn from the collective body, and its transgression of boundaries between people. Literary and film theorist Robert Stam describes how the public become socially equal during carnival:

All that was marginalized and excluded—the mad, scandalous, and aleatory—comes to the center in a veritable explosion of otherness. The material bodily

¹ Julia Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*. (New York: Columbia University Press, reprint 2002).

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

principle, especially of the body's 'lower stratum'—hunger, thirst, copulation, defecation—becomes a positive and corrosive force, and festive laughter enjoys a symbolic victory over death, over all that is held sacred, over all that oppresses and restricts.³

Destruction and uncrowning became positive methods to bring about rebirth and renewal. In its essence, the carnivalesque-grotesque evokes what is never closed or finished, but a process of constant change and transformation. The physical festivity of carnival subsided with the Enlightenment and according to Bakhtin, carried on in the form of the carnivalesque in literature, painting, theater, and the arts, continuing to embody a world turned upside down.

However, the modern form of the carnivalesque seems to miss the key restorative power of laughter and the social body, rendering the world solely as terrifying, hostile, without meaning, and dehumanized. In examining the difference between a medieval and a post-Enlightenment form of the carnivalesque, cultural scholar Mary Russo explains that the collective body of carnival became replaced by the individual psyche, grappling with the idea of the grotesque as terrifying. She believes “the interiority and bitterly derisive quality of the Romantic grotesque, as described by both Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin, sets it apart from earlier comic and public manifestations.”⁴ The inherent positivity of the original form of the grotesque now stands in opposition to modernity’s pessimism and disillusionment. As the restorative power of carnivalesque fades, literary critic and feminist Julia Kristeva’s definition of the abject takes its place.

Whereas the carnivalesque transgression of boundaries was a positive corrosive force, Kristeva’s ‘abject’ is that which is a threat to the border; it is when the boundary between subject and object, or between self and other, is unclear. In this space, meaning collapses and horror is

³ Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p 167.

⁴ Mary J. Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. (New York: Routledge, 1995). p. 32.

induced, as the abject forces the self to defend itself against what is other, by expelling that thing through bodily contortion and regurgitation, even when what the body expels is actually part of the self. By vomiting, one protects himself against what he wants to be separate from.⁵ Bodily fluids such as vomit and feces become complicated sites of a negotiation of boundaries, and the constant reassessment of what is the self that is acceptable, and what should be discarded.

Kristeva suggests:

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object.⁶

It is this idea of the shifting border between self and other that is at the core of my film. I use this confusion of boundaries to stage a character's rejection of the self through a physical regurgitation and subsequent consummation of the other. The Surveyor is at first repulsed by Yaga and her surroundings, being prompted to defecate, sweat, cough and show visible signs of rejection, such as stripping off his clothes to get 'clean'. I engage in the idea that we form our identities through a negotiation of what we accept or deny in the other. When negotiating boundaries, we solidify our sense of self. As such, it is only when the Surveyor is confronted with and open to the idea that Yaga is an aspect of himself that is grotesque, terrifying, violent, and amoral, that he is able to finally "eat" her through a carnivalesque sexual act, and arrive at a sense of equilibrium and openness.

⁵ Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, 2002, p 230.

⁶ Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, 2002, p. 231.

The Abject in Fairy Tales/Horror Films as Establishing Social Borders

Folklorist Andreas Johns describes how in pagan-Christian Russia, common problems in family relationships—including incest, battle between the sexes, and the tension of the individual versus collective group—were addressed by the fairy tale, serving as a societal outlet of taboo by providing instructions for those moral dilemmas that may not have been resolved in religious texts. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek suggests that, similar to the fairy tale, cinema also presents difficult conflicts found in reality through a lens of the fantastic, thereby rendering the message safe. He suggests, “If something gets too traumatic, too violent, even too filled with enjoyment, it shatters the coordinates of our reality. We have to fictionalize it. The first key to horror films is to say, ‘Let’s imagine the same story but without the horror element.’”⁷ In essence, we need fictional modes to come to grasp with reality. In my work, I use the language of both the horror film and the fairy tale to explore the theme of the monstrous self.

According to Sue Short, the horror film shares many of the same concerns as fairy tales, specifically that both serve to re-establish a culture’s negotiated boundaries with the taboo, marginal, and other. The function of the monster, despite nuances of its nature and context, is always the same—“to bring an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability.”⁸ The abject, like the monster, reminds us of how fragile the cultural order is, and as such, is tolerated so as to bring definition and boundary to life, helping us form our relational identity in the symbolic order.

One common source of the abject is the *monstrous-feminine*, described in Barbara Creed’s “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection.” She draws multiple examples of gendered monsters and links them to the fears of sexual difference and castration, a

⁷ *Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD.

⁸ Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 11.

construction of the feminine as an ‘other’ that must be controlled to secure the patriarchal order. One specific characteristic of the monstrous-feminine is concentrated in the maternal, which becomes a source of abjection through the struggle of a child’s maturation/breaking away from its mother, a common theme of both horror and fairy tales.

Citing Kristeva, Creed points to the mother-child relationship as a site of conflict, since the child’s identity is threatened by being consumed by the mother. As the mother’s identity rests on her maternal function, apart from the symbolic order of the father, she holds tighter on to the child. Creed notes this tension for the child, who, “partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful relationship with the mother and partly terrified of the separation, [...] finds it easy to succumb to the comforting pleasure of the dyadic relationship.”⁹ In breaking away, the child has actually made his mother abject.

“Polluting” bodily forms that signify the abject—urine, feces, vomit—are directly connected to the mother, as she is a child’s first encounter with a mapping his body (establishing what is self, what is other) through potty-training. Although this is a blissful period without guilt, it culminates in the child’s entrance into the world of the father, when boundaries have become solidified, and any breach of such evokes condemnation and shame. Discussing how these bodily forms are received in the context of cinema, Creed suggests:

They fill the subject—both the protagonist in the text and the spectator in the cinema—with disgust and loathing. On the other hand, they also point back to a time when a ‘fusion between mother and nature’ existed; when bodily wastes, while set apart from the body, were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame.¹⁰

⁹ Barbara Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 42.

¹⁰ Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” 1996, p. 43.

When you refrain from defecating, you are aware of your boundary as a self. When you forget yourself, your desire propels you into a space of non-differentiation with the rest of the world. On a more archaic level, the sight of polluting objects evokes pleasure in their transgression of the order and symbolic return to the mother.

In my film, the Surveyor increasingly “forgets himself,” first taking off his jacket (for the heat), his shirt (for the stain), and finally his pants (for the urine). In this stripping, he is entering Yaga’s world of the female grotesque, of ambiguous boundaries and primal physicality. Similarly, both fairy tales and horror films, while being frightening, have the capacity to evoke pleasure precisely through the narrative’s momentary transgression of boundaries. Kristeva expresses the simultaneous attraction and horror to that which is not differentiated. Ultimately, the momentary indulgence in perversion ends when we throw it away, eject it as not being part of us, re-establishing our borders and sense of self.

Baba Yaga and the Monstrous-Feminine

Many feminist interpretations of witches or crones suggest that she is a powerful woman past her sexual function; she receives the label of grotesque or menace by society as a way to negate her power. English and folklore scholar John W. Ellis-Etchison supports this idea in his analysis of Baba Yaga and other witches. He claims “because the crone dislocates symbolic

patriarchal power, and because she no longer can be made into a sexualized object, she becomes not only useless, but dangerous in the eyes of the patriarchy, thus she must be eliminated.”¹¹

By grounding (and starting) the project with the character of Baba Yaga—the famous Russian witch who lives in a house on chicken legs—I am interested in a Romantic awareness of a collective myth as well as how myths carry regressive messages, specifically about the ‘monstrous’. According to Slavic literary scholar Andreas Johns, Baba Yaga’s name can be traced back to several origins. The word *baba* refers to a midwife, sorceress, and is the shortened word for “grandmother” (*babushka*). The origin and meaning of *yaga* is more complicated, traced to the Old Slavonic word for “disease,” to Serbo-Croatian word for “horror,” “anger,” “serpent,” and “snake.”¹²

While she carries the appearance of the monstrous-feminine—she threatens the hero, and is often linked to cannibalism, wanting to eat the hero as the mother wants to subsume a child’s identity—we find in the figure of Baba Yaga, and in Russian fairy tales as a whole, a kind of ambiguity of characterization unseen in most European fairy tales. Lauren Lindgren, in “Behind the Fire River: The Role of Personification of Evil in the Russian Wonder Tale and its Modern Descendants” notes Baba Yaga’s elusiveness:

[Yaga’s] simultaneous appeal and capacity to inspire fear are in and of themselves a good illustration of the dual nature that pervades the *volshyebnaya skazka* [the fairy tale]. She is by turns comical and frightening, awe-inspiring and absurd.¹³

¹¹ John W. Ellis-Etchison, “But Not Every Question Has an Answer: Baba Yaga as Embodied Wisdom in Slavic Folk and Fairy Tales” in Christine DeVine and Marie Hendry, eds., *Turning Points and Transformations: Essays on Language, Literature, and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 79

¹² Andreas Johns, *Baba Yaga*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing 2004). p. 28.

¹³ Lauren Lindgren, “Behind the Fire River: The Role of Personification of Evil in the Russian Wonder Tale and its Modern Descendants.” <http://plato.mercyhurst.edu/english/breed/www/senior%20english%20project/Lauren%20Lindgren.html>

We are left to wonder why a character with such a dynamic range exists in what would otherwise be considered straightforward moral tales.

Folklore scholar Vladimir Propp believes that rather than having personalities, fairy tale characters are defined by the “roles” they play in the story, which he divides into several categories—donor, villain, sought-for-person, etc.¹⁴ Despite having an easily recognizable physical distinction, often described with formulaic phrases, the witch Baba Yaga is unique among other European witches in that her role is never stable—she would help the hero in some tales, and play the villain in others. Because her origins lie in pagan initiation rites, her main function is to challenge the hero coming into her domain. By requiring the hero to do work for her, the stories introduce Yaga as having another important function, as that of initiator.

For Propp, this is her fundamental purpose—to help a protagonist reach maturation and gain access to the adult world. Etchinson elaborates on Baba Yaga’s role as initiator in that “the item with which Baba Yaga presents the protagonist often results in his or her initiation into adulthood, autonomy, and agency.”¹⁵ I structured Yaga’s character in my film with this role in mind, setting the Surveyor to do multiple kinds of work, and forcing him to interact with objects that move him into ‘maturation.’

However, it is how the character takes on Yaga’s challenge that becomes critical in our understanding of her in the classic fairy tale. Lindgren finds an example of this in the character of Petrus, in Gogol’s “St. John’s Eve,” in which the hero is tempted to kill the brother of the woman he loves, in order to get enough money to marry her. She notes that it is the character’s own actions that become the defining force influencing what side of Yaga he experiences. By

¹⁴ Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁵ John W. Ellis-Etchison, “But Not Every Question Has an Answer,” 2011, p. 86.

choosing to act selfishly, he prompts Yaga to play the role of the villain, instead of the donor. Lindgren concludes, “In the end, he is literally destroyed not by the ‘evil’ characters, but by his own individualistic ambitions, wants and needs—the darkness within himself.”¹⁶ In this sense, Yaga, unlike many other witches, does not embody pure evil, but is a reflection of the hero’s own inner state, her actions becoming a mirror to how the hero behaves. This confusion of outer and inner is again embodied in the idea of the female grotesque.

The Female Grotesque

In her book *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo suggests that bodily excess—blood, tears, milk, vomit, and excrement—become categorized not specifically under the maternal, but under the feminine. The female body is the grotesque body, in opposition to the clean, composed, male body. Most importantly, Russo explains that the grotesque body mirrors and stands in for the slippery and open boundaries that the social body experiences during carnival:

The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world.¹⁷

Jessica Bradley, in discussing the work of artist Kiki Smith, notes how “the body has come to be understood in terms that negate the possibility of any body pre-existing its cultural interpretations,” implying that the physical body is essentially a blank slate upon which politics

¹⁶ Lindgren, “Behind the Fire River.”

¹⁷ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1995.

play out.¹⁸ As such, in the arena of social relations, one's interiority is eclipsed by its outer representations. It is this tension between inner and outer that becomes undermined with the idea of the female grotesque, which stresses those physical elements that slip from the inner to the outer, almost as a form of resistance to that which is written upon it, and that which it is not. Body artists such as Kiki Smith confront us with the interiority of a body, taking us into the private and untouched realm, unmarked by socially constructed concepts. As such, it is the 'grotesque' body that can be thought of as a site of resistance to the dominating and closed ideology of a masculine world-view.

Noting how long the post-murder scene of *Psycho* is, in which Norman Bates cleans up the bathroom, getting rid of the body and blood of the dead woman, philosopher Slavoj Žižek proposes that we take pleasure in hiding perversion:

I think that this tells us a lot about the satisfaction of work, of a job well done. Which is not so much to construct something new, but maybe human work at its most elementary, work, as it were, at the zero level, is the work of cleaning the traces of a stain. The work of erasing the stains, keeping at bay this chaotic netherworld, which threatens to explode at any time and engulf us.¹⁹

In Yaga's world there is no cleaning or obscuring; the messes multiply and rearrange themselves, denying the Surveyor the pleasure of hiding. When he tries to tidy up a spilled sack of rice, a knife is flung at his hand. After he scrapes a stick of melting butter on the table, he later finds his notebook has been carelessly placed on that mess, now splattered on its binding. If anything, the Surveyor slowly takes on the grotesque characteristics of Yaga herself. At the dinner table, the ambiguous white sludge she has served him drips from his beard, and while devouring the pie Yaga has made him, he mindlessly stains his shirt.

¹⁸ Bradley, Jessica., Mac Cormack, Karen, Smith, Kiki, and Power Plant. *Kiki Smith*. (Toronto: Power Plant, 1994). p. 29

¹⁹ *Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD.

Russo highlights that the origin of the grotesque in art lies in the 15th century, when excavations in Roman territories unearthed figures that combined human, animal, plant forms in elaborate designs, the style tracing back to Asia. In these figures, connections were drawn between figures that earlier, classical art, kept as separate. Pagan creatures served as decorative elements disembodied from any moral meaning. These figurative forms became fashionable during the Renaissance and the style was named “grottesca/grottesco” based on the Italian word for cave, “grotto,” where they were found. Russo observes, “In theories of the grotesque, the etymological starting point that links the grotesque with the grotto-esque, or cave proceeds quite swiftly to the further identification of the grotto with the womb, and with woman-as-mother.”²⁰ Thus, an important link is formed between what is grotesque and what gives life.

For Bakhtin, the meaning of the grotesque is concentrated in the image of the laughing pregnant hag, since she embodies the idea of the regenerative powers of death. English literature scholar Eva Torok comments on Bakhtin in her essay “Roles of the Grotesque in Contemporary Visual Arts,” suggesting that with the image of the pregnant hag, “we imagine the birth of the baby and the death of the hag at the same point in time, in order to understand the continually transforming grotesque body.”²¹ To embrace the physical body carries with it a carnivalesque spirit of constant change and renewal. As Bradley states:

There remains a paradoxical sense of our identities being somehow rooted in the body, when, in fact, like bodies themselves, these are in constant transformation. Against the reality of our own mortality, the body is imagined as a stable base even as it changes, not only in size and shape, but through its inexorable cycle of loss and replenishment until its final exhaustion.²²

²⁰ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1995, p. 29

²¹ Torok, “Roles of the Grotesque in Contemporary Visual Arts,” 2010, p. 3

²² Bradley, *Kiki Smith*, 1994, p. 37

Despite this, we view bodies as stable in the way we think about gender and the functions that are attached to that gender.

In her essay on how female identity is bound by the body, feminist writer Jill Kestenberg demonstrates that the biological function of the female body became subservient to a social construction of female gender. She claims “the gendering of bodies can be attributed to the reproductive capability of women to generate a life form, which, by extension, in a patriarchal society, is the basis for the differentiation of what is female and male.”²³ A woman’s reproductive capacity can be seen as a forced contract to one kind of gender, and will ultimately be the deciding factor shaping femininity. In Lars von Trier’s film *Antichrist*, these tensions are explored through the horror genre. Thinking about feminity as another boundary, his film stages what happens when that boundary is challenged—when the biological and societal roles defining us are experienced as having taken possession over us.

Antichrist, Motherhood, and the Erotic-Mother

Abjection, for Judith Butler, is a way to get rid of one’s own god-awful feeling and project it onto a punished other. It is a “mode by which others become shit.”²⁴ In her analysis of *Antichrist*, film theorist Amy Simmons demonstrates how the male protagonist’s guilt is projected onto the terrifyingly real manifestation of his wife as a demonic witch.²⁵ With this

²³ Jill Kestenberg, “Bounded by our Bodies: A Theoretical Essay on Female Identity and Gender Deconstruction” *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History* Vol V (2008-2009), accessed on November 11, 2016, <http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-v/essay10-volume5/>

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990). p. 134.

²⁵ Amy Simmons. *Antichrist*. (Devil’s Advocates. Leighton Buzzard: Columbia University Press, 2015)

reading, I return to the question of whether fantasy is a negotiating force that may at first palliate, and then slip out of our control, obscuring the abject within ourselves.

While *Antichrist* embodies the more general themes of man versus woman, reason versus nature, language/order versus emotional chaos, Simmons views *Antichrist* as a return to “the roots of folklore’s darker elements by manifesting the resurrection of the sexual, violent and supernatural elements of the fairy story that existed in oral tradition before they were censored for children’s literature.”²⁶ Originally disdained for its seeming misogynist outlook on female madness and the trope of female witchcraft, the film can actually be unpacked as a feminist awareness of how hateful misogynist messages become internalized by a female character.

Functioning somewhere between a horror and psychodrama, with an emphasis on the body, the film falls into Tim Palmer’s category of *cinéma du corps*—a group of contemporary French films that deal very viscerally with the body and its transgressions, in order to tackle psychological trauma. In these films, emphasis is placed on shocking the viewer out of complacency so as to reflect on the indifference created by hetero-normative culture and outlooks on sex. The film’s strength is in how it aligns our sympathies with the woman protagonist whose own morality we begin to question, as she increasingly shows violent and possessed behavior and aspects of the monstrous-feminine. Simmons suggests that “by shortening or eliminating the space between the female character and the spectator, von Trier practically forces us to get to know her, to care about her, and indeed to feel some part of the physical distress of her body onscreen.”²⁷

²⁶ Amy Simmons, *Antichrist*, 2015, p 21.

²⁷ Amy Simmons. *Antichrist*, 2015, p 42.

In the film, the woman's child dies by falling out the window while she is having sex with her husband in the next room. The guilt sustained for her negligence as a mother spirals out of control in Eden, the woods her husband forces her to go to confront her grief, and where, the previous summer, she spent the time with her child and worked on finishing her thesis on "gynocide"—the systemic murder of women accused of witchcraft during the medieval ages. This reclusion to the woods speaks to a history of 'mad' women forced to retreat away from society for treatment that is externally forced upon them by a male figure.

As often found in both fairy tale and horror films, a trip from a more civilized space to a more rural or natural setting is a structuring device for the film. In Eden, it becomes clear that nature is hostile towards man, the landscape taking on an alien meaninglessness that stands at odds with her husband's rational outlooks. For Simmons, "it is the fear of losing control... and the dread of rupturing the thin veneer of civilization that informs the philosophical horror of *Antichrist*."²⁸ It is at Eden that we learn that the previous summer, the mother had ambivalently and continuously switched the shoes on her child's feet, so that a deformity was found in the bone structure of the feet on his corpse. Simmons suggests that this ordinary yet passive-aggressive behavior towards the child immediately brings into question a mother's unshakeable sanctity, and it is with this that the film enters into taboo territory:

Antichrist's power to unsettle its audience also derives from its focus on the taboo subject of ambivalent maternity. 'Women do not control their own bodies,' she states in an early scene, 'nature does'. Her cold view signals that the very task of motherhood has been an explicitly traumatic experience for her.²⁹

Her comment is a reflection of how biology can also become an intrusive force on a woman's will and identity. The mother's defiance, then, of nature, is no longer running from it, but rather

²⁸ Amy Simmons, *Antichrist*, 2015, p 34.

²⁹ Amy Simmons, *Antichrist*, 2015, p 44.

embracing its dark forces. Yet by doing so, the mother suggests that she is also engaging with the forces that were the cause of gynocide, the subject of her thesis.

What fascinates me about the film is how the woman comes to believe herself as abject and evil, and seduces the viewer into believing it too: a reason why so many critics, after only a surface reading, criticized von Trier for perpetuating female characterizations as mad and possessed. Yet a closer look would suggest that it is not the supernatural, not her evil nature, but the patriarchal oppression that have led her into this twisted labyrinth of the mind. Simmons interprets the film as staging a character that “has buckled under terrifying weight of self-knowledge, internalized all the negative and hateful messages of a patriarchal culture, and arrived at a place of self-loathing.”³⁰ The film, by replicating a trope, also reveals the structures of patriarchal domination and the effect they have on the individual’s self-identity and psyche.

Antichrist asks us to wonder if the mother’s behavior was a true possession, or a rebellion against cultural norms that define her as a mother first, omitting her intellectual and sexual needs. Investigating Yaga’s character, we find that her personification of motherhood is open-ended. Johns describes Yaga as a character that “possesses exaggerated female features, such as giant breasts.... Baba Yaga is a mother without being a wife, reflecting a stage in history when humans conceived of fertility as exclusively female, without male participation.”³¹ I find this idea of untangling motherhood from the presence of the male fascinating because for centuries, motherhood was used to construct and limit a woman’s identity in a patriarchal society. While many contemporary feminists deny the role of maternity in women’s identity, motherhood was nearly the entirety of the feminine identity for centuries, and could be viewed through the lens of social control of women’s bodies, roles, and interests.

³⁰ Amy Simmons, *Antichrist*, 2015, p 86.

³¹ Johns, *Baba Yaga*, 2004, p. 23.

It is for this reason that I place the two characters in my film in an implied mother-son dynamic, and explore an alternate way that this relationship can be represented, venturing into the taboo of incest. I want to highlight the contradiction of motherhood's representation as non-erotic, selfless, and limited to her tie with the child. In her essay, "Stabat Mater," Julia Kristeva analyzes some of these contradictions embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mary.³² By representing the maternal as a virgin-mother, and by having her identity described only through her relationship as Mother to Christ, the Virgin Mary is a clear example of how women's sexuality was curbed and redirected through motherhood, as if the maternal was an anti-body to a woman's dangerous sexuality, instead of a complicated and integral layer of her eroticism and sexuality. Kristeva discusses the effects of this curtailment, one of which is a somewhat perverse mother-son relationship.

Like the main character in *Antichrist*, the Yaga of my film subverts the expectation of the selfless and un-erotic mother. With a subtle nod to the Surveyor's own childhood, Yaga claims that when she caught her son masturbating, she "grabbed his little cock and helped, rubbed and rubbed." In this vulgar and perverse anecdote, Yaga reframes her role as a mother; she is unhinged and sexual, rather than selfless and impotent.

Under the Skin and the Colonization of Desire

In Jonathan Glazer's feminist sci-fi film *Under the Skin*, an alien wears the human gender of "female" to attract and seduce men off the streets of Glasgow, first into her van, and then into

³² Kristeva, Julia, and Arthur Goldhammer. "Stabat Mater." *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 133-52.

a windowless black room where they sink into an amorphous liquid. Her femininity is not biological; it is a performance, constructed and given to her by an unknown outside force; the film begins with her literal construction—an eye—and her training—a voice. All this is for an unknown purpose. The film is sparse in dialogue and explanations; it is never revealed what happens to these men after their bodies have been suspended in the womb-like environment. After her ‘construction,’ she assumes her second skin—she buys a seductive fur coat and puts on bright red lipstick, consumerism serving to continue her acquired artifice of femininity.

The seductions themselves are never consummated, speaking to how femininity is geared towards the act of seducing, and not the particularity of intimacy with someone. Her disrobing in these rooms, yet refrain from sex, can be read as a dark-humored response to the Virgin-Whore complex—the alien woman has found a way to be both sexually engaging yet untouched, but at the expense of the men.

After a series of these seductions, we assume she starts to question her disguise and her role. She releases her last captive, and wanders from the city into a rural environment. Unable to continue performing the function of her original disguise, she loses her meaning and becomes aimless. Still wearing the mask of femininity, she takes on an almost damsel-in-distress persona, taking shelter with the man who has offered to help her. To fill the void that her prescribed gender has left behind, she ultimately succumbs to another stereotypical gender role.

While having sex with the man who has offered to help her, she suddenly pushes him off to look at her vagina, as if realizing that in her construction, the engineers did not think to program the ability for her to have pleasure. The disguise does not consider the woman herself. In the final scene, the alien holds the mask of her face in her hands, recognizing that it failed to signify anything beyond the gender it was constructed to project. As if in this moment that she

realizes that her free will has been constructed, that her desire has been colonized to fit a function for someone else, she is set ablaze by a lumber man who has spotted her disguise in the forest.

What are other ways that desire is fabricated, and what is its relationship to fantasy? Feminist writer Jean Grimshaw, in “Ethics, Fantasy, and Transformation,” suggests that women’s sexual fantasies have been colonized by men, and often contain a tension with both feminist and ethical principles, since they can include physical violence against the woman herself, or some form of domination, submission, and often, even rape.³³ While one view is to ignore these as being private, interior thoughts that have no adverse effect on reality, another outlook contests that because women’s sexuality is constructed by men, it is a moral obligation for women to unlearn these impulses, and to instead democratize desire in a way that eroticizes sameness and equality. Grimshaw notes:

Heterosexual desire is eroticized power difference, based on eroticizing the powerlessness, ‘otherness’ and subordination of women. And women’s desire for men is based on the same structure; they too have been conditioned to think that inequality and subordination are sexy. Women’s sexual response to men has been based partly on the material need to cope with male power and their own frequent dependence; but they have also learned the ‘deep structures’ of their own eroticism in a male dominated society.³⁴

The assumption that women’s imaginations have been colonized by men is disturbing, and puts interiority, individuality, and free will into question.

The palliative instruction to relearn what one desires is complicated by the fact that desire may be different from fantasy. Desire is something a woman may want to actually happen in real life, while a fantasy’s function is to facilitate a desire into happening. So while a woman may fantasize about bondage, what she desires through this fantasy is an ability to enjoy more

³³ Jean Grimshaw, “Ethics, Fantasy, and Self-transformation,” in Alan Soble 3rd ed. *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

³⁴ Grimshaw, “Ethics, Fantasy, and Self-transformation”, 1997, p. 177.

conventional sex. Grimshaw suggests that these fantasies are actually indeterminate, as they offer open or fragmented narratives, and a fluid identification with the role of victim or agent. In this sense, we can relate back to the idea of the grotesque and the abject as a transgression or confusion of boundaries and loss of a clear self. Inherent in eroticism are the ideas of power and loss of self; physically and mentally, sexual partners may experience a temporary lack of their own boundaries. Furthermore, sexual fantasies do not always have a clear meaning, but rather allow for shifting structures and varying modes of identification. Men may identify with the female hero, and vice versa. In discussing how to interpret fantasies, Grimshaw suggests:

Given the constant slippage of meaning, there is no way in which the ‘real meaning’ of a fantasy can simply be read off from a first account of the narrative or scenario. And in fact, some psychoanalytic uses of the term phantasy (spelt with a ‘ph’ to distinguish it from conscious fantasies) suggest that there are phantasies which are wholly unconscious, and whose meaning is radically inaccessible.³⁵

This notion of our own desires sometimes being hidden from us resonates with me. In a similar way, I think of the characters in my film as indeterminate in the way they oscillate between aggressor and victim, and in the way that one elicits and *enables* a response from the other. In this rapid exchange of dynamics, we are left to wonder how much of the Surveyor’s speech and outbursts of erratic, violent, and sexual behavior, are due to a colonized will and how much of them are truly ‘him’. Has Yaga hypnotized the Surveyor into taking these actions, or has her power simply allowed for latent aspects of the Surveyor’s own personality to come forward?

The tension that is of interest to me is that our fantasies can be at odds with who we think we are. Sadomasochistic fantasies may cause women to experience parts of themselves as alien to the rest of their personality, and to feel shame, as they are unable to integrate all aspects of themselves into a whole. Focusing on this, Grimshaw notes, “Liberals ignore the extent to which

³⁵ Grimshaw, “Ethics, Fantasy, and Self-transformation,” 1997, p. 181.

a person may experience her own sexuality as arbitrary, hateful and alien to the rest of her personality.”³⁶ The takeaway is that the author posits the impossibility of our desires and sense of self to appear as coherent and integrated. At this point I turn to another outlook on desire’s function in the integral whole of our psyche.

Slavoj Zizek, Fantasy, and Sadomasochism

Philosopher Slavoj Zizek uses a Lacanian framework to analyze a multitude of films, and what fueled the machine of cinema itself, in his *Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* (2006). He begins the film, “The problem for us is not, ‘are our desires satisfied or not?’ The problem is, ‘how do we know what we desire?’ There is nothing spontaneous, nothing natural, about human desires. Our desires are artificial. We have to be taught to desire.”³⁷ However, the message does not end with the defeat of free will. Our seemingly colonized desire can be activated, secured, and on a hopeful note, liberated, by fantasy. In *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Zizek explains that

It is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: through fantasy, we learn how to desire.³⁸

³⁶ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. (Thinking Gender. New York: Routledge, 1990). p. 51.

³⁷ *Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD.

³⁸ Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 4.

Zizek shows how fantasy is not a space apart from reality, but rather, actively informs it, by mapping our desires. In the film, he explains, “in sexuality, it’s never only me and my partner, or more partners, whatever you are doing... There has to be always some fantasmatic element. There has to be some third imagined element which enables me, to engage in sexuality.”³⁹ He suggests that we do not enjoy sex (and on a more broad scope, do not tolerate reality itself) directly, without this activating element of fantasy. In essence, for desire to function in a healthy way, the borders between fantasy and reality must be fluid, and the object of our desire, as seen in our fantasies, can never be attained. If the border between the two seemingly separate worlds is well-defined, and we find ourselves submerged in our fantasies, (meaning our desire has manifested), in such a case, Zizek claims that this is essentially a nightmare.

Returning back to the idea of the monstrous and the grotesque, I propose that our actualized fantasies would become nightmares specifically *because* we are perversely drawn to what we normally consider abject, because we have a complicated relationship to wholeness. For instance, we are both attracted to and repulsed by the return to the pre-symbolic oneness with the mother or to sight of bodily pollutions. We may want to return to a primordial wholeness, yet continue to struggle to retain our sense of self, our particularity. In tightening the boundaries between reality and fantasy, we risk being consumed by the fantasy, which would effectively negate our ability to keep *apart* the abject that normally lives within us, in its safe form of *desire*. Discussing Michael Hanake’s *The Piano Teacher*, Zizek notes,

As if to punish her for disclosing the fantasy in her letter to him, he literally enacts her fantasy in the way he makes love to her, which of course means that fantasy is lost for her. When fantasy disintegrates, you don’t get reality, you get some nightmarish real too traumatic to be experienced as ordinary reality. That

³⁹ *Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD

would be another definition of nightmare. Hell is here. Paradise, at least this perverse paradise, is hell.⁴⁰

Although in my film, the Surveyor's perverse desire for violence is never realized—it remains on the plane of fantasy and words (re-tellings)—what is important is that his awareness of his desire has been mapped by the fantasy of his encounter and role-play with Yaga. In mapping his desire, in his awareness of the possibilities of these desires, the Surveyor is able to make abject those aspects of himself that cannot remain hidden. It is then that he is finally able to leave her house. In my retelling of a fairy tale that roots in initiation practices, my version of the character's maturation is precisely this redefinition of himself.

In discussing the net effect and critique of carnival, Eva Torok suggests that its debauchery actually allows the existing socio-political hierarchy to remain intact. She claims “grotesque realism is a tool in carnival that helps people ‘let off steam,’ defeat the official culture in order to be able to live under this official culture as soon as the carnival season is over. It is then the official culture that needs the carnival and grotesque realism to maintain its power for the rest of the year.”⁴¹ I propose that while the social body needs the momentary transgression of carnival to ultimately re-establish its boundaries and return to cultural norms, the individual needs the fluid boundaries between reality and fantasy to continuously remap both—what he desires and what he considers abject—though they are essentially of the same nature.

Robert Stam notes, “in carnival, imagination and fantasy take power.”⁴² More specifically, there is a performative element to Bakhtin's carnivalesque-grotesque, since one had to know the laws in order to creatively subvert them. As such, Torok identifies within the carnivalesque a strong component of imagination and play on the part of the active participant.

⁴⁰ *Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD.

⁴¹ Torok, “Roles of the Grotesque in Contemporary Visual Arts,” 2010, p. 14

⁴² Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, 1992, p. 167.

She believes this to be the key in understanding the function of the grotesque as a border between life and art. By its nature, the grotesque presents the viewer with something that he has not seen before, and may thus create a shock, prompting a viewer to look again to make sense of what is essentially, an open-ended piece. Elaborating on this idea, Torok says:

These creative works we expose ourselves to make the perceiver create as well. The more contemporary an artwork, the more we need our creativity to make sense to it. During such creative activities we not only create a meaning, we create ourselves as well, we form our identities.⁴³

Thus, creative energies are activated when a viewer is presented with an open-ended artwork.

This is central to Torok's understanding of contemporary grotesque art as that which opens the boundaries between spectator and performer, to create an emphasis on the experiential.

How then might Torok interpret the world of S&M—as a grotesque art, or as a perpetuation of violence in the colonized minds of its participants? If our power to negotiate our boundaries can be seen as an activating, creative force, perhaps we can reframe S&M practices. One of the feminist arguments justifying S&M is its emphasis on *simulation* versus replication. It is through this displacement of the surface details of violence to a different context that negates this practice as being a continuation of violence. Instead, through the active participation—often creative—in the production of these simulations, sadomasochist practitioners become empowered through the agency of their performance. Supporting this argument, philosopher and ethicist Patrick D. Hopkins frames sadomasochism as “a performance, as a staging, a production, a simulation in which participants are writers, producers, directors, actors and audience.”⁴⁴ We once again see the activating agent of creativity at work, in the realm of constructed violence and

⁴³ Torok, “Roles of the Grotesque in Contemporary Visual Arts,” 2010.

⁴⁴ Soble, Alan, ed., *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 196.

transgression. In sadomasochistic practices, desire becomes directed more to the entire context of that production—to a reality creatively fabricated—rather than to a particular body.

Comparing the experience of wanting a simulation to the real thing, Hopkins suggests that, though we may enjoy being on a rollercoaster ride, we do not necessarily want to experience the actuality of a suicidal death leap. Similarly, he suggests that “the sadomasochist can desire the simulation itself, not as inferior copy of the real thing, not as a copy of anything at all, but as simulation qua simulation.”⁴⁵ In a similar way, can we think of language and storytelling as an activating, empowering mode of simulation, for the sake of re-creating one’s experience of reality?

Alexei German, Language, Repetition, the Embodied Perspective

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that the act of speaking is the continuation of a thought that could not be completed or whole without its expression in words. In asking “why the most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not recalled its name, why the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, or even spoken and written them,” Merleau-Ponty is implying that meaning requires *expression* as its natural end.⁴⁶ If speech makes the thought a tangible thing in the world, it is no longer a representation of the thing, but *the thing itself*. The function of language, repetition, and variation in my film embodies this idea—to speak is to essentially become, to complete, to make manifest.

⁴⁵ Soble, Alan, ed., *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 198.

⁴⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 206.

Repetition and variation play a central role in the fairy tale, since with every telling, a storyteller can change, add to, and alter a story. However, these changes must be effective or the addition will be forgotten. Johns talks about a kind of collective censorship that these ornamentations must pass before being retained in the folktale. And yet, in Russia, during the 1800s, during a literary movement of recording oral fairy tales, writers often left the holes and paradoxes of a story as the original storyteller had told them. I think of these discrepancies in the writing of my script, in which rapid changes of character and motive occur.

The storyteller is a present figure in all of these tales. Often, he ends his story with a request for food as a reward for telling the story, or a line that discredits everything he has just said as hearsay. This tendency to negate the accuracy of the story is seen in the work of Soviet filmmaker Alexei German, both in how he rethinks the function of a film's narrator, and how he subverts the linearity of action and character development. Often using long takes and a floating camera that deviates from the coherence of one character and one plot of action, German's cinema can be thought of as a carnivalesque meditation on the impossibility of remembering and defining the self in the broader flow of historical, and collective, time. One strategy he uses is the presence of a disembodied narrator, who offers insights that do not always correspond with what is being visually represented on screen. As such, the narrators' absence hints at a broader significance than its own instance, than its own historical and personal event. Film critic Alexander Graham focuses on this presence of the narrator in his essay "Immersion in Time": History, Memory and the Question of Readability in the Films of Aleksei German," saying:

My insistence in highlighting the disembodiment and the complicated Self of these four narrators relates to what I take to be a fundamental strategy of German's memory structure: to destabilize the inviolability of the remembered

Self as a representational subject, and thus to pose a phenomenological challenge to the primacy accorded to the individual, subjective witness of history.⁴⁷

In this way, the legitimacy of even historical events is brought into question in German's narratives. What remains, in the absence of fact, is an innumerable number of citations of literary texts in the dialogue, and a phenomenological attention to what is onscreen. These anchors of focus are gestures in the fight against a historical and personal forgetting. In German's films, what is privileged is not a sense of the "I" that is remembering, but rather *what* is remembered—citations, atmosphere, objects, and the polyphonic nature of the world he is recreating.

This sense of acknowledging the story's own fabrication and the failure of memory is ever present in *The Watering Room*, both through the presence of the unreliable narrator, as well as in the repetition and variation of the main story that structures the dialogue. Although the Surveyor retells the same anecdote throughout the film, none of the versions are "true." Yet, like Merleau-Ponty suggests, each variation's utterance makes manifest the thing itself, which, in the story's instance, is the emotional truth of that moment—the awareness of the Surveyor's own violence and perversion, an aspect of his personality that would otherwise be latently lodged in his psyche, dormant but threatening. By prompting him to speak and retell, Yaga has allowed the Surveyor to embrace the possibility of evil, and having spoken it, having momentarily become it, the threatening boundary between self and other, between good and evil swiftly crumbles, lifts, and retreats.

German's films include a reoccurring type of shot, one not often found in most narrative cinema—a protagonist looking directly into the camera. For Graham, this can be interpreted as an audience's identification not with an "assumed point of view, but with the experience of subjectivity situated in the 'look' of another. We look, and are not so much looked at, but rather

⁴⁷ Alexander Graham, "'Immersion in Time': History, Memory and the Question of Readability in the Films of Aleksei German." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 6, no. 2 (2012): 177-216, p 193.

experience a text that transcends its illusory reality.”⁴⁸ The breaking of the fourth wall is thus not just a tactic to subvert the appearance of coherence within the simulated world of the narration, but functions as a way to ground the audience in the phenomenological experience of witnessing subjectivity happen. In essence, it is a mode to connect to and momentarily become the other. There are multiple shots in my film that play with this tactic. While a character can look directly into and address the camera, implying that the audience has assumed the point of view of the other character, each of these shots ends with this receiving character walking into the frame he/she is supposedly looking at. In this way, I play with the embodiment of the self, of who is looking and becoming who, as characters’ points of view entangle and become confused with each other and with the audience.

Finally, in looking at German’s work, a common character found in his films is the childhood version of the otherwise-disembodied narrator. This child’s presence allows a momentary temporal confusion, as well as an audience’s awareness of where it places its identification, since in these films, we always move through a narrative that is littered with multiple, seemingly lateral characters. In a similar way, and with a nod to German’s use of a floating camera, I end my film with a physical and narrative departure from the main characters, to an encounter with a young boy who is presumed to be the main Surveyor’s childhood self, running into the woods. As such, I also choose to not privilege the coherent perception and subjectivity of one character, but conclude in an open-ended polyphony of otherness. We momentarily lose the boy on his path through the woods, and find him again in a field of lifeless children’s bodies. Suddenly resurrected, they all rise and run off, as the Surveyor’s sense of self is itself scattered and dispersed.

⁴⁸ Alexander Graham, "Immersion in Time," 2012, p 199.

My film is about embracing a multiplicity that includes the grotesque, the vulgar, and the violent, in order to gain a sense of self and equilibrium. I sense that to continuously retreat from the boundary of what is horrifying is to be trapped in the illusion of being on the other side of it. Truly, we are always in active and direct relation to the monstrous whole.

|



Fig. 1. Kiki Smith, *Tale*, 1992, beeswax, microcrystalline wax, pigment, and papier-mache



Fig. 2. Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 3. Alexei German, *Hard to Be A God*, 2013, 2 hrs 35 min.



Fig. 4. Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 5. Alexei German, *Khrustalev, My Car!*, 1998, 2 hrs 30 min.



Fig. 6. Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 7: Lars Von Trier, *Antichrist*, 2009, 1 hr 48 min.



Fig. 8: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 9: Lars Von Trier, *Antichrist*, 2009, 1 hr 48 min.



Fig. 10: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 11: Lars Von Trier, *Antichrist*, 2009, 1 hr 48 min.



Fig. 12: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 13: Jonathan Glazer, *Under the Skin*, 2013, 1 hr 48 min.



Fig. 14: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.

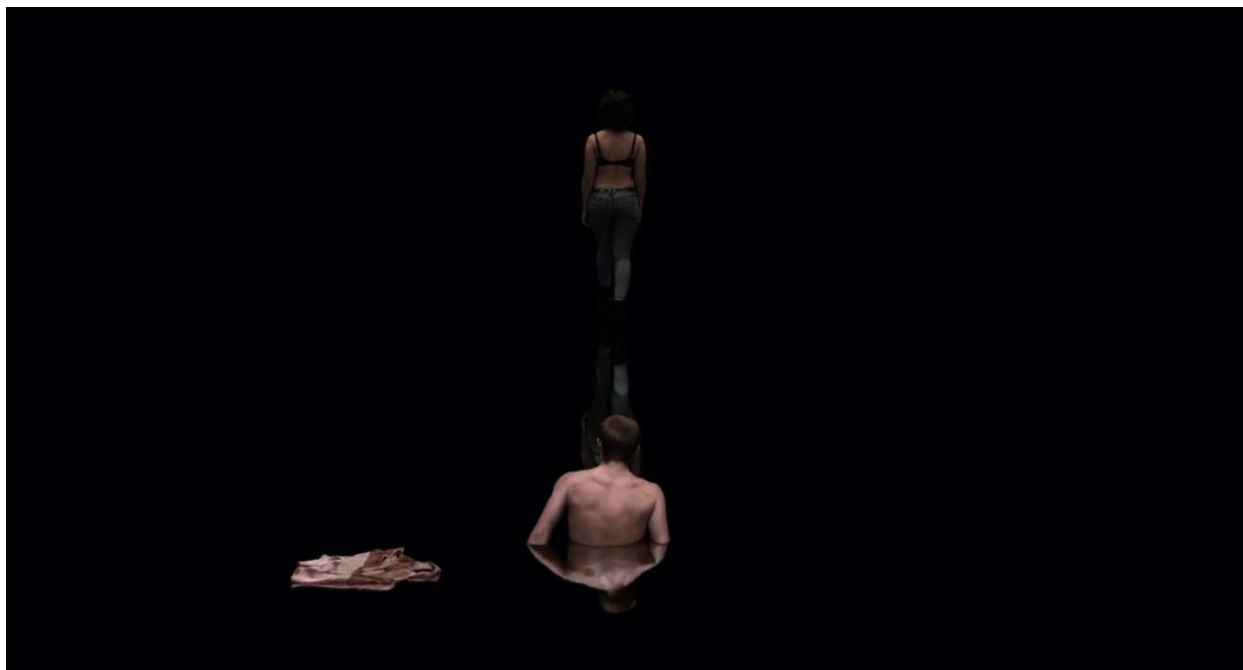


Fig. 15: Jonathan Glazer, *Under the Skin*, 2013, 1 hr 48 min.

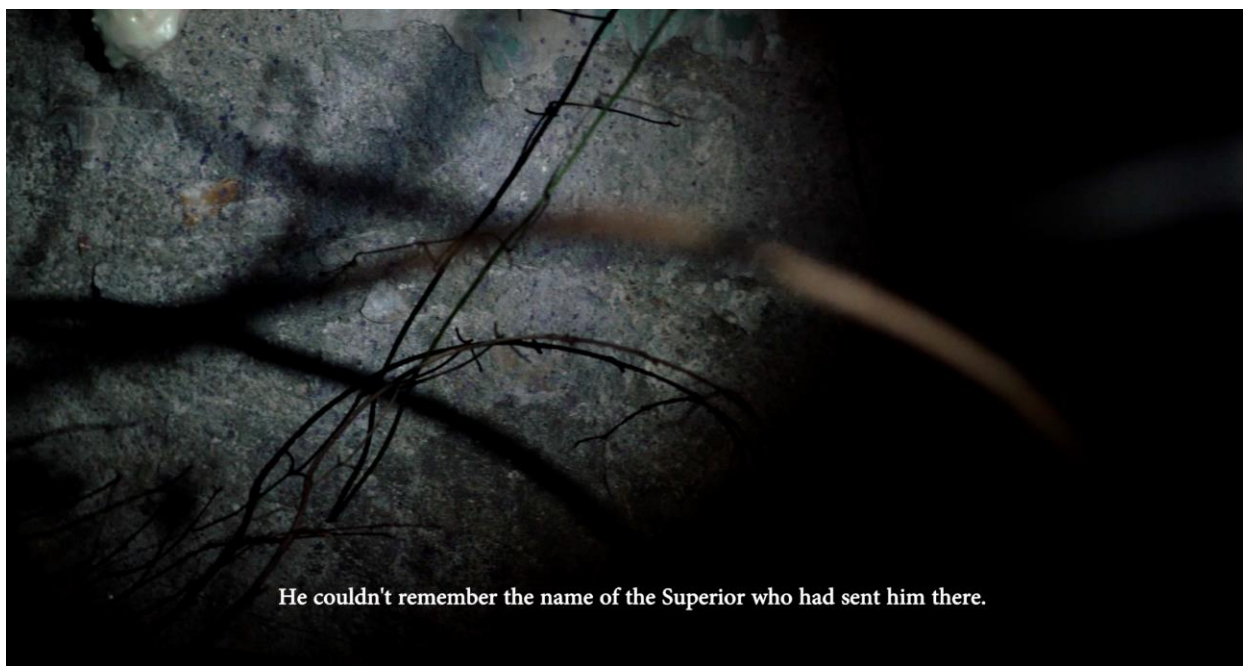


Fig. 16: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 17: Jonathan Glazer, *Under the Skin*, 2013, 1 hr 48 min.



Fig. 18: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min.



Fig. 19: Michael Hanake, *The Piano Teacher*, 2002, 2 hrs, 11 min.



Fig. 20: Katya Yakubov, *The Watering Room*, 2017, 35 min

Bibliography

- Antichrist*. Directed by Lars von Trier. 2009. New York, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2010. DVD.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Bradley, Jessica., Mac Cormack, Karen, Smith, Kiki, and Power Plant. *Kiki Smith*. Toronto: Power Plant, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Creed, Barbara, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Ellis-Etchison, John W. "But Not Every Question Has an Answer: Baba Yaga as Embodied Wisdom in Slavic Folk and Fairy Tales" in Christine DeVine and Marie Hendry, eds., *Turning Points and Transformations: Essays on Language, Literature, and Culture*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.
- Graham, Alexander. "'Immersion in Time': History, Memory and the Question of Readability in the Films of Aleksei German." *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 6, no. 2 (2012): 177-216.
- Grimshaw, Jean. "Ethics, Fantasy, and Self-transformation," in Alan Soble 3rd ed. *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).
- Hard to Be A God*. Directed by Alexei German. 2013. New York, NY: Kino Lorber, 2015. DVD.
- Hopkins, Patrick D. "Rethinking Sadomasochism: Feminism, Interpretation, and Simulation," in Alan Soble 3rd ed. *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.
- Johns, Andreas. *Baba Yaga*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004.

- Kestenberg, Jill. "Bounded by our Bodies: A Theoretical Essay on Female Identity and Gender Deconstruction" *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History* Vol V (2008-2009), accessed on November 11, 2016, <http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-v/essay10-volume5/>
- Khrustalev, My Car!* Directed by Alexei German. 1998. St. Petersburg, Russia: Lenfilm Video, 2002. DVD.
- Kristeva, Julia. *The Portable Kristeva*. New York: Columbia University Press, reprint 2002.
- Kristeva, Julia, and Arthur Goldhammer. "Stabat Mater." *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 133-152.
- Lindgren, Lauren. "Behind the Fire River: The Role of Personification of Evil in the Russian Wonder Tale and its Modern Descendants," accessed December 10, 2016, <http://plato.mercyhurst.edu/english/breed/www/senior%20english%20project/Lauren%20Lindgren.html>
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. 2006. P Guide Ltd, 2009. DVD.
- The Piano Teacher*. Directed by Michael Haneke. 2001. New York, NY: Kino International, 2002. DVD.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Theory and History of Folklore*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Russo, Mary J. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Short, Sue. *Misfit Sisters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Simmons, Amy. *Antichrist*. Devil's Advocates. Leighton Buzzard: Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Torok, Eva. "Roles of the Grotesque in Contemporary Visual Arts," *Apertúra*, (2010), accessed December 10, 2016, <http://uj.apertura.hu/2010/tel/torok-roles-of-the-grotesque-in-contemporary-visual-arts/>
- Under the Skin*. Directed by Jonathan Glazer. 2014. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate Entertainment, 2014. DVD.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*.
Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.