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On: 22 December 2012, At: 12:55

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Quarterly Journal of Speech

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rqjs20>

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Version of record first published: 12 Nov 2012.

To cite this article: Joshua Gunn (2012): Maranatha , Quarterly Journal of Speech, 98:4, 359-385

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2012.714900>

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Maranatha

Joshua Gunn

This essay advances a theory of generic criticism attuned to bodily affect. Aligning form with affect and genre with meaningful emotion, genre is described as the way in which the feeling of form is delivered to language. The primary example is Mel Gibson's film, The Passion of the Christ, which was marketed as a melodrama, but which exemplifies the generic norms of pornography.

Keywords: Cum Shot; Genre Criticism; Jesus; Perversity; Pornography

[W]hat Mel is doing is the Gospel according to Mel. People have said that sarcastically in critiques of [*The Passion of the Christ*], but in fact that's not a bad expression. He also saw a historical event which [sic] suggested to him that human suffering can have a redemptive quality.

—William Fulco¹

[*The Passion of the Christ*] is a repulsive masochistic fantasy, a sacred snuff film It will be objected that I see only pious pornography in *The Passion of the Christ* because I am not a believer in Christ.

—Leon Wieseltier²

Whether or not true believers in the divinity of Jesus, both admirers and critics of Mel Gibson's self-financed,³ 2004 filmic depiction of Christ's final hours seem to agree on one point: the gospel according to Mel is unflinchingly and relentlessly violent. "The movie is 126 minutes long," reported film critic Roger Ebert, "and I would guess that at least 100 of those minutes, maybe more, are concerned

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specifically and graphically with the details of the torture and death of Jesus. This is the most violent film I have ever seen.”⁴ Earning over \$600 million worldwide in less than seven months, Gibson’s vicious version of the gospels nevertheless seemed to resonate with filmgoers, many reporting a feeling of spiritual uplift after seeing the film.⁵ And despite its R-rated fountains of blood, the subsequently released DVD and VHS versions of the film have sold almost nine million copies, not counting the recently released, “definitive” version on Blu-Ray.⁶

Aside from its shocking violence, the film is also conspicuous as a curious amalgam of cinematic genres. For example, *The Passion of the Christ* (hereafter *The Passion*) models a number of the patterns now established in the “Jesus film” genre, from the Western depictions of the son of God (e.g., the typical, unshaven “white” man with long hair), to requisite scenes (e.g., the Last Supper, Judas’s kiss, the crucifixion), to aesthetic conventions (e.g., sepia tones, reddish hues, and other visual signifiers of ancient Mediterranean-chic).⁷ *The Passion* departs from the traditional Jesus film, however, by focusing exclusively on Christ’s final hours of suffering with little reference to his life or teachings. Gibson’s co-screenwriter explained this formal departure was deliberate, because “in almost every portrayal of Jesus’ life [in other films], the Passion is downplayed. It’s an embarrassment, so it’s whitewashed.”⁸ Gibson set out to make audiences wince with a “macho Jesus in charge,” a Jesus whose hard-core suffering would seem like a divinely inspired decision, not a passively fated victimage.⁹ The primary way in which Gibson butches up Jesus is through the depiction of a superhuman endurance of unbearable torture. Barring a list of the most garish adjectives one can conjure, perhaps the best way to even come close to describing an experience of Gibson’s cinematic innovations is fiendishly inductive, by way of an extended example. Here I beg the reader’s indulgence (or more sharply, revulsion), as a prolonged illustration will clear the ground for a reconceptualization of genre keyed specifically to affective experience—in this case, a kind of strung out, readerly discomfort that is but a filtered facsimile of the experience of screening Gibson’s unremitting, cinematic surfeit of slaughter.

Unquestionably, in the popular press the most discussed and controversial scene of sadistic savagery occurs approximately 52 minutes into *The Passion*, which depicts a scourging of Christ that is only fleetingly mentioned in three of the four gospels. Most likely inspired by the nineteenth-century embellishments or “visions” of Anne Catherine Emmerich in *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*,¹⁰ screenwriters Gibson and Fulco extended the flogging of Christ to twelve minutes—an excruciatingly long experience for the spectator in film-time, which is further exacerbated by a periodic absence of music. In the narrative, the torture scene is set up as follows: Portrayed by the model-esque, six-foot, blue-eyed James Caviezel (who wears brown contacts in the film), Jesus is led in chains to the courtyard of Pontius Pilate, played by the bald Bulgarian Hristo Shopov in a shiny, muscled chest plate. The Roman-appointed Jewish high priest, Caiaphas (played by Mattia Sbragia in elaborate, priestly garb), is outraged with Jesus, charges him with blasphemy, and demands a crucifixion. Reluctant to hurt Jesus, whom he believes to be harmless, Pilate offers the assembled crowd a choice: either kill Jesus and free Barabbas, a deranged murderer

with kooky eyes and horrible teeth, or free Jesus and put Barabbas to death. At Caiaphas's behest, the crowd demands Pilate to free Barabbas and kill Jesus. In an attempt to spare Christ's life, Pilate orders a public torture to appease the bloodthirsty crowd, but proclaims that after the punishment Jesus will be set free.

The torture scene begins with a rear, headshot of Jesus, who is led down a series of steps and into an adjoining courtyard used for public torture. An establishing aerial shot of the yard depicts a 40' by 40' stone-floor torture area with a large, wooden stump anchored in the center. At the edge of the torture area is a table at which the "torture guard" is seated. To his left is a longer table, draped in canvas and upon which rests a series of torture implements. Soldiers lead Jesus by a length of rope to the torture area, while a soldier ahead of the prisoner by three paces or so hands the guard a scrolled decree. While the torture guard reads his orders, the soldiers deposit Christ in front of the tree stump and recede as six new torturers—in conspicuous, brown leather costuming and helmets secured by wide, leather chin-straps—appear on screen, joking and laughing among themselves (the torture guard seems annoyed). Shots of their yellowed and rotting teeth are emphasized; one of the torturers playfully barks like a dog, snapping his corroded teeth at the open mouth of an amused, fellow torturer. Then, the scene cuts to a shot of the torturers disrobing Jesus, revealing a toned, attractive chest and torso, while they continue to laugh and joke with one another.

The visibly unhappy and swollen Jesus contemplates an impending beating. Christ is shackled to the stump as two of the torturers remove their chin-strapped helmets and pick up wooden switches from the implement table, which they flex and bow to test their suitability and strength. This is followed by a medium-close-up shot of Christ in profile, who says under his breath in the Aramaic tongue, "my heart is ready Father, my heart is ready." After this minute-and-a-half build-up, a brief close-up of the vengeful but curious visage of Caiaphas is shown just before the first torturer whips Jesus with a powerful crack. As Jesus is beaten, a helmeted torturer screams out the number of blows in Latin. Much of the physical violence of the blows is implied by the pained facial expressions of Jesus, however, the spectator is made to witness whelps and blood appearing on Christ's back and torso with a few of the blows. Shots of the whipping are juxtaposed with slow, zooming close-ups of stony-faced Jewish priests and the visibly amused whipping guard. Ominous music fades into the scene with the appearance of Satan, an androgynous, bald, and pale figure in a black robe (played by Rosalinda Celentano), weaving among the amassed crowd apparently unnoticed. After three minutes of flogging have passed, the Jewish clergy have seen enough and leave.

The torture guard orders the beating to stop as Christ slumps on the bloodstained stump. A torturer works to catch the breath he lost in the physical exertion of the beating. The tear-stained faces of Mary and Mary Magdalene, both in long, black robes, alternate with shots of the ravaged back of Jesus. Then, in a demonstration of remarkable strength, the bloated and bloody Jesus stands up, unsteadily. The torture guard is visibly amazed; a number of the surprised torturers tease and laugh at Jesus.

The torture guard orders that new implements be chosen. Two torturers pick up spiked sticks and brandish them with eager facial expressions. “No,” the guard says, directing the men to each select the cat-o’-nine-tails (a “cat”), a torture device that features nine, two foot long pieces of rope, each of which is knotted with beads and affixed with a blade or sharp flint at the end. A torturer flings his cat onto the guard’s table and a blade sticks into the wood, thereby demonstrating the destructive power of the device to the spectator and helping to create a sense of anticipatory dread. Christ’s hands tremble as he awaits new brutalities; he makes eye contact with his weeping mother. Then, the torture guard orders the lashing to begin again.

Unlike the initial series of lashings, however, the first shot of the cat-o’-nine-tails striking Jesus’ back is not implied: the spectator is made to see the implement gouge into his right side, creating five deep, red-bottomed canals. The second blow is implied, but, again, the spectator is made to see flesh slicing open in the third and forth lashing, the camera slowly zooming toward the now blood-drenched back of Jesus. Again, an off-screen torturer barks the number of lashings as they occur: “Unum! Duo! Triiiiiiii—aaahhhh!” Christ audibly gasps and convulses with each, flesh-tearing rake. Finally, on the ninth lashing, something is amiss: the cat gets stuck in Christ’s side; the spectator sees five blades embedded in Christ’s rib-cage in the lower part of the frame as the torturer towers behind him in the upper right. There is a brief hesitation. The torturer forcefully yanks the blades out. Christ’s flesh parts as a chunk of blurred meat is seen to fly across the screen. Christ screams in agony as dramatic strings swell in the soundtrack, leading to a cut-away of Mary covering her face with her hands. The blood-spattered face of the torturer who just delivered the gruesome blow is grinning as he steps backward from the bloody stump. Another torturer laughs manically, his face also speckled in crimson.

The scene cuts to a close-up of Mary, who turns away from the bloody scene with wet eyes. “My son, when, where, how will you choose to be delivered of this?” she says to herself, as sounds of the beating continue off-screen. When the spectator is returned to the torture area, the sadists are caught up in a blossoming ecstasy of sadism, grinning and laughing as they continue to wail away at Jesus’ lacerated body faster and faster. The spectator is briefly shown a shot of Mary Magdalene, now also covering her face, before a cut to a shot of a cattail ripping across Jesus’ face. As the beating continues into the sixth minute, Mary leaves and is shown walking behind those who have amassed to gawk at the ghastly spectacle. She weeps. Magdalene joins her and, clutching Mary’s breast, cries uncontrollably. Claudia Procles, the wife of Pontius Pilate, slowly approaches the weeping women and presents them white linens; fearful of being seen, Procles runs away as the Marys realize the symbolic import of her gesture.

With the presentation of the linens, the torture scene enters its eighth minute. The soundtrack’s choral lamentation descends to a meditative drone as the camera cuts from the women and slowly zooms toward the torture guard, who orders the flogging to end. Again, in slow zoom, the camera cuts to a rear view of Jesus limp on the stone ground, his head held aloft only by his shackled right arm. The torture guard stands as an aerial shot shows the two torturers bend over, resting their arms on their knees,

panting. Collectively, the music, the motionless and bloodied Jesus, the image of the out-of-breath torturers, and the calm resolve of the now-standing torture guard signify that the scene is over.

But wait, there's more! The torture guard holds out his left arm, palm down, and then inverts his hand upward, indicating that Christ should now be flogged on the front of his body. A third torturer unshackles Jesus' left arm and then flips him over on the slippery rocks, his right arm still shackled. Christ's flaccid body is not lifeless, but almost. Again, the spectator is made to witness more shots of flayed flesh, interspersed with slow-motion, first-person shots of gleeful torturers hurling their penetrating implements at him. Then, again in slow motion, Satan is shown sauntering behind the torturers, this time holding an infant with the face of a grown man (the actor is actually an adult little person or dwarf). As the torture scene continues, full-body shots of Jesus give way to a predominance of head shots of his bloodied face, his left eye swollen shut. The spectator is then delivered to a melodramatic memory, signified in sepia hues, of Jesus washing the feet of his apostle, John. As he washes John's feet, he says in Aramaic:

If the world hates you, remember it has hated me first. Remember also that no servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. You must not be afraid. The Helper will come who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father.

Viewers are then returned to the torture scene in the first-person, blurred vision of Christ who spies a Roman soldier enter the torture area. "Stop! Stop!" screams the soldier in Latin, "Enough! Your orders were to punish this man, not to scourge him to death!" The spectator is given another aerial shot that depicts Jesus, lying in a pool of blood and writhing in pain with labored breathing. "Take him away!" barks the soldier. "Get going!" The blood-soaked torturers unshackle Jesus. "Get him out of here!" screams the soldier. A couple of helmeted torturers grab each arm of Jesus and drag him across the torture area; the spectator is then shown a first-person perspective of Christ, who sees the surrounding scene upside down. A final aerial shot reveals the dragged body of Jesus leaving a smeared trail of his own blood. The scene ends with a shot of the vacated torture area; Mary is seen wiping up the pooled blood with the gifted linens.

I have described the torture scene of *The Passion* at some length—deliberately beyond what is customary for an introduction—in order to impart better the unremitting character of the film's intensity: just when the viewer is deliberately led to expect a reprieve from violent imagery, the film takes a downward spiral into even more graphic—if not grandiloquent—displays of brutality.¹¹ As I trust the length of this introductory example performatively demonstrates, Gibson's film simply never lets up. A syndicated commentary by *Hollywood Reporter* columnist Ray Richmond captures a popular, critical response to Gibson's murderous marathon:

Who would ever have thought that two hours of ceaseless, excruciating torture would come to represent such a potent slice of mass entertainment? The film is monumentally disturbing—not for its depiction of Christ dying for our sins but for

its unbearably gruesome, gratuitously savage illustration of the final 12 hours of Christ's life. [The film] is the most gut-piercing depiction ever of a man being beaten to death in all of its blood-spurting, flesh-pulverizing glory. The film is an orgy of gore, displayed for the seeming sake of gore. Take away the spiritual veneer and, in its way, the film is downright pornographic.¹²

Richmond claims the lengthy torture scene is pornographic, but the warrant linking such a claim to the details of the scene is far from obvious. Presumably, a link can be made between pornography and violence in terms of their signature excesses, their mutual "over-the-top-ness," as it were.¹³ Even so, just how Gibson's tactical violence relates to pornography is unclear. More importantly, we might ask why so many critics experience the bloody scene I have just described—not to mention the film itself—as pornographic, even though such a label seems counterintuitive. In this essay, I endeavor to explain how and why *The Passion of the Christ* can be read and experienced as pornography through genre criticism. To do so, however, I argue for a psychoanalytic rethinking of genre as the representational counterpart to the affective excitations of form. What Gibson's film teaches us is that our more commonplace understanding of genres as names for textual patterns overlooks the important ways in which affective and bodily modalities underwrite and interact with such patterns. A genre is not merely the label for a text, but the signature of an affective apparatus that both presumes and produces bodies-in-feeling.

From *Jouissance* to Genre, or the Feeling of Form

Camera got them images/camera got them all/nothing's shocking
 Showed me everybody/naked and disfigured/nothing's shocking
 And then he came/now sister's not a virgin anymore
 Her sex is violent.

—Jane's Addiction, "Ted, Just Admit It"¹⁴

Although a number of critics and scholars have described *The Passion* as pornography, to my knowledge none have taken the time or space to explain their reasoning. What passes as an explanation is, at best, lodged at the level of popular insinuation. For example, *New York Magazine* film critic David Edelstein suggests *The Passion* participates in the horror sub-genre that he dubbed "torture porn," along with films such as *Hostel*, *Saw*, and *Wolf Creek*, which, "in the quest to have a visceral impact," he speculates, situates "viscera" as "the final frontier."¹⁵ The hallmark of this genre film is that its excessive or gratuitous violence appears "viciously nihilistic."¹⁶ Still, what makes "torture porn" pornographic remains unsaid. Perhaps because scholarly research on the torture porn genre is relatively new, thus far the literature offers little more insight than that first put forward by Laura Mulvey on the pleasures of cinema and the gaze.¹⁷ What links violence and sexuality is a rather simplistic form of cinematic sadism. Dean Lockwood explains that

Cine-psychoanalysis concentrates on how an illusion of agency and transcendence is afforded the spectator, their subjective coherence ideologically constituted and secured by the disavowal of discontinuities and differences. . . . This is a gendered

process—cinema constitutes the spectating subject as the dominating, active male, pleasurably fetishizing and victimizing woman as palliative for castration anxiety.¹⁸

Such an approach has been, more or less, the consensus view of pornography in film studies; the suggestion here is that “torture porn” is redundant because of its pro forma restaging of male violence toward feminine bodies common to both porn and horror films.¹⁹ Lockwood references gaze theory, but only to dismiss it in favor of a Deleuzian understanding of affect, which he then draws upon in order to make the somewhat counterintuitive claim that “torture porn” has a libratory potential.

Lockwood’s claim will seem less counterintuitive if we take up Christian Lundberg’s recently published analysis of *The Passion*, which implicates the role of *jouissance* (translated as “enjoyment”) in the cultural labor or rhetoric of the film.²⁰ Better than any other essay about *The Passion* to date, Lundberg makes sense of its popularity, particularly among evangelicals, by examining the relationships between the fantasies of persecution and the visceral impact of the film on the spectator’s body. Physical revulsion while watching the film is crucial because the film also simultaneously organizes fantasies or cultural scripts that suggest to the spectator how to feel. *The Passion*, in other words, stimulates the bodies of spectators (affect) and delivers them to suggested emotions. Lundberg’s reading depends on making an important and sharp distinction between the concepts of affect and emotion:

... it is crucial to disarticulate affect from emotion, a term often understood to be nearly synonymous with affect. Where emotion describes a subjectively felt state, affect describes the set of forces, investments, logics, relations, and practices of subjectivization that are the conditions of possibility for emotion... reading an evangelic public’s response to *The Passion* virtually mandates this distinction; how else might one account for an intense investment in a film staging brutal violence against the savior with a minimalist presentation of the resurrection?²¹

Through a sophisticated critical apparatus organized around a Lacanian treatment of tropes (as generative logics, not figures), Lundberg demonstrates that the film is successful, despite its revolting scenes, because it aims for an evangelical audience; even if a given spectator is not a Christian, the film nevertheless articulates cultural scripts of persecution and salvation in such a way as to situate her as a true believer. Lundberg argues this positioning allows the film to forge its primary suturing: the scourging scene with which this essay opens, for example, “is structured to promote a metaphorical identification of the evangelical viewing public and the beaten body of Jesus.”²²

Lundberg’s stress on the centrality of affect and his description of how Gibson’s film encourages powerful body-trope articulations gets us a little closer to understanding why the film is pornographic. Although his stated purpose is to explain the labor of violence in the film for the constitution of a public, his analysis points us in a helpful direction: the Lacanian notion of *jouissance* or enjoyment, “which both names the process of producing a subject, and the set of habits, investments, and relations that orient a subject to its world.”²³ Enjoyment, which has the connotations of orgasm in the original French, is an indescribable compulsion toward painful

pleasure or pleasurable pain, and in some sense Lundberg's reading of a given spectator's active "investment" in *The Passion* depends on the compulsory character of cinematic enjoyment. Grounded in a (seemingly) ineffable, affective experience,²⁴ the film articulates the spectator to a subject position over and through the suffering body of Christ in a way that repeats not only "the greatest story ever told," but also the larger, cultural experience of feeling like an underdog in a presumably agnostic and cynical culture.²⁵ The powerful affective identification with Christ experienced by some viewers can only be achieved through a kind of repetition compulsion that articulates multiple, affective strands of experience into meaningful emotions (empathy, love, gratitude, and so forth). Or, to put it as John Cougar (Mellencamp) once sang, *The Passion* is successful only to the extent the film makes "it hurt so good" and then gives one some labels to make this good-hurting meaningful.²⁶

In film studies, the function of *jouissance* in cinema has also been fruitfully explained through a particular, psychoanalytic conception of genre that locates cinematic patterns in bodily excitations. As Claire Cisco King observes, "genres are constructed through imitative practices,"²⁷ which speaks to their compulsory character and, by extension, why seeing the same generic patterns in films over and over can be pleasurable. Arguably, the dominant approaches to film genre among cinema studies scholars ground genre in the studio system, industry development, and economically motivated standardization on the one hand, or in empirically leaning reception studies on the other.²⁸ A less popular yet seemingly resurgent psychoanalytic approach to genre in cinema studies understands the concept as referencing an imitative practice that can be helpfully complemented with recourse to Burke's conception of "form."

In his essay "The Psychology of Audience," Burke defines form as "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."²⁹ As Debra Hawhee has pointed out, Burke's thinking on form was influenced by his brief stint as a music critic and the way in which that role influenced him to think about how music acts on the body.³⁰ The understanding of "form" Burke had in mind can be easily illustrated in reference to just about any contemporary pop song, say, one by Britney Spears. In her first early hit, "Oops, I Did it Again," Spears teases the auditor by repeatedly straying from the home key or tonic as the song moves toward a climatic crescendo of high notes. Even if the hearer detests the music of Spears, the compulsory character of the melody and beat of the chorus—"Oops, I did it again/I played with your heart/Got lost in the game"—makes bodily excitation impossible to resist; even haters cannot help but tap their toes to this catchy, sadistic ditty!³¹ In this way, Burke's understanding of form depends on bodily excitation or, in the language of Lacan, an experience of *jouissance*.

Both Burke and Lacan's understanding of the bodily dimensions symbolic inducement depend on repetition; however, it would be a mistake to equate their respective views.³² They differ significantly on two, interrelated points: the character of "satisfaction" and the status of the body. In respect to the first, for Burke form hinges on a bodily experience of gratification and the "arousing and fulfillment of desires" via an anticipated sequencing of textual repetitions.³³ "This satisfaction," says Burke, "at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end these

frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction,” intensifying the experience.³⁴ Such a telic perspective on form appears indebted to some degree to Freud’s conception of a “pleasure principle,” established by a parade of “pleasant and unpleasant expectancies” as Burke later put it.³⁵

As with his appropriation of many of Freud’s ideas, however, Burke did not pursue the elaboration of form’s compulsions far enough.³⁶ Although Freud admitted that repetition “is clearly in itself a source of pleasure,” he also argued that the compulsion to repeat, nevertheless, is driven by something “beyond” pleasure, ultimately, a drive “to restore an earlier state of things”—a drive toward equilibrium or death.³⁷ Freud came to this conclusion after repeatedly observing in his clinical practice individuals who compulsively return to painful situations or destructive behaviors despite themselves (e.g., in our contemporary culture we recognize these in terms of the trauma-obsessed, practices of self-mutilation, obsessive-compulsive disorders, hoarding, and so forth). For Freud, pleasure and pain seemed to function in ways that bespoke a common structure that were not reducible to mere biology or conditioning. Freud concluded that there is no total satisfaction to the compulsion to repeat because it is a kind of structural frustration in itself; repetition compulsion is a kind of continual restatement—or, as Lacan says, “insistence”—of a limit on this entropic “urge” toward stasis.

Extending Freud’s insights, Lacan argued that the compulsion to repeat “is based on the return of *jouissance*,” which would imply that the pleasures of form—insofar as they are recognized as such—are a kind of substitution or limit on human enjoyment; pleasure is actually a frustration of, or a form of prohibition against, unbridled *jouissance*.³⁸ The Lacanian reading of Freud (which some argue is also gleaned from Alexandre Koèbe’s famed lectures on Hegel) is that the Master advanced an opposition between pleasure and enjoyment.³⁹ Our drives or compulsions are to transgress “beyond” the pleasure principle, which is “the path toward death.”⁴⁰

Consequently, Lacan argues we sacrifice enjoyment to function as subjects in a meaningful world, or alternately put, we give up unbridled affect in exchange for the signifier. Unlike Burke’s notion of form,⁴¹ then, a Lacanian understanding describes the “pleasure” of repetition as a substitute satisfaction, for to realize the motor behind repetition itself is quite painful or beyond the symbolic registers of named emotions (feeling good or feeling bad). Metaphorically speaking, the recognition of form as such (especially in terms of genres) applies brakes to the engines of enjoyment, preventing a crash. Second, in distinction from a Burkean view of form that prefigures the body as a condition of satisfaction, the Lacanian approach to repetition compulsion suggests a dialectical relation: not only do the excitations of repetition act on a body, but also they bring a body into being. Indeed, the prohibition of enjoyment inaugurated by the pleasure principle helps to outline the contours of a body-in-feeling as something meaningful in the first place.⁴²

That Fantastic Inversion: Perversion

I have rehearsed Burke’s conception of form and its difference from a Lacanian understanding of repetition because these ideas implicate bodily affect in ways that

many readers will recognize as rhetorical processes. I have also done so, however, to help us contend better with the peculiar way in which film scholars have rendered the bodily excitations of cinematic experience as fundamentally perverse. As E. L. McCallum has put it, from a psychoanalytic perspective perversion denotes a deviation, a deliberate attempt to stop “short of union, wholeness, in favor of finding satisfaction in fragments or parts,” more commonly understood in our culture as fetishes.⁴³ The elaboration of *jouissance* in filmic genre studies has tended to focus on the cinema as a fetish machine, rooted in a form of perversion that tempers enjoyment in the substitute satisfactions of voyeurism.⁴⁴ Defined simply, voyeurism refers in general to the enjoyment of looking at other people who do not know they are being looked at, either because they are pretending not to notice (as with actors) or simply because they really do not notice (as is the case with “people watching” and “peeping toms”).⁴⁵ Although it is currently socially acceptable (which was not always the case), movie-going is a fundamentally perverse practice insofar as its principal function is affective excitation without an apparent purpose other than entertainment. Much of film theory, of course, concerns how cinematic perversion is never “just entertainment.”

It should be stressed that Freud’s understanding of perversion was not disparaging; for him, all human sexual practice was perverse insofar as it deviates from its central, biological (or genetic) purpose of sexual reproduction.⁴⁶ In various ways, psychoanalytic film scholars have described film genres as the creation and satisfaction of “appetites,” but in the more peculiar sense of organizing affect in order to momentarily stabilize subjectivity or work-through various social problems in the cinematic experience; cinematic perversion, in other words, depends on its vicarious or substitutional character.⁴⁷ It should also be stressed that the way in which film scholars have approached genre as a perverse, bodily excitation is markedly different from the way in which genre has been theorized in rhetorical studies.⁴⁸ Since the 1970s, in rhetorical studies genre has been advanced as a relatively stable, textual category that references a patterned response to a particular situation.⁴⁹ This relatively flat, text-bound conception of genre understandably came under much criticism, dismissed as formulaic on the one hand or as a pointless exercise in taxonomy on the other (charges unfortunately buoyed by formulaic and taxonomic criticism).⁵⁰ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have done much to rehabilitate and reconceptualize genre by forcefully arguing that genres are not “in” texts like some sort of ghostly structure, but rather are patterned forms that reside in the popular imaginary.⁵¹ We can extend the utility of Campbell and Jamieson’s approach by conceptualizing these patterned forms as repetitive and addictive—that is, as forms of enjoyment that articulate the body to the symbolic or, as Lundberg suggests, as compulsory forms that court affective investment.

Taking cues from Lundberg’s tropological approach to *The Passion*, Burke and Lacan on form, and the psychoanalytic approach to film genres, I want to suggest that genre criticism is a powerful tool for understanding cultural expressions if we attend more assiduously to the centrality of bodily excitation or affect. One way to do this is to reconstitute the relationship between form and genre to affect and emotion

respectively. As a kind of bodily rhythm, form refers to the affective experience of the subject without meaning, an experience referenced by Lacan's conception of *jouissance*. Ultimately, form eludes (and resists) capture; one feels it, but she cannot say it. Genre emerges at the point at which the symbolic meets the body; genre, in other words, is form delivered to language, form succumbing to the insistence of languaging. This explains why critics and artists alike often bristle at discussions of genres, for the forms they attempt to name are protean and dynamic and the function of genre is to fix. As genres stabilize the forms they name, they begin to accrue symbolic value, deviating from feeling over time. This is why we can speak about them and why the emotions they connote seem to lose, gradually, a sense of potency. In this sense, genres are something like Nietzsche's coins that have lost their embossing.⁵²

The Body Genres

An affective approach to genre attends to the feelings evoked by patterned repetitions; in a cinematic context, what is important is not so much the narrative as it is the plot, or the manner in which the narrative is deployed and the vehicles of that deployment vis-à-vis the affect evoked in the spectator.⁵³ In her widely read essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Linda Williams suggests that the primary vehicle of cinematic narrative is the human body—or rather, the relationship forged between the body sitting in the theatre and the bodies on the screen. To make her case, Williams focuses on what she terms "the body genres," or the types of films that most conspicuously feature bodies in "systems of excess": horror; melodrama, and pornography. These three genres are fundamentally defined by how bodily excitations in the film stimulate the bodies in the audience: horror inspires fear; melodramas make us cry; and pornography turns us on. The affects any one of these kinds of films evoke may be quite variable, but the generic norms that have accrued over time provide meaningful coordinates for those affects, naming them into emotions: fear, sorrow, and sexual arousal.

Williams argues that body genre films tend to have the following features: (1) a strong display of emotion; (2) the spectacle of the body as an object, either monstrous or beautiful; (3) an ecstatic event, violent, orgasmic, or both; and (4) the vicarious embodiment of identity (usually in terms of a feminized body).⁵⁴ Body genre films are also culturally devalued because of the widespread "perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen."⁵⁵ For example, pornography is critiqued for a kind of mimesis trouble, because of the lack of a kind of critical distance between bodies real and celluloid: pornography invites the spectator to masturbate—at the very least, to consider it—a physical activity wholly contrary to the appropriate norms of theatre-going behavior. Given the inevitable mismatch between the body-in-feeling (affect/form) and the way in which we make this meaningful (emotion/genre), genre criticism attuned to affect is particularly useful for making sense of films that seem incoherent or strange. Genre-busting films may, in fact, be quite coherent at the

formal level of the repetition of bodily excitation. Arguably, one could say that genre criticism in general is only critically useful or interesting when examining an object or “text” that does not faithfully subscribe to generic norms; productive genre criticism examines the unusual case or odd match, not the film, song, or speech that predictably plods along a well-worn sequencing. For this reason, *The Passion* is an ideal object for genre criticism because it is an exemplary hybrid “body genre” film that, curiously, invites a host of complex and seemingly contradictory affects. The film features monstrous bodies (Satan and Jesus)⁵⁶ and horrifying ecstasies (torture and gore); the film has many tear-jerking moments catalyzed by melodramatic flashback sequences (e.g., through the remembrances of Mary); and then there’s . . . well, there’s the charge that the film is pornographic, which would seem to require the sexual arousal of the spectator. Therein is the body trouble.

It is relatively easy to understand why *The Passion* inspires feelings of fear, horror, and sorrow, combining the horror film and the melodrama. For example, *The Passion* exhibits a number of melodramatic conventions, such as in the first flashback approximately twenty minutes into the film.⁵⁷ Shortly after the Jews apprehend Jesus, the spectator is shown a scene in which Jesus interacts with Mary as he is making a table; in keeping with the familial norms of melodrama, the relationship between Jesus and his mother is emphasized from Mary’s perspective. The film also exhibits the principal contrivance of horror, that which Clarie Sisco King dubs the “abject body” and Linda Williams the “monstrous body,” the excesses of which are signified by ecstatic violence and blood.⁵⁸ Interestingly, King also notes a horror convention that emerged in the 1970s that is exemplified by *The Passion* almost perfectly:

Hollywood in the 1970s was an industry fixated on death and destruction . . . while there is variety among the particular evils faced in [70s horror films]. . . they all share an overt fascination with ritualized practices, ranging from séances to exorcisms to Catholic masses. What also unites many of the supernaturally-oriented horror films of the 1970s is a sacrificial narrative, in which a biologically male character becomes a hero by first becoming a victim—ritually offering up his own life in order to save others, not unlike a Christ figure.⁵⁹

Over the course of the film, Christ’s body does indeed become both monstrous and sacrificial as it is beaten to a bloody pulp. But, understanding *The Passion* as both melodrama and horror is relatively straightforward, if not obvious. The more baffling question remains: why do commentators suggest the film provokes sexual arousal? Whence the label “porn?”

Trying to understand *The Passion* as a pornographic film suggests a fairly straightforward procedure of comparison, working backwards in a sense, from generic norms to the affective response of the spectator. As Dennis Giles puts it, “as the physician reads the text of the body to discover the hidden disease, as the shaman reads the entrails of beasts to discern the traces of the fugitive gods, so the film analyst must read the film on the screen as a symptomatic text—as the disguise of an Other film.”⁶⁰ To discern the “Other film” of *The Passion* we must ask, first, “what are the norms of porn?” And then, “how does *The Passion* exemplify these norms?”

The Norms of Porn

As we have come to know it today, the pornographic feature film is a relatively recent invention that is usually identified as beginning in the 1970s.⁶¹ The precursors to feature-length pornographic movies were stag films, which were short, black and white movies only minutes in length, initially without sound, showing women undressing or couples having sex. As far as the generic pattern for stag, well, there wasn't much of one. Stag films were relatively simple and designed to arouse the viewer with the spectacle of nudity and sex; the bodily excitations these films evoked were achieved by the seeming lack of any mimetic misdirection: see naked bodies, get turned on.

The ante was upped, so to speak, by a simple innovation: the meat shot.⁶² The meat shot was a brief image depicting an erect penis penetrating a vagina. Early innovators in pornography used this shot as a feature of authenticity—evidence that a couple was really having sex (this shot later could also include the licking of the labia—especially in stag featuring lesbians). The name of this innovation, however, also points to the principle kind of identification encouraged by pornography, often described as “the male gaze.”⁶³ As Giles notes:

Since [traditional] pornographic film is made *for* the male spectator, we must consider his relationship to the male and female parties on the screen. If the film is a fantasy which the spectator accepts as if it were his own creation, he is also a protagonist in the drama . . . the spectator inserts himself into the pornographic fantasy by identifying himself with *both* the male and female characters.⁶⁴

Many early feminist critiques of pornography suggest that the subject of the film is the male spectator, and the object is the female body,⁶⁵ signified by the gratuitous gesture of the meat shot: the penis bearer is me, the spectator, and I am thus vicariously having sex with this lady through him. Giles continues by arguing, however, there is also an unconscious and more “primary identification” with the woman, thereby enjoying “both active and passive roles,” or, “to put it crudely, he is both ‘fucker’ and ‘fucked.’”⁶⁶ Such an observation is consistent with Slavoj Žižek’s claim that the moment of *jouissance* affected by pornography occurs when the passive lover or “bottom” (these days, male, female, or anything other or in between) breaks the so-called fourth wall by staring directly into the camera, objectifying the spectator.⁶⁷ In this way, the meat shot references a kind of cinematic shuttlecock effecting a complicated double-identification, usually unconscious, with both members of a sexual coupling. The seeming absence of mimetic misdirection and the double-identification with bodies in ecstasy do not, of course, comprise the key signature of pornography as we know it today. That dubious honor goes to the “money shot,” or more popularly, the “cum shot.”⁶⁸ Linda Williams argues that pornography did not become an established genre until the early 1970s, and we have one film to thank for this settled status: *Deep Throat*, which premiered in 1972. The film’s thin story concerns a woman who learns that her clitoris is, by some strange evolutionary perversion, located in her throat; performing fellatio is thereby the only way she can experience sexual pleasure.

Although *Deep Throat* was not the only feature-length pornographic film of its time, it was the most famous because of the way in which the film inspired a pornographic revolution of production standards: first, as Williams notes, *Deep Throat* was in glorious Eastman color! The low-budget black-and-white stag movie was over. Second, it had a story!⁶⁹ True, it didn't have much of one, but narrative was something lacking in stag films at the time. Finally and most significantly, *Deep Throat* helped to popularize a new plot device and filmic form of periodization:

For the first time in the history of the American cinema, a penis central to the action of a story appeared “in action” on the big screen of a legitimate theatre [The New Mature World Theatre in Times Square, where it debuted] . . . Thus with the money shot we appear to arrive at what the cinematic will-to-knowledge had relentlessly pursued ever since photographer Eadweard Muybridge first threw the image of naked moving bodies on the screen of his lecture hall and ever since Thomas Edison ordered his technicians to photograph a sneeze: the visual evidence of the mechanical “truth” of bodily pleasure caught in involuntary spasm; the ultimate and uncontrollable—ultimate *because* uncontrollable—confession of sexual pleasure in the climax of orgasm.⁷⁰

By “money shot,” Williams refers to the conventional industry term for the most expensive or costly shot to produce in a film. The term could refer to, for example, expensive explosions in action films, such as when whole buildings are collapsed or when there is a car crash. Among workers in the porn industry, the money shot was a quaint euphemism for the cum shot, the moment in a porno when the male “pulls out” of his partner and ejaculates semen. Almost always, this ejaculate is deposited on someone's body. In American pornography in the 1980s, this was frequently on the face of a woman, who often proclaimed something patently ridiculous like, “I want you to come on my face.”

The signifying import of the cum shot is multiple. For Giles, the cum shot is a spectacular substitute for a truth that remains forever hidden from view, the failure of transcendence or the inability to know the “Other place” of the feminine:

. . . the most erotic, the most valued space in the pornographic film is invisible. The woman desires that the outside come inside and the camera records the penetration. But the camera can never pass within the body to see what happens there. The woman sighs and exclaims her pleasure but the knowledge of feeling is not full knowledge according to our philosophical and cinematic traditions. The feminine interior remains a mystery . . . Since what lies beyond the mouth of the hole must remain unknown, the participants demand visible evidence that something has really happened inside.⁷¹

For Giles, the generic convention of the cum shot represents the impossibility of truly expressing the affect of sexual arousal; it is a displacement or substitute of the mystery of *jouissance* itself, quite literally an emblem of sacrifice. As a visual token of male orgasm, the cum shot means it's over—in the mundane sense of the end of pleasure and, for Giles, in an existential sense too. Williams is careful to note that the cum shot also represents a peculiar filming decision: that those who experience pleasure on screen would want you to see it, a subtle form of sadism. Now, as (almost) anyone

who has a penis or clitoris probably knows, exchanging tactile pleasure for visual pleasure is not as much fun; it is much more pleasurable to continue bodily contact until one has an orgasm or until an orgasm is over (unless, of course, the pain of soreness makes itself too meaningful). In the formative years of pornography, however, men would typically give up a bit of tactile pleasure to “pull out” and expend ejaculate—a sacrifice for the spectacle and, unquestionably, a limit to *jouissance* (a little cinematic self-restraint).⁷² “The money shot is thus an obvious perversion—in the literal sense of the term,” continues Williams, “as a swerving away from more ‘direct’ forms of genital engagement—of the tactile sexual connection.”⁷³ Of course, Williams points out it’s even worse for the bottom, who must pretend—often moaning—that he or she is deriving great pleasure from having this stuff on his or her face. If the cum shot is after a “doggy style” coupling, the bottom doesn’t even get to see the money, only feeling warm-cum-chill in the small of his or her back.

Aside from its rhetorical labor (authenticity, compensation, substitution/sacrifice), as the cum shot became more ubiquitous and standard in pornography, it also started to structure the plot, or again, the way the narrative unfolds in time: the cum shot became a technique of temporal periodization, effecting the rhythm of the pornographic feature film. Sex scenes begin with kissing and foreplay and end with the cum shot. In this way, unlike traditional narrative cinema in which a plot builds to a climax over the course of a film, pornographic films became a series of climaxes in which the story—if there is one—is moved along by the scenic stops of the cum shot. In other words, the cum shot is not merely a spectacle, but a pacing device that registers at the level of form, at the level of repetition compulsion. The cum shot is not simply a gesture of authenticity and substitution but also a filmic technique that disciplines the spectator’s body into a kind of temporal rhythm: cum shot; end scene; dramatic turn; cum shot; end scene, dramatic turn; rinse, repeat.

Pornography has, of course, changed significantly since scholars first engaged the genre; gay and lesbian porn films, for example, have unsettled many of the heteronormative conventions that inaugurated the genre. The advent of the Internet, “do it yourself” or DIY pornography sites like Xtube.com, and other innovations have further revolutionized the norms of porn since the feature-length became coherent in the 1970s. Owing to the dynamism of the formal repetitions that give rise to generic norms, there is simply no way to stabilize human affective response; by definition, genres cannot keep pace. What I have tried to do, however, is locate three norms that nevertheless still seem to obtain in pornography regardless of orientation, gender, or medium (norms that will inevitably produce their exceptions, too): the lack of mimetic interference with naked bodies, the double-identifications of sexual virtuality, and the rhetoric of the cum shot. Collectively, these norms suggest that watching pornography (especially in a theatre) entails a curious set of sacrifices. Although the sight of naked bodies excites the spectator directly and seemingly without mediation, the spectator cannot really have those bodies to him- or herself; the realization of the affect cued by the lack of mediation is impossible. The seeming lack of mimetic interference, in other words, is nevertheless a profoundly deceptive

kind of interference; pornography is watched because one does not want or cannot have “the real thing.”⁷⁴ And although the spectator identifies with both the penetrator and the penetrated (and primarily the latter), s/he cannot have direct access to the mystery of the lover. In porn, the promise of transcendence is thwarted, and the carnal knowledge of the Other remains off limits (the camera can’t go “in,” and more existentially, you really can’t go back, either). Finally and consequently, the cum shot is a substitution, the representative of a sacrifice of tactile pleasure, and in some sense an admission that the spectacle is “all we have.” Traditionally conceived, the pornographic feature-film is sacrifice and substitution all the way down.

From a generic standpoint, the paradox of pornography is simply that it is not what popular culture supposes it to be. Understood from the vantage of its feature-length coherence in the 1970s, pornography is fundamentally a form of substitution—the “next best thing,” or worse, the realization that the real thing, sexual intercourse, never follows through on its overloaded, cultural promise of total fulfillment.⁷⁵ We truly do not become “one” with our sexual partners during intercourse, and pornography stages this truth and allows us to confront it indirectly. As Lacan put it, “there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship.”⁷⁶ Indeed, we could say that the cum shot is the condensation symbol of an impossible, transcendent sexual/spiritual unification. In this sense, pornography as such—or even that it exists at all—is a screened screen or sort of blind for the fact that human sexual desire is perverse (“fantasy” understood in the psychoanalytic sense).⁷⁷ At the affective level of bodily excitation, pornography concerns the formal arousal of appetites as well as a fundamental failure to satisfy them.⁷⁸ In this respect, insofar as it is a feature-length narrative, *The Passion* is pornographic only insofar as it features a series of cum shots and stages a spectacular ecstasy of renunciation, a strange melding of the sacrifice of the male hero that King argues is typical of 1970s horror films and 1970s porn. *The Passion* does so, of course, through the sacrificial figure of Jesus and the catholic or liberal meaning of the term “passion” itself.

The First Coming

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

—Malachi 2:3 (KJV)

To say that *The Passion* has cum shots is an understatement. Insofar as ejaculating on the body of another is a kind of violence, *The Passion* changes out the semen for blood. Although it is tempting to locate a homology in the viscosity of semen and blood, we should be careful to specify the cinematic function of the cum shot: (1) it is a substitute of an interior truth hidden from view; (2) it represents a sacrifice of enjoyment for sake of spectacle; and (3) it periodizes the unfolding narrative. Ultimately, as an expenditure the cum shot signifies *jouissance* or affect (seemingly) beyond the capacity of language to represent it—passion or ecstasy or suffering.

Although, owing to his purpose, he does not dwell on the point, Lundberg locates the first cum shot in the extended torture scene:

If one detects an element of pornography in this unparalleled and graphic spectacle of violence, the ninth blow can only be termed the “money shot”—a penetration shot staged with vivid and exacting detail. . . . Fragments of flesh and blood splatter the crowd and the faces of the guards. . . .⁷⁹

Admittedly, there is much to say here about how Gibson queers the gendering of “active” and “passive” in the film’s cum shot scenes (is Jesus the passive feminine? Is he a macho masochist? Is the spectator male?). But, bracketing the complex figuration of the gender of the gaze for the larger point,⁸⁰ we can note that the splattering of blood into folks’ faces signifies that Jesus’ suffering is authentic. Whereas, in traditional pornography, the feminized object harbors an inner mystery—an Other place—that cannot be known, in *The Passion* a gorgeous but bloodied Jesus harbors divine knowledge and the promise of transcendence, the ultimate Other place of almighty God the Father; the suffering signified by his blood and penetrated flesh are the closest one can get to the mysteries of divinity. In this respect, understanding the redemptive blood of Christ as a cum shot demonstrates how the theological doctrine of “substitutional atonement” concerns a transaction of sexual authenticity.⁸¹

But what about periodization? Throughout the film, violent bloodlettings either signify the end of a scene or are used as a frustration device to prolong mixed affects. In the inaugural torture scene, the cum shot initiates a swell of melodramatic music that is a well-established cinematic code for climax and a scenic end; however, that expectation is deliberately frustrated when the beating continues for some minutes. Other scenes are similarly structured; the cum shot—or blood shots—elongates the sense of time for the spectator because it does not signal ultimate release, only a growing sense of dread and agony that is finally resolved by the most spectacular cum shot at the film’s end: the crucifixion scene.

As the penultimate scene of *The Passion*, the crucifixion is clearly placed and overdetermined as the film’s climax at the level of affect, plot, and narrative. The scene can be divided into three descriptive sections: the torture, the death, and the cum shot.

After the torture (which is predictably gruesome), the death section begins with a close-up of Christ’s completely bloodied face. The camera cuts to a shot of Mary Magdalene on her knees, wailing in sorrow. The camera then cuts to a Roman soldier, visibly moved by the Magdalene’s cries, and then a shot of Mary, comforted by John the apostle. The spectator is then shown Christ’s face, which slumps back as a final breath exits his mouth. An extreme close-up of Jesus’ open and blank eyes are shown; the left eyelid is, disturbingly, half-closed.⁸² The camera slowly zooms out until one is given a medium-shot of the Christ; his head drops downward toward his chest, signifying his final death.

The next shot introduces a rather conspicuous special effect: there is a silent, aerial shot of Mount Sinai, which then blurs until the spectator realizes it is a raindrop, which then tumbles toward the same landscape below. When the drop hits the ground, the soundtrack returns with the sound of violent winds; the ground quakes. A full-blown earthquake then commences, and a Jewish temple is torn asunder. Pilate’s palace begins to crumble as well. When the camera returns the spectator to

the crucifixion scene, Roman soldiers commence breaking the legs of the two men crucified alongside Jesus with sledgehammers and clubs to hasten their deaths. The legendary (and apocryphal) Roman soldier Cassius is commanded to do the same to Jesus, whereupon he reports that Jesus is already dead. Cassius is then thrown a spear and instructed to harpoon Christ to verify his death.

What happens next is truly spectacular. Cassius sticks it to Jesus and a copious amount of blood sprays into his face (see Figure 1); the camera zooms out to reveal Mary standing at attention with her eyes wide open, held by a squinting apostle, as they both are showered in blood (see Figure 2). As Cassius wipes blood from his eyes, he groans and then, astonishingly, falls to his knees in reverence as he succumbs to the seemingly endless rain of spurting blood (the legend of Cassius is that he accepted Christ as divine and repented after he speared him; see Figure 3). The scene ends with a long-shot tableau featuring Christ and the two thieves drooping and dead on their crosses, Cassius on his knees still in reverence, Mary and John standing and holding one another, the Magdalene huddled in grief on the ground behind them, and six Roman soldiers scattered about looking confused. The film cuts to reveal the Jewish temple in ruins; Satan screaming in a desolate landscape; Mary holding her dead and bloodied son; and then finally concludes with an image of a clean, well-groomed, and conspicuously nude Jesus exiting his tomb.

Once it is pointed out as such, the final cum shot in *The Passion* is not in need of analysis; it is obvious that the affective rhythms established by pornography are behind the plot of the film's well-known narrative, whether or not the filmmakers were conscious of this astonishing "mash-up" of generic conventions. The point here is not as juvenile as it may appear upon first reading: it's not simply that Christ is coming on his family, friends, and enemies; rather, it's the fact that *Christ himself is the cum shot*. He is ejaculation incarnate, the gesture made flesh, God's spent load. There is no possibility of direct transcendence—there is no sexual relationship—so

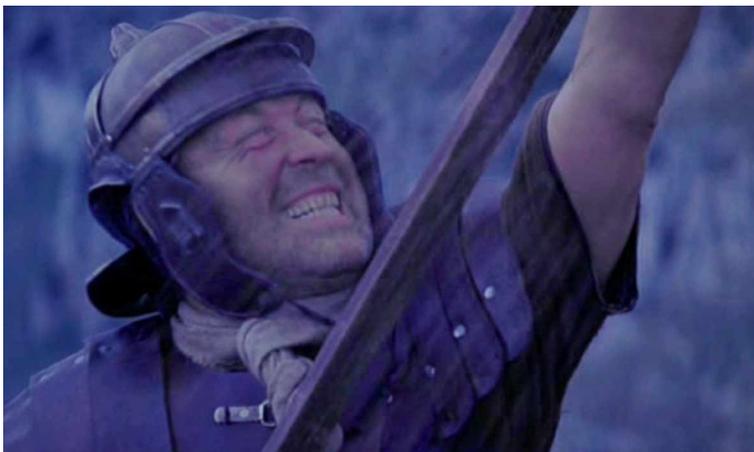


Figure 1. Cassius spears the Christ and his face is sprayed with blood. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (Icon Productions, 2004).



Figure 2. Mary stands with John as they are sprayed with blood while Cassius gorges Christ (Icon Productions, 2004).

Deity sent a substitute with his “son,” the death of whom signified no simple orgasm—*le petite morte*—but rather “the big one,” *le grand!* Insofar as the sanctum sanctorum, the Other place, of the pornographic sexual object is forever off limits, and insofar as the cum shot ultimately signifies a perversion of sexual satisfaction for the sake of spectacle, Christ’s torture, death, and final bloodletting comprise the ultimate sacrificial extravaganza, a climatic circus of substitutional atonement whereby the impossible promise of transcendence—sexual and spiritual—is bypassed for the “next best thing,” ritual sacrifice. In this way, the norms of horror and melodrama converge with the norms of porn, not at the level of the narrative (although the story does feature elements of all three), but in the feeling of the temporality of the plot, in the affective substratum similarly provided by all body



Figure 3. Cassius falls to his knees in reverence as he is sprayed with blood. (Icon Productions, 2004)

genre films. By the end of the movie, *The Passion of the Christ* ultimately comes to signify the sorrowful feeling one sometimes experiences after sexual intercourse, aptly summarized by Christ's final words, "it is finished."⁸³

Concluding Remarks: On the Alchemical Perversity of Genre

Tell me who doesn't love/What can never come back?
 You can never forget how it used to feel/The illusion is deep
 . . . I am paralyzed by the blood of Christ/Though it clouds my eyes
 I can never stop/Never stop⁸⁴

—The Cure "The Blood."

Many of us who have grown up in church have often wondered what Mary looked like under her blue dress, or perhaps marveled at how attractive Jesus appears with his six-pack abs hanging, scantily clad, on the cross. At an early age, many young people realize there is some sort of relationship between spirituality and sexuality. We also learn, however, that trying to think through this relationship is taboo, and that even mentioning it at all in polite company risks punishment and the charge of blasphemy. I suspect many commentators and critics who have been quick to proclaim *The Passion* as pornographic elect to forgo an explanation because it requires a potentially embarrassing interrogation of one's feelings on the one hand, and risks the charge that one is a blasphemer or unprofessional on the other (e.g., for newspaper audiences, too much frank discussion might risk alienating subscribers). Explaining why *The Passion* is pornographic requires a resolute, if not uncomfortable, irreverence: Gibson's Jesus is not simply repulsive, he's also quite hot.

In this essay, I have argued that we can understand the "Other film" of *The Passion* as pornography with recourse to genre theory and criticism, but only when we understand genres as concerning the delivery of the body-in-feeling to language. Prima facie, *The Passion* is a melodrama or "weepie," but at the level of form, at the level of the feelings the film excites, it is fundamentally and undeniably horrific and erotic as well. *The Passion* evokes affects understood on this side of language as revulsion, fear, and sexual arousal, but by the film's end, after the spectator is permitted his or her limited enjoyment via substitution, the narrative of Christ's torture and death is articulated to the more socially appropriate emotions of sorrow and gratitude, which are in turn embedded in the Christian fantasy of salvation. Understanding how the film does this is only possible when we think about the rhetorical labor of genre as the fixing of an otherwise elusive feeling evoked by formal repetitions.

Thinking about genres as the representational counterpart to bodily affect at the level of form means that genre criticism is simultaneously as unstable as it is useful. The three norms of porn I identified to help analyze Gibson's film are norms most easily recognized in the pornographic films of the 1970s and 1980s, when the industry still aspired to artistry and classical narratives. Postmodern innovations in the technology of pornography—beginning with the rather radical innovation of the home videotape and residing currently in the atomized "streams" of amateur web-

cam masturbators on the Internet—have reconfigured the norms of porn in ways that demand revisions of the generic codes.⁸⁵ That generic norms change over time, however, simply reflects the versatility or inscrutability of bodily affect before it becomes meaningful or fixed in/by speech. If generic norms were not in need of constant revision, it would say something quite frightening about the human condition, that we are automatons or are purely instinctual beings for whom contingency is an illusion. In short, like human sexuality itself, genres are perverse.

Genres necessarily distort the affective repetitions or formal excitations that they help us to name; by delivering affect over to the signifier, genres change the character of that affect into emotion and thereby “swerve” from the body-in-feeling toward representation. This does not mean, therefore, that genres should be abandoned—as if they could, as if we could abandon our yearning for meaning! Rather, it simply means that pattern recognition in language is the best we have to capture the dynamism of affect. Genres provide a metaphorical foothold, stabilizing feeling into meaning for the purposes of thought, reflection, and often prediction. Still, because genres are perverse they are also necessarily provisional.

Thinking about the protean character of the affect betokened by form and the uneasy fixing of form that is generic norming, I come to an end with what is, I think, a rememberable condensation symbol for the conception of genre: Leah Piepgras’ conceptual art piece, *Pearl Necklace*. Piepgras is a multi-medium artist who claims to “[blur] design, life, and art.”⁸⁶ *Pearl Necklace* is her most popular piece to date, which she sells copies of for \$420 on her self-titled website. She describes this mass-produced art as a “seemingly amorphous cast silver shape on a chain that is actually an accurate representation of semen.”⁸⁷

In correspondence with the artist, I asked if *Pearl Necklace* was intended as a feminist critique of the cum shot (“pearl necklace” is slang for a man ejaculating on a person’s upper-body). To my surprise, Piepgras explained that her art was intended as something even more radical, unsettling my own generic expectations:



Figure 4. “Girl with a Pearl Necklace,” by Leah Piepgras. Image used by permission of the artist (©Leah Piepgras).

I see the necklace as having several cultural reads competing simultaneously and want the piece to morph back and forth between beautiful object, an artifact from an intensely personal and intimate moment, [and] a pornographic money shot. For me it is a cultural signifier (like a wedding ring) that shows mutual possession. It is a choice to wear it and to mark your-self in that way, to completely give your self over. I am not sorry that as a woman I choose to enjoy my body and have intense shared experiences. For me making an object is an act of empowerment. It is a choice to bring fleeting into being. This piece is my “Big Bang” on a cosmic level.⁸⁸

What began as a cinematic innovation to “authenticate” the sexual pleasure of a couple in a pornographic film, what presumably started as a gesture that signifies identification and the sacrifice of tactile pleasure for spectacle in pornography, has now become a floating signifier. For Piepgras, *Pearl Necklace* is the solidification of the “amorphous” character of sexual enjoyment into a solid emblem of prideful propriety—in a sense, a logic homologous to the perverse labor of genre. Piepgras has delivered something versatile into hard metal, a kind of alchemical substitution. Regardless of the artist’s intent, we can see how Piepgras’ alchemy of turning a protean material into silver also betokens the way in which generic norms are mobile and subject to reconfiguration; if this were not so, if by their fixing labor genres did not also deterritorialize the formal repetitions they name, a hybrid film like Gibson’s *The Passion* would not be possible. Nor would the resignification of the cum shot as a plastic art.

As a form of bodily excitation, there is some evidence (mostly anecdotal) that the cum shot has become a visual pleasure in itself,⁸⁹ no longer a component of pornographic plots but a part of an everyday, bedroom repertoire of pleasure for average folks.⁹⁰ This is to say, the perverse spectacle of the cum shot may now rival the pleasures of tactility in ways pioneering scholars of porn could not have predicted. We can also recognize the function of the cum shot as temporal device in other film genres as well: a number of media scholars have argued the music video pioneered by MTV in the 1980s was indebted to the norms of porn; and arguably, the cum shot is now the central plot device of action films, which utilize periodic explosions to advance the narrative until the final, ultimate explosion at film’s end.⁹¹ And with *Pearl Necklace*, we see that the cum shot has become jewelry to be worn, like a “wedding ring,” a signifier of that “Other place” in someone’s so-called private life to be worn in public.

If anything, the perversity of genre and its logics of substitution explain how and even why the cum shot has traveled so far from its cinematic origins; it is a filmic gimmick and generic norm that has become a kind of abject body itself, a kind of semiotic semen, a dissemination and an agency of its own.

Notes

- [1] David Shepherd, “From Gospel to Gibson: An Interview with the Writers Behind Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*,” *Religion and the Arts* 9 (2005): 325.
- [2] Leon Wieseltier, “The Worship of Blood,” *The New Republic*, March 8, 2004, 19.

- [3] Because no studio or production house would entertain Gibson's script, he financed *The Passion* through his production company, Icon Productions, for a modest \$25 million. Jon Meacham, "Who Really Killed Jesus?" in *On The Passion of the Christ: Exploring Issues Raised by the Controversial Movie*, ed. Paula Fredriksen (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 4.
- [4] Roger Ebert, "The Passion of the Christ," rogerebert.com *Movie Reviews*, February 24, 2004, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040224/REVIEWS/402240301/1023>.
- [5] William J. Brown, John D. Keeler, and Terrence R. Lindvall, "Audience Responses to *The Passion of the Christ*," *Journal of Media and Religion* 6 (2007): 87–107.
- [6] Brown, Keeler, and Lindvall, "Audience Responses," 87.
- [7] Here I draw on the Thomas Schatz's distinction between "film genre" and the "genre film." The former is a general term that denotes a kind or type of film. The latter refers to films that are "self-conscious" about their aesthetic kind (e.g., film noir) and conventions. "Jesus film" became a genre film in the twentieth century. See Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981), 16.
- [8] Shepherd, "From Gospel," 328.
- [9] Shepherd, "From Gospel," 328.
- [10] Clodagh M. Weldon, "The Passion Re-Cut: If 'It is as it Was,' Why the Redaction?" *Journal of Religion and Film* 10 (2006), http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol10No2/Weldon_PassionRecut.htm. Also see Anna Catherine Emmeric, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, ed. Brentano, Klement Maria (El Sobrante, CA: North Bay Books, 2004), 135–36.
- [11] Widely criticized for the relentlessness of its violence, Gibson resorted to shaving off approximately six minutes from the film's goriest scenes (e.g., the cat o' nine tails flesh ripping) for the film's theatrical rerelease as *The Passion Re-Cut* in 2005. Anthony Breznican, "The Passion Recut' Goes Easier on the Gore," *USA Today*, March 10, 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2005-03-10-passion-main_x.htm.
- [12] Ray Richmond, "'Passion'—Pornography for the Whole Family?" *Today Movies*, March 2, 2004, <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/4428753>.
- [13] Linda Williams would describe both genres as sharing a similar "system of excess." See Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44 (1991): 2–13.
- [14] Perry Farrell, David Navarro, Eric A., and Stephen Perkins, "Ted, Just Admit It." *Nothing's Shocking*. Performed by Jane's Addiction. 1988. Warner Bros. Compact disc.
- [15] David Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn," *New York*, January 28, 2006, <http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/>.
- [16] Edelstein, "Now Playing."
- [17] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18.
- [18] Dean Lockwood, "All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of 'Torture Porn,'" *Popular Communication* 7 (2009): 43.
- [19] This is not to say this view has not been challenged; indeed, the view is often the foil for film studies since the inception of the gaze as a concept. See Linda Williams, ed., *Porn Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- [20] Because the rhetorical dimensions of film are multiple, I prefer to characterize them collectively as a kind of cultural labor or work. In other words, I understand the persuasive effect of cinema in terms of the ways in which it stages and "works through" a culture's many social problems.
- [21] Christian Lundberg, "Enjoying God's Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 390.
- [22] Lundberg, "Enjoying," 395.
- [23] Lundberg, "Enjoying," 401.

- [24] I qualify affect as “seemingly” ineffable to ward against the suggestion that the experience of body-in-feeling denoted by affect is immune to or beyond theorization. Although affect can and often does exceed signification, that it can be caused, catalyzed, and modified through signification means that affect is not beyond the reach of meaning or understanding. The theorization of genre advanced here strives toward such an understanding.
- [25] Lundberg, “Enjoying,” 407.
- [26] John Mellencamp, “Hurts so Good.” *American Fool*. Performed by John Cougar. 1982. Riva. Compact disc.
- [27] Claire Sisco King, “Acting Out and Sounding Off: Sacrifice and Performativity in *Alice, Sweet Alice*,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27 (2007): 125.
- [28] See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader III* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities, 1981).
- [29] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 31.
- [30] Debra Hawhee, *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), esp. 22–29; 72.
- [31] Max Martin and Rami, “Oops! . . . I Did It Again.” *Oops! . . . I Did It Again*. Performed by Britney Spears. 2000. Jive. Compact disc.
- [32] For detailed analyses of Burke’s theory of form, see Richard B. Gregg, “Kenneth Burke’s Prolegomena to the Study of the Rhetoric of Form.” *Communication Quarterly* 26 (1978): 3–13; and Robert L. Heath, “Kenneth Burke on Form.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 392–404.
- [33] Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 124.
- [34] Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 31.
- [35] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 21.
- [36] For an example, see Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 18–36.
- [37] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 42–43.
- [38] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 46.
- [39] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- [40] Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 18.
- [41] Space limits any discussion here, but I am suggesting that Burke’s analysis of form is lodged at the level of desire when, in fact, form concerns *jouissance*. The conceptual alignment I’m hinting at here is that form is to *jouissance* as genre is to desire.
- [42] Alternately put, this is the demand of the law of castration in the creation of a desiring body: “Castration means that *jouissance* has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire.” See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 700.
- [43] E. L. McCallum, “Contamination’s Germinations,” In *Sic 4: Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 187.
- [44] See Christian Metz, “Story/Discourse: Notes on Two Kinds of Voyeurism,” In *Movies and Methods, Volume II: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 543–49; Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure”; and Williams, “Film Bodies,” 6.

- [45] See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 67–78; Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure”; and Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 181–86.
- [46] Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 165–202.
- [47] In this respect, Lundberg’s analysis of *The Passion* is demonstrative of a complicated melding of a rhetorical (via tropology) and cinema studies (via affect) approach to filmic enjoyment: *The Passion* is popular because it emboldens a righteous sense of self.
- [48] One notable exception here is Barry Brummett’s “homology hypothesis,” which draws on Burke’s theory of form to discern structural parallels between different expressive modalities; the move I am making with genre is similar, however, I would centralize the body-in-feeling. See Barry Brummett, “The Homology Hypothesis: Pornography on the VCR,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5 (1988): 202–16; and Barry Brummett, *Rhetorical Homologies: Form, Culture, Experience* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).
- [49] See Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 4th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2009), 137–40. Also see Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 133; and Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 13.
- [50] See William L. Benoit, “Beyond Genre Theory: A Genesis of Rhetorical Action,” *Communication Monographs* 67 (2000): 178–92; Thomas Conley, “The Linnaean Blues: Thoughts on the Genre Approach,” in *Form, Genre and the Study of Popular Discourse*, ed. Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 59–78; and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 105.
- [51] See Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, ed., *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1978). Also see Carolyn R. Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151–67.
- [52] Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1990). Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, ed. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1990), 891. For an alternative take on an approach to genre keyed specifically to music and the adjective, see Joshua Gunn, “Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre,” *Popular Music and Society* 23 (1999): 31–50.
- [53] David Bordwell, “Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 17–34.
- [54] Williams, “Film Bodies,” 9.
- [55] Williams, “Film Bodies,” 4.
- [56] For more on the monstrosity of the body of Christ, see Edward Ingebretsen, *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 177–200.
- [57] For more on the centrality of flashbacks to melodrama, see Pam Cook, ed., *The Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 80.
- [58] Claire Sisco King, “It Cuts Both Ways: *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and Abject Hegemony,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 367; Williams, “Film Bodies,” 9.
- [59] Clarie Sisco King, “Acting Out,” 124–25.
- [60] Dennis Giles, “Pornographic Space,” in *Film: Historical-Theoretical Speculations: The 1977 Film Studies Annual: Part Two*, ed. Laura Cehanowicz (Pleasantville, NY: Redgrave, 1977), 53.
- [61] For standard reference material on pornography in the United States, including the complicated history of its legislation, see Joseph W. Slade, *Pornography in America:*

- A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000) and Joseph W. Slade, *Pornography and Sexual Representation: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).
- [62] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* Expanded Edition (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999), 79–80.
- [63] See Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*.
- [64] Giles, "Pornographic Space," 55–56.
- [65] In addition to Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," see Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Diana E. H. Russell, "Pornography and Rape: A Causal Model," *Political Psychology* 9 (1988): 41–73.
- [66] Giles, "Pornographic Space," 57.
- [67] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 107–22.
- [68] Although film scholars frequently identify the cum shot as an innovation that appeared in the 1970s, men ejaculating on film can be seen in even the earliest of pornographic films in the 1910s (my thanks to Janet Staiger for double-checking this fact by referencing her personal film archive). The argument here is that pornography's place as a distinct genre was secured by the centrality and ubiquity of the cum shot from the 1970s forward.
- [69] Williams, *Hard Core*, 99.
- [70] Williams, *Hard Core*, 100–1.
- [71] Giles, *Pornographic Space*, 58–59.
- [72] The problem of the sacrifice of pleasure represented by the spectacle of the cum shot has been most recently challenged by the innovation of the "cream pie": the male ejaculates in the hole, and then the recipient "pushes" the ejaculate out of the vagina or anus, which is usually filmed with a "close-up."
- [73] Williams, *Hard Core*, 101.
- [74] Of course, one could argue that the spectacle of porn has evolved such that not having the "real thing" is the thing.
- [75] See Joshua Gunn, "For the Love of Rhetoric, with Continual Reference to Kenny and Dolly," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 131–55.
- [76] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 12. My essay, "For the Love of Rhetoric," attempts to explain this Lacanian insight as productive of rhetoric and the source of invention.
- [77] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), esp. 3–44.
- [78] For readers more familiar with queer scholarship on pornography, I recognize I'm trying to walk a very careful line here; there is ample evidence to suggest that the spectacle of pornographic sacrifice has become, or perhaps may have always been, part of a human, sexual repertoire for decades; that is to say, for some individuals, the visibility of sexual intercourse may be just as important or pleasurable as the tactility. I take up this concern in the conclusion.
- [79] Lundberg, "Enjoying," 395.
- [80] An analysis of the gendered gaze in *The Passion* merits its own, essay-length study. One would have to begin with Giles' insistence that there is a double-identification with both the torturers and with Jesus, and that the dynamic is thoroughly queer. Insofar as Gibson deliberately set-out to "butch up" Jesus, the power-play of gender is that Christ resists his "feminization" through torture, such that the torturers always become the feminized bodies in the final instance. Even so, Christ represents the temple into which we cannot go and about which we must take his "word."
- [81] For more on the doctrine, see Don McLellan, "Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Essential Elements in Atonement Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2005): 4–15.

- [82] For an excellent use of Lacan's conception of the gaze for a compelling reading of the lazy eyelid, see Lundberg, "Enjoying," 397–98.
- [83] And this is to say nothing of that three-day refractory period before the resurrection or the second coming.
- [84] The Cure, "The Blood." *The Head on the Door*. Performed by The Cure. 1985. Fiction/Elektra. Compact Disc.
- [85] Such innovations led Williams to revise her original, classic account in *Hard Core*; see Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
- [86] Leah Piepgras, personal communication (email to the author), 24 October 2010.
- [87] Leah Piepgras, *Girl with a Pearl Necklace*, <http://www.leahpiepgras.com/objects/gallery/pearlnecklace/index.php>.
- [88] Leah Piepgras, personal communication (email to the author), 24 October 2010.
- [89] See Hugo Schwyzer, "He Wants to Jizz on Your Face, But Not Why You Think," *Jezebel.com*, January 11, 2012. <http://jezebel.com/5875217/he-wants-to-jizz-on-your-face-but-not-why-you-d-think>.
- [90] For more on the ever-blurred distinction between pornography and "real life," see Susanna Paasonen, "Labors of Love: Netporn, Web 2.0, and the Meanings of Amateurism," *New Media & Society* 12 (2010): 1297–312. For a detailed cultural history of ejaculation (including the advent of female ejaculation or "squirting"), see Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- [91] See, for example, Meredith Levande, "Women, Pop Music, and Pornography," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8 (2008): 293–321; and Roger Ebert, "Kick Ass," *rogerebert.com Movie Reviews*, April 14, 2010, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100414/REVIEWS/100419986>.