ALFRED HITCHCOCK &
THE UNDISCOVERED SCIENCE OF SUSPENSE

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Abstract

Whether cheering the demise of a ruthless villain or crying in despair as a romantic couple is torn apart, 'viewers seem to take inherent pleasure in strongly desiring various outcomes for the central characters of a narrative' (Plantinga 2009, p. 31). Despite film practitioners striving to incite this desire and film theorists often fretting about its ability to bypass our moral compass, the origin of these passionate preferences has rarely been subjected to sustained investigation. In challenging folk accounts of our 'predilections for narrative outcomes' (Rapp & Gerrig, 2006), this thesis counters conventional wisdom of 'rooting' for narrative outcomes. Attitudes towards filmmakers, films, and audiences who fail to adhere to ideologically-imbued assumptions about the 'right' outcomes to root for are interrogated against the possibility that viewers might indulge in this passionate arousal whilst remaining acutely aware and openly critical of a film's aesthetic and ideological construction. Where received wisdom suggests that rooting is the result of *morality* and *partiality*, a counter thesis is proposed that suggests failure to predict enigmatic responses during Hitchcockian suspense when viewers find themselves hoping for immoral outcomes and/or characters. In combination with textual analysis of these as yet unexplained 'moral inversion of suspense' scenes (Allen 2007, p. 62) and new research on the nature of moral judgment and emotion, I argue that although the influence of character remains significant, widespread assumption that it is the primary source of our moment-by-moment desires for narrative outcomes appear to be overstated and may represent an 'attachment fallacy'. Moreover, this focus on moral judgment and empathic concern has hampered the recognition of *egocentric concerns* capable of exerting a major amoral and impartial influence on the narrative outcomes that audience members root for at the movies.

Declaration

I, Cody McCormack, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Alfred Hitchcock and the Undiscovered Science of Suspense* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature
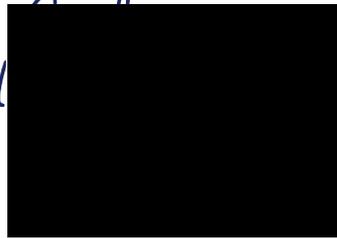
Date 12/03/2017

Dedicated to the three things I have loved and hated most:
film, theory, and my Huckleberry friend, The Rang.

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Acknowledgements

'A plague o' both your houses'
  - Mercutio (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Sc. 1)

Preface

'We are standing here today because a famous shojo manga artist recently refused us permission to reproduce his art in our reprinted book, *Reading Japan Cool: Patterns of Manga Literacy and Discourse*.' So started my latest reminder that theorists and practitioners are born to feuding families. 'He said our theory was wrong', continued Tokyo-based academics John E. Ingulsrud and Kate Allen in a presentation at my first-ever academic conference, having returned to theory after a decade and a half in practice. 'He informed us that caricatured faces in his work did not represent a character's inner feelings as our book claimed'. This news was a sudden jolt to these senior academics and it sent them scurrying off to reexamine the issue anew. The result was a passionate, intelligent research paper that utilised sociolinguistic concepts to conclude that, contrary to their original claim, the artistic device did indeed have *multiple* functions.[1] When the presentation ended and questions opened up, I could barely contain my curiosity. 'What did the shojo artist have to say about your new theory?', I asked, visions of wild saké celebrations between artist and academic duo stretching long into the night. Then came the reply: 'We didn't ask'. And before I'd even blinked, the next question was taken. My heart sank. In all my years away from academia, nothing had changed.

Back in the early 90s when I was studying film, I was astonished by the deep divide between theory and practice. Even work that focused on the films as artifacts tended to be close readings capable of sending the original filmmaker to sleep. The only time film *making* seemed to be mentioned in this, the preeminent film theory course in Australia, was when lauding a director's genius or when explaining why their work was either ideologically complicit with, or slyly critical of, ongoing social oppression. The theory that surrounded me seemed fanciful and self-inflated. I wanted theory that mattered to practice. Theory I could put *into* practice in my own filmmaking. For these reasons, *Noël* Carroll's work was an important antidote for me.

Not only did Carroll call out the cult of psycho-semiotic theory that was still widely preached, but he also engaged in straightforward attempts to explain how films worked rather than cloaking them in obscure terminology and counterintuitive claims. By far the

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[1] Ingulsrud & Allen 2012, John E. Ingulsrud and Kate Allen, Abstract, Conference Program, POPCAANZ, Melbourne, Australia.

most important example to me was his moral theory of suspense, which worked both as theoretical explanation and practical principle. At last I caught a glimpse of what film theory that informed practice might look like. But it proved just that. A glimpse.

Throughout the course, I continued to be surrounded by theory that looked down on practitioners and their audiences. That these excluded parties might actually have something worthy to say which could assist in a more accurate diagnosis beyond the common wisdom was apparently thought impossible. It felt like every attempt to speak about film creation and reception had to be prefaced with an apology or an excuse. You were either doing *official* experimental psychology in the laboratory or you were not, and anything in between was of no worth whatsoever. So, after somehow surviving in this environment until Honours, I abandoned my plans for a Masters of Arts and left film theory for practice, enrolling in the first full-time screenwriting course in the southern hemisphere to learn about narrative craft. And there, as I explained to no less than the head of the Australian Film Commission that I had recently moved across from theory out of frustration that it continually neglected practice, I was once again reminded that these pastimes are born to feuding families.

In an eerily similar attitude to the theorists I had left behind, the AFC head honcho sighed and bemoaned the pointlessness of film theory. Rather than find comfort in his sympathy, I challenged him on the issue, not because I believed film theory hadn't lived down to his lowly assessment or because I was offended by the suggestion that I might have wasted so many years on a pointless pastime. What disturbed me was the persistent, petty division between the two groups having personally glimpsed, in Carroll, the riches that we might find at the intersection of practice and theory.

Needless to say, my argument fell on deaf ears. The course itself exhibited surprisingly little concern for theoretical reflection about the craft tricks that make stories work and the remedial maneuvers this might allow us to categorise and communicate to help resolve creative problems that commonly arise. All but one lecturer had little time for theorising about practical problems. I continued to produce my own screen craft theory in private on a seemingly infinite number of topics, analysing my movie reception to reveal subtle moviemaking tricks that seemed to have bluffed my brain and produced magical emotional and aesthetic effects. After the course, I drifted into multimedia, producing videos for the education sector. But all the while, I continued to theorise about practice and remained staggered that simplistic claims about the way narrative cinema worked upon an audience were still passed off as gospel in both film theory and craft manuals.

Most notable of these claims the way screen stories were said to encourage suspense and side-taking. Based on my own self-analysis as a viewer, these seemed entirely unsustainable. Even Carroll's grand old theory had not received a much-needed makeover. I kept expecting someone in film or craft theory would make the kind of counter-claims I was leaning towards – particularly Carroll – but no one ever did. And so, over a decade and a half later, I returned to university in the belief that these feuding families could finally put aside their differences and mark an exciting new chapter in our understanding of the way that screen stories interact with living, breathing viewers.

As questions opened up after I ebulliently delivered my first-ever paper at that first-ever conference, having just argued that 'identification' was an inadequate explanation for the narrative outcomes we root for during suspense, a confident young student raised her hand and asked without a hint of irony, 'But what about in *Rear Window* when Hitchcock makes us identify with the camera?'. My heart sank. A plague on both your houses.

Contents

The extraordinarily high number of screenshots and illustrations used throughout made an official Figure List repetitive and impractical. Films under discussion are clearly referenced in the text, ensuring that the source of most screenshots is intuitive. Those figures whose source was not immediately apparent have been captioned to indicate their origin. The sole exception is the recurring images of our 'host', Alfred Hitchcock, which come from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents…* (1955-1962) and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962-1965). These have been Photoshopped by the author in parody. Finally, the reader should note that framing, colour, brightness, and order of all images throughout this thesis may not accurately reflect the original source, but that these adjustments have been made purely to enhance communication on the printed page.

Introduction

The Background

In arguably the most famous anecdote from the most famous filmmaker in the history of cinema, Alfred Hitchcock offered an explanation of suspense to anyone who would listen.

> You and I are sitting talking, we'll say, about baseball…Suddenly a bomb goes off and the audience have a ten-second terrible shock. Now. Let's take the same situation. Tell the audience at the beginning that under the table–and show it to them–there's a bomb and it's going to go off in five minutes. Now we talk baseball. What are the audience doing? They're saying, "Don't talk about baseball! There's a bomb under there! Get rid of it!"
> (cited in Schickel 1975, p. 293).[1]

That Hitchcock's oft-repeated anecdote has been understood the world over for more than half a century, that no interviewer or critic ever expressed confusion about the audience behaviour he describes, and that you, too, are able to comprehend the tale today all points to the existence of a common response in our movie-going experience known as *rooting*. 'Although this tendency most obviously applies to sporting events', notes Bruce Kerievsky, 'it also pertains to many kinds of fiction, whether written, performed or filmed' (2010, p. 385). And it is this participatory practice that Hitchcock's imaginary audience is surely indulging in as they inwardly scream at the screen, expressing a passionate preference for a particular narrative outcome, *hoping* the bomb will be discovered and *fearing* that it will not. Hitchcock's anecdote not only draws attention to what I shall call 'rooting for narrative outcomes', but also highlights the considerable importance he placed on inducing such a response in his audience – an aim long-shared by Hollywood and many other popular filmmakers around the word. Although this would seem to make the phenomenon central to movie production and reception, rooting remains one of the most neglected concepts in one hundred years of film theory.

As of 2016, not one study has been dedicated to the origins of our preference for particular narrative outcomes in popular cinema (though see Gerrig, Bagelmann & Mumper 2016).[2] Key texts on movie reception continue to ignore it (see, for instance, Eder, Jannidis & Schneider 2010; Mayne 2002; Shimamura 2013b). In a century of cinema scholarship, the most substantial direct treatment of the topic is arguably Bruce F. Kawin's four-hundred-word entry on 'rooting interest' in *How Movies Work* (1992). This is curious given that, as Hitchcock's anecdote suggests, the most explicit and enduring instances of this impassioned response occur during scenes of suspense and that the figure inextricably linked to such moments remains far and away the most analysed figure in filmdom. The disconnect between the vast investigation and celebration of Hitchcock and the virtual neglect of rooting raises the possibility that this oversight may be the result of preconceived notions about both its cause and its worth, rather than critical thought.

"Rooting interest! How vulgar can you get!'", summed up Joshua Logan of an attitude he saw in many upcoming playwrights (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 195).[3] Although Logan did not share this view, fear and disdain of popular drama and the passionate responses it arouses has been present since Plato's academy (see Nehamas 1988). This attitude continued over the centuries (see, for example, Carlson 1993; Forman 1933; Howard 1912; Levine 1988) and still persists today (see Barker 2005; Sergi & Lovell 2009, pp. 23-25; Srinivas 2002, pp. 163-164; Stempel 2001, pp. 221-225). 'So strong is this inclination in many of us', warns Kerievsky of our urge to root, 'that we are often induced to cheer inwardly for anti-heroes or rogues exhibiting outrageously anti-social behavior' (2010, p. 385). The implication is that the emotional power of rooting interest is not only sufficient to bypass our standard moral thinking, but also that this passion might be so pronounced as to signal a threat to social order itself. Although the obvious reply to such a claim is that our responses to fictional characters and events harm no one (or, as Hitchcock continually said, 'It's only a movie'), some have sought to create a system that calls these responses into account (see, for instance, Gaut 2007b; Hazlett 2009).

Thus, while audiences around the globe covet rooting for its pleasurable qualities, many academics are driven to publicly express concern about its potential moral ramifications and mount intellectual excuses for their own private indulgence in its pleasures (see Eitzen 2013; Gaut 2007a; Plantinga 2010; Raney 2011; Vaage 2015a). Where film practitioners work hard to encourage audiences to root for characters and their goals (see Iglesias 2001; Rooney & Belli 2011; Squire 2004), film theorists continue to worry about movies' ability to manipulate audience emotions and incite viewers in cinemas around the world to scream, '"Take the ax. Hit him! Hit him!"' (cited in Zillmann 2008, p. 220) and '"Kill the bitch!"' (cited in Holmlund 1991, p. 25). The stakes in this debate only make it all the more astounding that the origins of our rooting interest have not been the object of sustained theoretical scrutiny. This research seeks to redress this problem and, in doing so, demonstrate that a political poetics of cinema is possible. To investigate rooting is to rescue this pleasure – to encourage its experience and weaken its hold. For too long filmmakers and their audiences have suffered under the stigma of rooting as infantile or unsavory act. Meanwhile, select storytellers from Hitchcock to Shakespeare have been celebrated for achieving the same kind of impassioned audience response. In their hands, this effect is not taken as evidence of 'mere' craft and entertainment, but of high art that offers the audience an education in morality and empathy (see, for example, Cox & Theilgaard 1994, p. 20; Deavel & Deavel 2007; Osteen 2000; Sanders 2007; Sonbert 2015; Winston 2000/2013). Acknowledging rooting's complexity could lead film theorists to a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms that drive this desire, allowing all

to enjoy its button-pushing and critique its aesthetic and ideological construction rather than remaining forever blind to its operations.

The Problem

One of the key reasons the 'science' of suspense applied to rooting for narrative outcomes remains undiscovered is due to neglect, not only because the phenomenon has been thought unworthy, but also because its origins have often been considered obvious. Conventional thinking assumes that viewers root for the 'good guys' and root against the 'bad guys'. The appeal to *morality* and *partiality* is dominant across popular film and narrative practice. 'Fiction is, on the whole, intensely moralistic', suggests evolutionary literary scholar, Jonathan Gottschall (2012, p. 130). Hence rooting might be presumed to follow this pattern. Dolf Zillmann (1980, 1996/2013, 2012) and Noël Carroll (1984/1996, 1996b, 2010) have conjoined these influences in elegant, highly esteemed theoretical accounts of suspense and side-taking that predict the outcomes viewers will typically root for. In their view, partiality is granted on moral grounds. Murray Smith (1995a, 1999, 2010a, 2011) has also proposed that we rank characters on moral grounds and offer our 'moral allegiance' to those at the top of the list. Even those who do not focus on morality presume that some kind of emotional bond to character is more or less formed. Across film theorists, practitioners, critics, and audiences this folk psychological attachment is widely assumed to be 'the foundation for our developing durable dispositions of sympathy or antipathy for characters as well as for siding with or against them in situations involving their interests' (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider 2010, p. 54).

In many cases, *morality* and *partiality* appear perfectly adequate explanation for the narrative outcomes that we root for at the movies. After all, the Hollywood cliché torn from the pages of nineteenth century melodrama is a morally virtuous hero battling a morally despicable antagonist. Further support for this contention might also be gleaned from the popular American sitcom, *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014). In 'The Stinsons' (episode 15, season 4), loveable yuppy rogue, Barnabus 'Barney' Stinson (Neil Patrick Harris), reveals his rooting practices to his friends.[4]

INT. MACLAREN'S BAR — NEW YORK - NIGHT

MARSHALL, BARNEY, LILY, ROBIN and TED sit at their favourite booth amidst the afterwork crowd in their local neighbourhood hangout.

                MARSHALL
      Let me get this straight. You're
      really telling me that when you watch
      The Karate Kid, you don't root for
      Daniel-san [the good guy protagonist]?

                BARNEY
      Nope.

Audience chuckles on the soundtrack.

                TED
      Who do you root for in *Die Hard*?

                BARNEY
      Hans Gruber [the bad guy antagonist],
      charming international bandit.

More laughter.

                BARNEY
      At the end, he died hard. He's the
      title character.

Laughter.

                LILY
      Okay, *The Breakfast Club*?

                BARNEY
      The teacher running detention. He's
      the only guy in the whole movie
      wearing a suit.

Laughter.

                ROBIN
      I got one. *Terminator*?

                BARNEY
      What's the name of the movie, Robin?
        (to the table)
      ...Who among us didn't shed a tear
      when his little red eye went out at
      the end and he didn't get to kill
      those people?

Laughter.

                BARNEY
        (tearing up)
      I'm sorry. That movie...

BARNEY is grief stricken just thinking about it.

                TED
      I am never watching a movie with you
      ever again.

                BARNEY
        (incensed)
      They didn't even try to help him!

Big laugh.

                              FADE OUT.

The success of the scene centres on an audience's ability to i) recognise that the practice of rooting in the cinema is pervasive and ii) believe it is usually synchronised across viewers via *morality* and/or *partiality.* Without either of these assumptions, the entire scene would be incomprehensible, and any audible laughter at Barney's rooting practices would be perplexing to the sitcom's mass audience.

However, Hitchcock and other less-lauded storytellers often appear to induce what Richard Allen refers to as an 'inversion of the moral coordinates of traditional suspense' (2007, p. 58). These enigmatic cases tend to be:

- dismissed as mysterious exceptions-to-the-rule,

- explained away with appeal to either *relative* moral judgment or *sudden and seductive* character attachment, or

- completely overlooked in favour of the intuitive assumption that audiences root based upon their ongoing moral sympathy and antipathy for particular characters.

But is this assumption warranted? The public comments and popular cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, in combination with close observation of my own rooting practices, suggest that it is unsustainable and in need of considerable clarification.

In recent years, a growing trend for vicious protagonists such as Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos* 1999-2007), Walter White (*Breaking Bad* 2008-2013), and Dexter Morgan (*Dexter* 2006-2013) has led to a flurry of articles attempting to explain the peculiar power of these 'rough heroes' (Eaton 2011) to enlist rooting interest in diverse viewers. In asking why we root for bad guys and immoral outcomes, academics such as García (2016), Mittell (2015), Plantinga (2010), Vaage (2015a), and Murray Smith (2014a) imply that rooting is typically driven by *morality* and *partiality*. Whether via emotional attachment to moral characters or a desire for outcomes judged morally appropriate, this in turn frames 'immoral rooting' as abnormal: an exception to the rule and an enigma to be solved.[5]

Many of the fleetingly suggested solutions offered comprise of overriding rules, such as triggered sympathy for an underdog, star power or emotional contagion. Carl Plantinga's work in this area has raised questions about the boundary between moral allegiance and sympathy; the potential influence of amoral factors upon our feelings of good and ill will, and the distinction between emotional response to characters and those to the story itself (2009, 2010). However, the full implications of these claims, and the predictions they might make about viewer response, are rarely explored in detail. Academic inquiry is often left to fall back on the same old answer – *morality* and *partiality* (Jones, WE 2011; Vaage 2014) with overriding rules explaining away the exceptions. Carroll (2004/2013, 2010),

Zillmann (2012), and Smith (2011) have therefore managed to stand firm in their conviction that partiality is granted on moral grounds and remains at the centre of suspense and side-taking, steering the narrative outcomes for which we root.

Few have sought to systematically challenge these claims until Arthur A. Raney turned to *moral disengagement* and *schema* theories to argue that viewers make excuses for their preferred characters' immoral behaviour based on an expectation and desire to be entertained (2004, 2005, 2011). Margrethe Bruun Vaage's *The Antihero in American Television* (2015a) has since extended Raney's moral heuristics and bias approach. Vaage draws upon recent dual-process theories in moral psychology in an attempt to explain how immoral suspense and side-taking is possible. Nevertheless, both Raney and Vaage's solutions retain an emphasis on the power of *morality* and *partiality*. Although I share their desire to acknowledge the existence of immoral suspense and side-taking (something Carroll, Zillmann, and Smith all but deny), I challenge Vaage and Raney's solution to this enigma. Instead, I argue that emotional attachment to character is far less influential than assumed and that 'immoral' rooting is not encouraged through moral error but through egocentric (rather than empathic) concerns.

This thesis does not argue that moral judgment and emotional attachment to character have no influence at all upon our desire for impending narrative outcomes. Although Carroll and Smith do make the odd concession to the possibility of immoral rooting, these are presented as fleeting exceptions to the rule and are never pursued in any detail. Zillmann has ignored the issue even more, conceding only that different viewing subcultures may hold different moral values (2000, p. 60). However, this hardly explains why ostensibly ordinary viewers would suddenly root for outcomes that are clearly favourable to the bad guy and unfavourable to the good guy. In essence, any moment of immoral suspense and side-taking that Carroll, Smith, and Zillmann's moral account cannot cover or dispute is seen to represent the exception that proves the rule. I take issue with this exception-to-the-rule approach, for the same kind of thinking might apply to once popular claims that men are naturally good at mathematics and women are not. Any counter example is greeted with, 'Yeah, but s/he's an exception'. Scientific claims, by definition, are never absolute, thus rendering the reply 'I didn't say that *all* cases were explained by my theory' unnecessary.

The problem here is not that I have taken others to claim that every single instance is explained by an appeal to *morality* and/or *partiality*, nor that I have failed to recognise their claims offer the most accurate answer to the general issue of rooting for narrative outcomes. The problem is that I believe others have vastly overestimated the explanatory power of this answer, and vastly underestimated the occasions upon when it falls short.

Much of this may be because they have been so confident in the intuitive assumptions long associated with movie audience response, and confirmation bias has blinded them to the kind of counter-examples I draw attention to in this thesis.

Alternatively, those I question may in fact be focused on some kind of abstract commitment and goodwill towards moral characters and outcomes that is not meant to equate to moment-by-moment hopes and fears for particular narrative outcomes during suspense scenes that my study seeks to understand. If this is the case, however, I can find no evidence of it. Only Richard J. Gerrig bothers to distinguish between rooting for outcomes as opposed to rooting for characters, the latter of which is often automatically presumed to set the direction of our outcome preference (see Gerrig, Bagelmann & Mumper 2016). And no one, so far as I am aware, has drawn attention to the difference between moral evaluation of character and moral evaluation of outcome. I suggest that acknowledging this difference helps to both break the ingrained assumption that the outcomes we root for at the cinema are overwhelmingly steered by *morality* and *partiality*. It may also allow us to see important influences that lie beyond these intuitive answers. If, on the other hand, these remain unchallenged, they will continue to impact the way we think about the nature of story construction and reception, the potential dangers of story, and the value of particular stories and their tellers.

The Aim

In seeking to clarify this issue, I will limit my investigation to the most explicit instances of rooting – those found in moments of movie suspense, where viewers are encouraged to take sides in passionately desiring a particular outcome. Whether this is hope that a bomb be detected before it explodes (*Sabotage*, 1936), a husband lie to his beloved wife to cover a foolish sexual indiscretion (*Barney's Version*, 2010), or a little boy's red balloon survive a band of rock-throwing bullies (*The Red Balloon*, 1956), suspense is considered 'a very important factor in nearly all motion pictures' (Hitchcock 1939). Numerous studies have found that this narrative effect is tied to interest and enjoyment (see Bryant, Rockwell & Owens 1994; Comisky & Bryant 1982; Hoffner & Cantor 1991; Jose & Brewer 1984; Klimmt et al. 2009; Knobloch et al. 2004; Madrigal et al. 2011; Peterson, EM & Raney 2008; Sapolsky 1980; Zillmann, Hay & Bryant 1975). Suspense and side-taking are also of particular relevance to entertainment and persuasion, both 'good' and 'bad' (see Green, Brock & Kaufman 2004; Moyer-Gusé 2008). Far from being confined to thrillers and action films, it is pervasive across almost any genre at almost any moment.

My main focus in this study will be upon instances of Allen's 'moral inversion of suspense', or what I choose to call *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking*. The enigma arises in those moments where viewers mysteriously find themselves rooting for the bad guys and their goals and/or rooting against the good guys and their goals. This consideration naturally leads me back to Hitchcock, who as The Master of Suspense occupies a prime and peculiar position in the conversation on rooting for narrative outcomes in popular cinema.[6] Whilst Hitchcock publicly professed his mastery of audience manipulation through 'primitive' psychological mechanisms and frequently appeared to deliberately encourage rooting for immoral characters and/or outcomes, his movies are praised for their artistic and moral complexity. He is thus a primary source of evidence both for and against the moral and aesthetic value of rooting. Such a dominant figure within the historical, aesthetic, and ideological facets of the debate about rooting for narrative outcomes therefore deserves to play a central part in this research. This thesis is not, however, the ten thousandth close analysis of Hitchcock's artistic genius, his construction of suspense, or the ideological pros and cons of his thrillers. Instead, Hitchcock's well-established ability to make audiences root in often-mysterious ways and his willingness to talk at unprecedented length about this affords a prime opportunity for film theory to add clarity to practitioner wisdom on the issue at hand.

My research focuses on the *craft* of suspense and side-taking that leads to our passionate preference for particular narrative outcomes which Hollywood calls 'rooting'. Hitchcock is thus a kind of satellite figure, orbiting the issue with his explicit advice,

counterintuitive claims about audience response, and suspense scenes that see many viewers unexpectedly root for immoral outcomes or characters. The director will remain a touchstone throughout the thesis and, along the way, I will attempt to ascertain how much he knew about the biocultural mechanics of suspense in order to investigate such practical claims through theory.

The Approach

Edgar Morin 'speaks of a "science" of man to insist on the necessity of empirical verification…[s]triving for thought that is as little mutilating and as rational as possible', explains Mortimer (2005, p. xvi). It is in this same sense that I appeal to the term 'science' — not as a definitive source of knowledge, but as a sign of commitment to open inquiry, even though Morin willingly admits this is our '"mission impossible"' (cited in Mortimer 2005, p. xiv). Rather than seek shelter in what I take to be the often-empty skepticism of postmodernism, I believe it is important to oppose thought that is even more mutilating, for to fail to do so is to sit back and let potentially unfounded assumptions spread. Such a state of affairs should never be conceded because, as Morin (2008) points out, 'mutilating thought necessarily leads to mutilating actions' (p. 6). In his view, this mutilation occurs when theorists filter human experience through a lens of assumptions. With Morin's warning about 'mutilating thought' in mind, I aim to take a more inclusive approach than is standard in film theory. My approach builds upon David Bordwell's recent advice about the ongoing dialogue between theory and practice.

> We need to develop rigorous ideas and arguments (i.e., ***theory***) to understand film as best we can. But to the would-be theorist I say: Keep fastened on the look and feel of the ***films***, and test your ideas and arguments not only against them, but against what you can find out about the ***craft*** of cinema (2014, emphasis added).

In extension of this tripartite model (***theory***, ***films***, and ***craft***), I wish to add a fourth factor Bordwell has yet to formally embrace: ***viewers***. As rooting for narrative outcomes is a conscious activity, even if the reasons behind it are not, viewers have a major part to play in the conversation surrounding this phenomenon.[7] My investigation into rooting for narrative outcomes during popular cinema reception will therefore gather current 'ideas and arguments' (***theory***) about the creation of rooting interest and 'test' these explanations against:

- films from a range of genres and eras (***films***),

- Hitchcock's comments about reliable but mysterious audience effects (***craft***), and

- my own viewing experiences and those of others reported in audience studies, film reviews, fan forums, interviews, blog, and autobiographies (**viewers**).[8]

During this process, I shall put these theoretical claims about rooting for narrative to further critical analysis in the hope of drawing some conclusions about future experimental research required on this topic. So barren is the literary landscape on rooting, and so complex is the issue on multiple fronts, that this thesis aims to juggle competing goals. These are to define the terrain and draw out theoretical explanations; collect preliminary data and contest current claims; develop questions for future research; and convince film theorists, critics, practitioners, craft teachers, and movie fans of the importance of this topic and the need for further investigation. If the open approach I have adopted over-extends my reach, I can only quote Carl Plantinga in my defense:

> My chief goal is to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the important topic of film and affect, and if some of the treatments of particular issues are seen as suggestive and provocative rather than complete, I will not be much bothered by that (2009, p. 11).

This thesis is an exercise in screen craft theory – bringing together the often intuitive practical wisdom of craft with the rigorous thinking of theory in an attempt to clarify the mechanisms behind our passionate desire for narrative outcomes, commonly known as 'rooting'. Far from apolitical in its return to the filmic text, the neoformalist approach herein extends formalism by examining the encounter between film and biocultural being, making it a vital and untapped tool in the critique of the ideological effects *of* film and of the ideological nature of effects claims made *about* films. This is a corrective to Robert Stam's criticism that cognitive film theory dangerously overlooks ideological issues and that science has been co-opted and contaminated by power groups guilty of the worst of human atrocities (Stam 2000, p. 240). Whilst cognitive film theorists may have exhibited disinterest in ideological debates about the movies, this need not be the case. Rather than ask these folk to adopt the same interest as Stam, I would ask that politicised thinkers begin to recognise the great utility cognitive explanations have for understanding the effects of cinema and to put these theories to use in their own arguments about the ideological power of movies. This research aims to articulate an increased understanding of the biocultural mechanisms behind rooting during cinematic suspense and to provide a fresh perspective on an issue that impacts upon entertainment, aesthetics, industry, and media effects.

The Outline

The thesis is organised into eight episodes hosted by 'Alfred Hitchcock'. Although this is unconventional, it is my firm belief that film theory should not, in my book, be an obscure enterprise. I dream of a day when it will be intelligently discussed in its own medium in a way that manages to convey complex ideas to a general movie-going population in an entertaining fashion. Scott McCloud's groundbreaking *Understanding Comics* (1993) and the well-known *...For Beginners* documentary comic book series founded by Glenn Thompson and the Writers and Readers Cooperative that helped spread Marx, Freud, Foucault, and Derrida's theories to a broader audience in the 80s and 90s suggest that such a dream is possible.[9]

Episode 1 will survey attitudes and ideas about our passionate preference for particular narrative outcomes, arguing that where rooting has been portrayed as *mechanical*, *manipulative*, *artless*, and *immoral*, none of these charges is necessarily true. Hence the rooting audience, the reasons behind this urge, and the mechanisms that encourage it, are long overdue for analysis.

Episode 2 will assess how much Hitchcock truly knew about suspense and how this study should approach his vast body of public claims about creating this effect.

Episode 3 will provide grounds for the philosophy behind the method I have adopted, which contends that the magic of cinema is made possible by pandering to common biocultural tendencies in its human audience.

Episode 4 will outline the most influential current theory of suspense, Noël Carroll's (1984/1996) moral question-and-answer model and test this against autoethnographic examples drawn from my past two decades of viewing. I argue for revisions to this wonderful theory on the grounds that it is currently unable to account for, nor even recognise, the existence of immoral suspense and side taking.

Episode 5 will discuss Margrethe Bruun Vaage's (2015a) solution to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, taking theoretical, logistical, and ideological issue with her adoption of dual-process theories of morality. I argue that her turn to a heuristics and biases approach is built on an unfailing belief in the power of *morality* and *partiality*, which I believe is both misguided and ideologically problematic.

Episode 6 will offer eleven little arguments against empathic identification and emotional attachment to character that underlie *partiality* claims.

Episode 7 will counter another increasingly common explanation for viewers' emotional response that Vaage, Murray Smith, and others allude to: *mirroring*. I offer an extended

discussion of this issue on the grounds that its purported 'empirical' grounding and simplistic 'scientific' claims make it highly seductive to fellow cognitive theorists, but that newer, stronger scientific studies without the same sex-appeal suggest these claims are founded on flawed thinking and serve to highlight the ideological stakes in the battle over the essence of emotion.

Episode 8 will propose that although *morality* and *partiality* remain significant factors, their influence upon moment-by-moment rooting for narrative outcomes is often less than direct because there are other important and unrecognised influences capable of pulling us in different directions. These include *egocentric concerns*, the *hypocritical mind, either/or narrative questions*, and the presentation of *selective information onscreen*. Future research must consider these and other factors in attempting to explain the narrative outcomes that viewers root for moment-by-moment in the cinema.

More important than the content of my argument or my unconventional appeal to entertainment techniques in these episodes is an acknowledgment that this study has been written in an age of great skepticism at so-called scientific method, especially when it comes to the study of the most complex topic of all — ourselves. Robert Bellah and his colleagues end their book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, with a humble plea for open and inclusive discussion:

> We know we will be subject to the judgments of the academic "community of competence," but we hope the reader will not respond passively to our book, awaiting expert judgments as to whether we have got our data or our methods right. Anyone who has spent a lifetime in this society knows a great deal about the subject matter of this book…We hope the reader will test what we say against his or her own experience, will argue with us when what we say does not fit, and, best of all, will join the public discussion by offering interpretations superior to ours that can then receive further discussion (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 307).

And this is my own hope for the current research, for anyone who has spent a lifetime in the cinema knows a great deal about the subject matter of this thesis, whether they realise it or not. The following pages are an attempt to start the conversation.

CONFESSIONS OF A CINEMA SLUT
ROOTING IN THE FRONT ROW & THE PERVERSION OF PARTICIPATORY RESPONSES

Wherein we outline the phenomenon and argue for its importance...
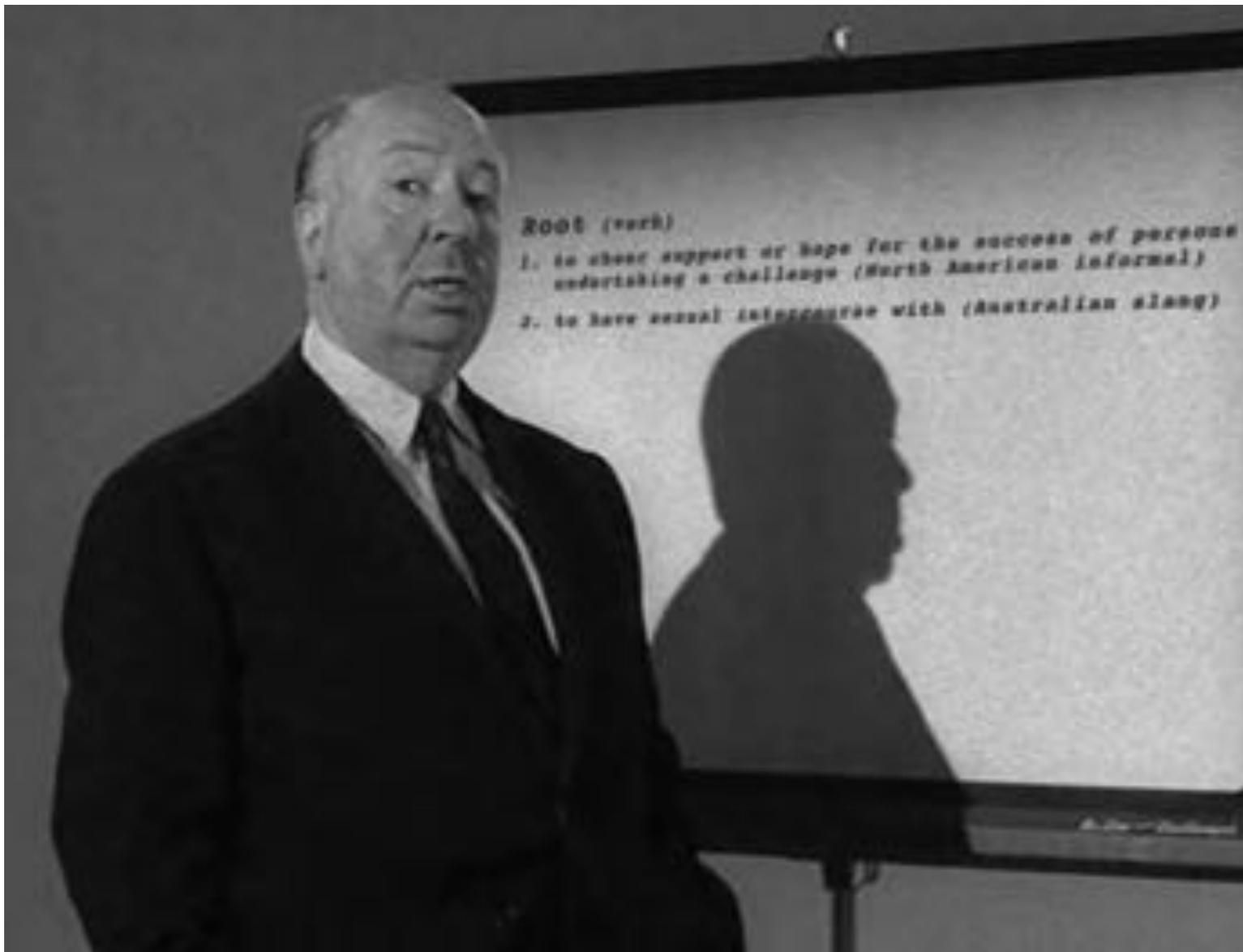
(*In your drollest Hitchcock tone*)

Good evening to you, dear viewer.
Or as they say Down Under, "G'day".

I, Alfred Hitchcock, have an important confession to make.

For many years I have been rooting in the front row of local cinemas. You may have heard me on occasion, or even caught a glimpse of my head bobbing up and down in the dark. Every instance starts out innocently enough. I select my seat and politely assume my position alongside my better half. But when the lights dim and the music rises, animal urges awaken within. Before I know it, a rush of blood sends my heart hammering, giving birth to a series of barely contained groans, gasps, and squeals. Despite my best British intentions to remain discreet, I am often so aroused by onscreen events that I find myself either whispering explicit advice to my partners about how they might achieve my desired ends, or screaming aloud about their failure to perform adequately under pressure. I must also confess that my use of 'partners' plural in this matter is no mistake, as I often take on multiple in a single session and (on more 'European' occasions) simultaneously. Sit back and judge me if you will, but after years of silence on this issue, I have decided it is time I spoke up about my overwhelming urge to root at the movies. For all evidence suggests that I am not alone in this peculiar practice, and that you, dear viewer, are a cinema slut just like me.

A Brief History of Rooting

In a memo dated November 5, 1946, the head of 20th Century Fox studios, Darryl F. Zanuck, outlined a key storytelling philosophy to collaborators on *Nightmare Alley* (1947).

> It is my belief that in every story there has to be a rooting interest. You have to have one person whom the audience sympathizes with; one person whom they want to triumph at the end of the story. This is utterly essential; there is no way to avoid it (cited in Behlmer (ed.) & Zanuck 1993, p. 116).

Zanuck has therefore been credited with turning the act of 'rooting' into a craft concept (see Custen 1997; Lev 2013), a central point of interest every popular story is thought to need in order to help ensure a passionate desire for preferred narrative outcomes. Rooting as an audience activity, however, had already been acknowledged by the industry long before the Fox movie mogul championed it. Entering the American vernacular sometime between 1885 and 1890, possibly as a variant of the Scottish word *rout* (to make a loud noise) that evolved from the Old Norse *rauta* (to roar), in popular US parlance the verb 'root' came to mean either 'to encourage a team or contestant' or 'to lend moral support'.[10] After initially referring to real world characters and causes in sport, celebrity, and politics during the early twentieth century, the film industry soon came to apply this act to characters and causes from the world of fiction.[11]

'The masses enjoy…when the struggle becomes sufficiently acute to cause the auditor to "pull" or "root" for the success or defeat of some one or more characters', wrote Moses Malevinsky in a 1925 craft manual (p. 108). And Hollywood, in an ongoing quest to draw in these masses, therefore held *rooting* to be central to a movie's success. In the decades leading up to Zanuck's own interest in rooting, the industry regularly referred to the term in interviews, movie reviews, studio memos, and screenwriting manuals.[12] By 1950, the question '"Who will we be rooting for?"' had become so common in movie construction as to warrant the description 'the words of the old industry bromide' (Schary, p. 13). Joshua Logan reinforced this impression in his 1952 address to the New Dramatists group.

> You hear those clichés and they don't mean anything after a while because they've been said to you so many times...Phrases like "rooting interest," or "I haven't got anybody to root for." Clichés.

And yet Logan was quick to caution all up-and-coming writers in the room —

> But don't forget it, because when you forget it you have plots that cannot be successful (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 195).

Like Hitchcock's bomb-under-the-table anecdote, Logan's advice signals a firm belief in the importance of rooting based on an underlying assumption that audiences everywhere enjoy and indulge in the act itself. Not only has this belief continued in industry texts and

studio practices such as test screenings, which seek to measure and manipulate rooting interest, but there is also good reason to believe the assumption is true.

Academic Interest in Rooting

'The first thing anyone (in Hollywood) asks is, "Where's the rooting interest?"', revealed actor Jack Nicholson (cited in Brode 1990, p. 124). If Nicholson is right, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that one of the first things anyone in film theory should ask is 'What's rooting interest?'. That this is not so suggests a major academic oversight. Nevertheless, rooting has not been entirely neglected. Over the past two decades, psycholinguist Richard J. Gerrig has built a body of research on the belief that responses such as this are central to our understanding of narrative reception (1993, 2005, 2007; 2013). 'We call these types of thoughts *participatory responses*', explains Gerrig, 'because people are reacting as if, in certain respects, they are genuine participants in the narrative world' (2009, p. 414, emphasis in original). He takes this principle from conversational theories of 'overhearing' where 'side-participants' are able to, for instance, listen in on two people struggling to recall the winner of last year's Best Film Oscar and respond in the own 'inner voice' (Clark, HH & Carlson 1982; Gerrig & Prentice 1996). It applies to any incident in which people mentally participate in unfolding events as mere witnesses without the ability to directly intervene. A passage from *The Photoplay Synopsis* (1919) by Ardon Van Buren Powell contains an excellent illustration of Gerrig's core idea during its description of the kind of audience involvement the author believes new screenwriters should be striving for.

> If you should see a friend racing across a field, toward a sheltering fence, with a mad bull in hot pursuit, you would be actively interested…Should your friend stumble, your heart would be in your mouth until he rose and got away, just in the nick of time. Should the bull step into an unseen depression of the earth, and fall to his knees, you would exult, and call out for your friend's assurance, "Hurry! He's down!" Until your breathless friend might roll to safety under the fence, your interest in his fate would be sustained, and even if your help should be prohibited by reason of your aloofness from the scene, in point of distance, *you would mentally and vocally take sides against the bull* (1919, p. 120, emphasis added).

For Gerrig, readers and viewers of narrative art are *side-participants* in this same sense. Like Hitchcock's ideal audience 'longing to warn the characters on the screen' about the bomb because they are 'participating in the scene' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73), inferring it will explode and hoping this will be averted, Gerrig's side-participant also makes mental *predictions* about impending outcomes and forms *predilections* — 'a particular type of participatory response…in which readers [and viewers] express mental preferences in favor of one or two potential outcomes' (Gerrig 2009, p. 414). In Gerrig's assessment, moviegoers regularly *root* in their mental interaction with onscreen action.

Although such a stance would seem to be highly relevant to increasing interest in audience activity in the cinema, Gerrig's one and only essay appearing directly under the 'film theory' banner (Gerrig & Prentice 1996) has been almost completely ignored. Even more disappointing is the fact that the two prominent theorists who bothered to acknowledge the essay, and who remain sympathetic to cognitive theories of film reception, were so quick to dismiss Gerrig's path as a dead end.

Gregory Currie regards Gerrig's proposed similarity between movie audiences and side-participants to a conversation as 'an implausible suggestion' (1999, p. 191), whilst Carl Plantinga comes to the conclusion that '[u]sing human conversation as a model for film viewing is something like using the model of scuba diving to understand snow skiing' (2009, p. 235). Both, I believe, misread Gerrig's comparison and react with an understandable aversion to his presumed analogy in the wake of Noël Carroll's infamous dismemberment of the tenuous connection between dreams and films, screens and mirrors, and wombs and cinemas so often proposed in contemporary film theory (1988). Gerrig's position, however, is an altogether different case.

In pointing out a parallel between cinema reception and side-participation in conversations, he seeks no direct support for his claims. Instead, he merely hopes to offer a clearer explanation as to the common cognitive processes involved in both. In other words, Gerrig does not argue that our mental interaction with movies is because films are like conversations; he simply explains that our mental interaction is enabled by emotional and cognitive processes that are on demonstration when we are side-participants to conversations. Nevertheless his lateral example has come under attack and the assumption it has created in cognitive film theorists has undermined the value of his important insight.

Although Gerrig's entire project is founded upon the assumption that 'under most narrative circumstances, it is quite likely that readers [and viewers] will prefer particular outcomes' (Rapp & Gerrig 2006, p. 55), his focus on psycholinguistic processes offered no direct evidence for the existence of rooting. Instead, Gerrig reported fluctuations in reading speed that he automatically attributed to our 'predilections for narrative outcomes', following a further assumption that holding these can affect cognitive processing during reading.[13] The indirect, quantitative nature of his evidence, combined with his 'conversational' parallel, left Gerrig open to criticism and far too easy for film theorists to ignore. That is, until now. After almost twenty years, perhaps encouraged by recent research students Matthew A. Bezdek (2012) and Jeffrey E. Foy (2012), Gerrig finally sought to offer more explicit evidence for the existence of participatory responses during movie reception.

In an experiment showing suspense scenes from four feature films, Gerrig and his young colleagues adopted a think-aloud protocol, asking viewers to 'think aloud' their thoughts during the viewing process (Bezdek, Foy & Gerrig 2013). Results revealed that 'verbalisations frequently included participatory responses, despite the open-ended nature of the think-aloud protocol'. The experimenters concluded that this 'provided direct evidence that people generate…participatory responses' (Bezdek, Foy & Gerrig 2013, p. 4). This evidence might be attacked on several grounds: that the experiment was conducted in an unnatural environment (a 'lab') with unnatural material (2:39-5:58 minute stand-alone scenes); that all four films were thrillers; that participants may have felt obliged to show signs of activity; that only twenty participants were tested; that all were native English speakers and that, being undergraduate students, many may have been of similar age, education, class, and possibly even culture. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence outside the lab that audiences often hold 'desires or wishes' for narrative outcomes which we have called rooting. And, if nothing else, Gerrig's experiment has thankfully resulted in his discarding the conversational analogy for a more intuitive parallel I have long favoured: *sport*.[14]

Film as Sport

'Consider what it is like for people to view sporting events', write Gerrig and Bezdek (2013). 'As a game unfolds, people are very likely to encode their preferences for actions in which they wish the players to engage. As the excitement grows, they are even likely to verbalize those preferences: e.g., "Shoot!" or "Block the shot!"' (p. 91). Thus the authors view these common responses during sports spectatorship as a parallel to participatory responses in popular narrative cinema. Where film theorists struggled to see any support for Gerrig's previous parallel to conversation side-participant, examples of sports-style side-participation (i.e. *rooting*) are readily found across motion picture literature.[15]

'"[I get] so involved in the movie I am watching that I will talk back to the actors when danger approaches, or I will advise them regarding what is the best thing for them to do"', confesses Rocio Vargas, echoing Ardon Van Buren Powell's bull-watching witness (cited in Stempel 2001, p. 222). Television writer, Dennis Leoni, recalls his Mexican-American grandmother, Paula, responding to television westerns this same way. 'She would root for the good guys and actually verbally warn them about the bad guys sneaking up on them' (cited in Priggé 2005, p. 49). But Rocio admits to taking his own participatory responses even further, stepping towards the kind of behavior one might expect to see from grown men watching a dramatic sporting spectacle:

> "Sometimes I even argue with them for the stupid thing they did or did not do, and on several occasions, I have embarrassed my peers by getting up from my seat in an effort to influence their actions" (cited in Stempel, p. 222).

Many decades ago, sociologist Herbert Blumer witnessed these 'undisguised expressions of intense emotions' in crowded cinemas screening movie serials to excitable children (1933, p. 117). As one twenty-year-old white male college sophomore participating in Blumer's Payne Fund study recalled of his childhood, '[W]e used to be worked up to a terrific high state of emotion, yelling at the hero when danger was near, hissing at the villain, and heaving sighs of relief when the danger was past' (cited in 1933, p. 120).[16] All the above cases provide evidence of the presence of *predictions* and *predilections* during popular movie reception that find 'voice' in the act of rooting. And though these examples might sound like the participatory responses of a primary school pantomime crowd, they are certainly not confined to overexcited children or over-emotive Hispanics.

In her ethnographic study of Bollywood audiences, Lakshmi Srinivas provides ample evidence of these processes occurring in the East.

> Interviewees' accounts of watching the films revealed that a common focus of discussion while watching was predicting or looking ahead and speculating about what would happen next…Viewers often shout out comments or "give advice" to characters on-screen. If the hero or heroine are fleeing from the villain, viewers shout out, "Run! Run faster!"
> (1998, p. 327, 336).

Predictions and predilections are particularly transparent in this environment because, as Srinivas explains, Indian audiences adopt an 'interactive and participatory style of viewing which…allows a certain spontaneous involvement as viewers shout out comments to the screen, talk to characters, give them advice and take sides' (2002, p. 170). She even reports on a viewer so keen to help a disarmed hero during a fight sequence that he was seen to toss a knife toward the screen (see Srinivas 1998, p. 344 & 337).[17]

All this evidence for Gerrig's claims would appear less common in the West where, Srinivas points out, audiences 'are expected, and are found to be, fairly quiet and absorbed by on-screen images and sound' (2002, p. 160). Although this convention is not always adhered to, and class differences can still be found in many participant responses, the immense influence that middle-class modes of viewing have had upon audience practices in the West becomes particularly evident when these unwritten expectations are systematically broken during cult film screenings that *demand* talking aloud, calling out, and throwing objects at the screen (see McCulloch 2011).[18] The cultural convention for silent and respectful contemplation that took hold following the development of American cinema palaces in the early nineteenth century accounts for the aforementioned embarrassment Rocio Vargas caused his peers by standing up to intervene in the action

onscreen. Nevertheless, the practice of rooting need not always be so public, and there is reason to believe that even well-behaved Western audiences enact the exact same participatory responses as Rocio Vargas, Grandma Paula, or audiences in Bangalore but simply exhibit fewer overt physical signs in an environment with a strong 'expectation of silent attentiveness' (Srinivas 2002, p. 171).

Influenced by his reading of sociologist Norbert Elias (1978; 1986) and his own extensive fieldwork with Hanshin Tiger baseball fans in Japan, sports anthropologist William W. Kelly (2010) describes the act of cheering as a 'barely-contained release of our emotions—brought on by the suspense of the moment and the importance of the outcome'. And we might take the groans and sighs described by one of Blumer's 'trained investigators' during the silent serial, *Pirates of Panama* (1929), in this same way.

> Each time the madman nearly hurled the hero over the cliff groans could be heard, and I noticed that my sister and Dick seemed to be holding their breath, and then sighing in relief when the hero survived. Roy again was quiet. When the hero threw the madman over the cliff the theater was filled with ear-piercing noise (cited in Blumer 1933, p. 118).

The groans and sighs, gripping hands or furrowed brows of those around us in the multiplex might thus be seen as typical expressions of rooting interest under constraints that dictate cinema-viewing as 'an atomized and highly disciplined activity' (Srinivas 2002, p. 160). But what of those who fail to exhibit signs of rooting? What of viewers like the trained investigator's nephew, Roy, who he reported 'again was quiet'?

Despite my argument for the widespread practice of rooting, this activity is certainty not a pre-requisite for cinema reception. '[F]ilm-watching is a *role which we perform*', argues Martin Barker (2000, p. 48, emphasis in original), outlining a list of recurring patterns of response he sees as indicative of viewer activity. The first two of these —

- *guessing ahead*, formulating hypotheses about characters, motivations and events
- *taking sides:*…[W]anting some things to happen, others not
  (Barker & Austin 2000, p. 48, emphasis added)

— are clearly equivalent to Gerrig's *predictions* and *predilections*, the basic building blocks of rooting outlined earlier.[19] We can thus choose to perform our role as the storyteller had hoped and root for Hitchcock's bomb blast to be averted, or choose not to take up our role at all. Little Roy's silence could be a sign that he is bored out of his brain or happily thinking about something else. However, there is also no reason to presume that silence is a sign of the absence of rooting. If human beings are able to enact predictions and predilections when reading a novel in quiet contemplation or watching televised sport on their own, why suspect that cinema is any different? Roy might just as well be sitting quietly mentally taking sides without vocally doing so, as Gerrig and Van

Buren Powell originally envisaged. Regardless, movies offer many pleasures, from sets to stars, costumes and cutting, music and cinematography. Rooting is but one and, like all, may be embraced or ignored (see also Plantinga 2009, pp. 21-22).

Side-participants at the cinema

Despite Gerrig's repeated calls for canonical analyses of narrative comprehension to recognise the importance of participatory responses (Gerrig & Jacovina 2009; Rapp & Gerrig 2006) and the existence of hundreds of references to 'rooting' in movie industry, craft, and criticism texts and in online forums written by real viewers describing their rooting reactions to specific films, the matter continues to be neglected. Although a large body of research regarding *comprehension* during moment-by-moment narrative encounters has investigated predictions (Bordwell 1985; Graesser, Singer & Trabasso 1994; Magliano, Dijkstra & Zwaan 1996), scant attention has been paid to *emotional* episodes wherein viewers rapidly evaluate the desirability of their predictions to form predilections that find 'voice' in the act of rooting. In film theory, the situation is worse still.

Whilst Carl Plantinga's *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009) mentions the response twice (p. 108 & 150), Janet Staiger's *Perverse spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (2000) refers to the word but once (p. 119), and Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995a), Judith Mayne's *Cinema and Spectatorship* (2002), Schneider, Jannidis & Eder's (eds.) *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (2010), and Arthur P Shimamura's (ed.) *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (2013b) make no mention of rooting at all. The most substantial direct treatment on the topic remains Bruce F. Kawin's brief account of 'rooting interest' in *How Movies Work* (1992).

> Hollywood formula depends…on **audience identification** and **rooting interest**. That is, the members of the audience are presented with characters with whom they can identify – usually played by stars – and conflicts in which they can be led to feel that they have a personal stake. The audience identifies with the hero, in the simplest of all formulas, and collectively roots for him or her. We are led to care about the characters and to hope they will get what's coming to them (p. 63, emphasis in original).

Kawin offers Paul Newman's alcoholic lawyer in the courtroom drama *The Verdict* (1982) as a conventional example. That this 'seedy, unreliable' protagonist whom many might normally be reluctant to identify with is played by someone 'physically attractive and a star' like Newman makes it, according to Kawin, 'easier for the audience to enjoy playing with the idea of being in his shoes for a couple of hours' (1992, pp. 63-64). In addition, the hero's defense of a helpless, sympathetic client against 'a huge and inhuman

organization, practically in league with the Devil' that wants to avoid compensating for a clear-cut case of medical negligence, also helps create a rooting interest.

> [W]e want the lawyer to discredit the bad guys, to win his client's case, and to clean up his own life. Having created those desires, the film goes on to satisfy them (Kawin 1992, p. 64).

Citing *The Odyssey* and *King Lear* to demonstrate that '"Identification plus rooting interest" is not a new formula', Kawin then points to Brechtian works which

> set out to undermine that formula or turn it against itself, encouraging the audience to adopt a distanced, critical attitude rather than to behave like an emotionally manipulated mob.

In Kawin's view, making the audience take sides in a calculated way is '[o]ne of the most time-tested ways for an artist to get across a point or to convey a value judgment'. Lest anyone assume they are above influence, Kawin ends his entry on rooting interest by assuring the reader that

> strategic manipulation of identification and rooting interest is so effective that even a sophisticated audience is liable to find itself rooting for the Ku Klux Klan at the climax of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1992, p. 64).

Leaving aside the questionable, class-based reference to 'mob' and 'sophisticated audience', Kawin's four-hundred-word study makes two key claims about rooting interest:

1) It is **mechanical**, the result of 'formulas' that encourage 'favour' for particular outcomes.

2) It is **manipulative**, capable of creating desires that bypass critical thought and betray our own ethics.

So common are these arguments that general agreement appears to be the default position, not only for film theorists and film critics, but also for filmmakers and viewers.

Mechanical and Manipulative Participation

> I think it's always very simple to ask for rooting interest. There's no trick and anybody can do it. It's almost mechanical in the writing, in the way one directs the opening scenes…We tell the audience you've got to be for this guy, and you've got to be against this man. If you do it skillfully enough, they'll be happy to do it for you…But, right or wrong, I don't like to do it (cited in Silke 1964, pp. 20-21).

So said Hollywood director Fred Zinnemann, whose vote against rooting can be seen to carry similar attitudes that the creation of this response is mechanical and manipulative. Despite his stance on the subject, Zinnemann offers no details about how filmmakers 'tell the audience you've got to be for this guy' to make them 'happy to do it'. As he elaborates, we might presume that the director is referring to familiar notions of good guys and bad guys that early Hollywood took from nineteenth century stage melodrama.

> Rooting interest is something we all learned in kindergarten, because in the old days every
> picture was really based on it to the point where when you had a chase on horseback, the
> heavy was riding a black horse and the hero was riding a white horse, so you could tell who
> was which (cited in Silke 1964, p. 20).

Though this information may be central to our subsequent predictions and predilections, it is still clearly not the *origin* of our rooting response. If simple semiotics could guarantee rooting interest, a film such as *Johnny Guitar* (1954), which inverts this convention by placing the goody in black and the baddy in white, could not function.

The type of side-taking strategy to which Zinnemann might more likely refer is old Hollywood's well-worn trick of making the villain 'kick the dog' upon entry into the drama, often contrasted with a hero who would 'pet the dog'. Whilst initially a literal strategy (see Sargent 1934, p. 432), the device quickly turned into a cliché and the phrase became shorthand for dramatic advice to, as screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky explains, '[p]ut in a scene to show who's the villain' (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 127). What was frowned upon in third-rate melodramas from *The Hidden Spring* (1917) to *Campus Alley* (1932) thus became a legitimate device believed to help encourage and control rooting when written in more subtle and indirect ways by a new breed of industry professionals such as Chayefsky. And this belief continues today, with the advice recently returning to popularity as Blake Snyder's 'Save the cat!' mantra from his bestselling book of the same name urging screenwriters to include a scene where the hero does something kindly when first appearing onscreen (Snyder 2005).[20] Nonetheless, even the self-proclaimed father of 'rooting interest', Daryl F. Zanuck, seemed less than certain as to how this process actually worked despite more or less adopting a 'Save the Cat!' strategy in one famous gangster film. As the Fox movie mogul confessed in a memo on February 10, 1947:

> In *Public Enemy* [1931] I gave Cagney one redeeming trait. He was a no-good bastard but
> he loved his mother and **somehow or other** you felt a certain affection and rooting interest
> for him even though he was despicable (cited in Behlmer (ed.) & Zanuck 1993, pp. 118-119,
> emphasis added).

Quite aside from the question of exactly *how* such moments might manage to make us root, this trick can hardly be the whole story. If viewers were to root for characters based purely on 'Kick the dog!' or 'Save the cat!' scenes then we would struggle to explain moments when they change sides in their rooting. And if our explanation is simply to claim the sudden insertion of what amounts to a new 'Kick the dog!' or 'Save the cat!' scene — where does this leave industry practitioners? Instead of the *ongoing* rooting interest Hollywood hopes to achieve, wouldn't side-taking be a wholly fickle affair at the mercy of each and every scene that involved, deliberately or otherwise, an instance of dog-kicking

or cat-saving? And doesn't that fly in the face of Zanuck's entire achievement in *Public Enemy* (1931), where Cagney acted like a 'no-good bastard' yet somehow retained audience support?

If this process were truly as mechanical and straightforward as Kawin, Zinnemann, and Snyder suggest, it is strange that so many storytellers have failed to create it. 'If you don't have a rooting interest and you're not for somebody then you haven't got a picture', director Howard Hawks told Peter Bogdanovich, lamenting that his film he liked the least, *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), suffered from this problem (cited in 1962, p. 34). Either we take Hawks for an idiot in knowing this rule and still producing the huge, expensive Hollywood epic in spite of it, or we consider that creating rooting interest is much harder in practice than in theory

Even Hitchcock, with his explicit intent and supposed expertise in audience involvement, produced more indifference than interest in later output such as *Torn Curtain* (1966), *Topaz* (1969), and *Family Plot* (1976). Hence whilst the bomb-under-the-table anecdote highlights the existence of rooting, it simultaneously raises a mystery. Although Hitchcock confidently claims an audience will automatically desire that the metaphorical bomb blast be averted, this ideal response frequently fails to eventuate in movies that explicitly attempt to induce it – including his very own. Despite the presence of stars, production value, or pedigree, at times the only bomb an audience hopes to see stopped onscreen is the film itself. Nevertheless, successful television writer/producer and long-time UCLA professor, William Froug, appears to insist that rooting is a simple trick that ought to be distinguished from deeper aesthetic effects.

'Creating rooting interest for the good guys is a no-brainer; creating empathy for the bad guys is good writing', advises Froug (2000, p. 204). This questionable distinction between what he labels 'superficial rooting interest' and the 'deeper connection of empathy' (p. 203) is built upon the assumption that the creation of each involves differing technical and/or psychological mechanisms, and that one outcome is worthy, the other frivolous. But one might ask how Froug's shining example, the creation of empathy for the 'conniving hunchback who murders his nephews in order to be crowned king' in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (p. 199), is any different from Zanuck's achievement inducing rooting interest for a 'no-good bastard' gangster in *Public Enemy*? Any distinction appears to rest on the belief that audiences emotionally embrace the goals of one (the 'pop culture' character), whilst intellectually assessing the goals of another (the 'high art' character). But Zanuck's description of the audience's less than whole-hearted connection as 'a *certain* affection and rooting interest for him *even though he was despicable*' (cited in Behlmer (ed.) & Zanuck 1993, p. 119, emphasis added) is at odds

with this assumption, highlighting that viewers may not lose sight of his gangster hero's immorality any more than they do the murderous scheming of Shakespeare's discontented hunchback.

The black and white distinction many make between empathy and rooting is questionable on other grounds, as these reactions are by no means mutually exclusive. Audiences are able to remain ambivalent about a character at the same time as they can root for or against her or him. Jinhee Choi (2003) points to the way Joseph Cotton's portrayal of 'both a murderer and a loveable brother and uncle' in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) means that '[w]e do not want Uncle Charlie to run away from his crime, but at the same time we hope that his true nature is not revealed to the rest of his sister's family'' (pp. 318-319). Although Hitchcock has been celebrated for producing instances of moral ambiguity and viewer guilt, we could also list any number of other actor/character combinations that achieve this same 'Shakespearean' ambivalence, from Robert De Niro's roles in *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Cape Fear* (1991), Mel Gibson's questionable protagonists in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981) and *What Women Want* (2000), or Matt Dillon's characters in *Crash* (2005) and *There's Something About Mary* (1998).

'I don't even know if you're entirely for Marlon Brando in [*On the*] *Waterfront* [(1954)]', says director Elia Kazan of one of the most celebrated character journeys this side of *Casablanca* (1942). 'You follow him emotionally, but I never intended to say, "God, he's right"' (Kazan 1999, p. 307). This points once more to the audience's ability to be ambivalent *simultaneously* to their side-taking. Kazan sounds as if he believes his film achieved something out of the ordinary, but barring the most black and white portrayal of 'good' versus 'evil' – which is arguably far rarer than often claimed – even 'mass entertainment' such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Dumb and Dumber* (1994) has most viewers not entirely endorsing Han Solo's selfishness or Harry and Lloyd's mutual sabotage of one another as they compete for the same girl. Clint Eastwood, one of the most consistently successful stars of the last half century, has built an entire career out of playing characters that push the limits of our loyalty, suggesting any moral and aesthetic distinction between empathy and rooting is shaky at best. And this raises the further possibility that rather than resting on a valid difference in experience, the distinction might be born out of a common desire to distinguish Art from entertainment; to separate what we safely enjoy from what Others unsafely indulge in. Works that we are convinced may lead weak minds to various moral and aesthetic maladies.

The Perversion of Participatory Responses

In *Playwriting For Dummies* (2011), Angelo Parra adopts Froug's distinction between empty entertainment and aesthetic education, cautioning new writers against the creation of clear-cut rooting patterns:

> Easy-to-boo-and-hiss-at characters are the kind of antagonists you find in cartoons, comic books, silent movie melodramas, superhero movies, and passé and inferior plays. Fun, maybe, but far from the lifelike characters you should be striving for (2011, p. 124).

The view is familiar and likely to be heard in any writing course around the world, but what is typically omitted is exactly *why* we should be striving for lifelike characters, especially if easy-to-boo-and-hiss-at characters are acknowledged as fun. Even Parra does not bother to explain, so readers are left to assume that where 'realism' is valued for its supposed insight, fun is considered frivolous at best. By this logic, viewers such as the two middle-aged sisters in the tiny Australian Aboriginal settlement of Gapuwiyak in north-eastern Arnhem Land who 'hoot with laughter as they berate heroes and bad guys alike for violent behavior or swearing' according to anthropologist, Jennifer Deger (2011, p. 463), are either participating in an inferior manner, participating with an inferior movie, or both. What Hitchcock celebrated in his bomb-under-the-table anecdote has continually been derided by many as artistically and ethically vacuous.

In a recent paper, Frank Krutnik reveals how a lowly view of suspense as 'a "mechanical" enterprise' (2013, p. 23) forced Hitchcock to publicly promote the phenomenon as a worthy pursuit in opposition to this widespread attitude. Though the director could doubtless be described as succeeding in this task 'to create an image of him[self] as worthy of highbrow critical regard as well as low- and middle-brow mass consumption' (Gottlieb 1997, p. xvi; see also Kapsis 1992), a critic like Charles Higham (1962) is still able to attack him on these grounds. 'The mechanics of creating terror and amusement in an audience are all Hitchcock properly understands', decries Higham of a director he feels treats the audience as 'the collective victim of a Pavlovian experiment' (pp. 3-4). Hitchcock's expertise in 'what can move the masses without fail', and his open encouragement of rooting, is morally bothersome to Higham.

> We know, for instance, the response that the sight of a child or dog in danger can evoke even in the most brutally sophisticated people. No one save Hitchcock would dare to turn this natural responsiveness to his own advantage (p. 4).

And thus, atop of Kawin's study, which framed rooting as **mechanical** and **manipulative**, two more conclusions have been commonly drawn to describe this participatory practice:

1) It is **artless**: the films that adopt such 'formulas' are of lesser value

2) It is **immoral**: ill effects threaten society where viewers carry this 'value judgment' from the cinema.

When watching a scene where a man is badly beaten by a bunch of boys in *Kids* (1995), Allan Hazlett remembers that his viewing companion 'found this sequence hilarious, and was 'rooting for' the attackers', an act the philosopher felt 'was, intuitively, an immoral response' (2009, p. 242). Hazlett invests his considerable energy arguing for the importance of 'response moralism' and the need to avoid reactions to fictional personages that would be widely held to be unethical in the real world. He is by no means the first to follow this path. '[W]here vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation', wrote moral philosopher David Hume (1758), 'I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments' (p. 145). More recently, Berys Gaut's ethical notion of 'merited response' (see Gaut 2007b), Noël Carroll's 'morally sensitive viewers' (1996a, pp. 233-234), and Ronald de Sousa's 'phthonic [malicious] laughter' (1987) have pursued this path with little apparent gain in the eyes of some, including Hazlett himself (see also Carr & Davis 2007; Hamilton, C 2003; Jacobson 1997; Smuts 2010). Matthew Kieran, for instance, asks,

> [W]hy assume how we ought to respond in real life should govern our responses to art works? In real life there are all sorts of considerations that apply which may not with respect to reading or seeing particular works…In real life many of us wouldn't root for Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* [1972], Tony in *The Sopranos* [1999-2007] or delight in N.W.A's attitude toward the police [i.e. Niggaz Wit Attitudes, a provocative 80s gangsta rap band best known for their protest song 'Fuck Tha Police']. But then this isn't real life. So we can allow the force of our internalised moral prohibitions to slacken and go with the responses sought from us (2006, pp. 134-135).

Gaut also makes it clear that we can have responses whilst simultaneously dismissing their worth on ethical grounds when he writes that 'responses must be *merited*, not simply the ones we actually have' (2007a, pp. 227-228, emphasis in original). For example, we may feel awe at Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) even though we ultimately dismiss the validity of both artwork and our response because the film is a celebration of Nazism (Gaut 1998, p. 190). And this dismissal does not undo the initial experience. Our awe still existed. The same knee-jerk nature of many rooting responses, and our ability to intellectually assess this response after the fact, finds a useful parallel in laughter.

No Laughing Matter

What do you call the useless piece of skin on the end of a penis?

A man.

The serious problem with offensive jokes such as this, according to philosopher Ted Cohen, is 'the fact that they are funny' (1999, p. 84). Cohen argues that 'denial is a pretense that will help nothing' (p. 77) and so offers humanity a simple piece of advice: 'Face the fact' (p. 84). Only by doing this can we hope to move on and seek clarity as to how these mysterious (and often offensive) stories in miniature work. I contend that this advice applies equally well to *rooting* for immoral outcomes and characters. Rather than mount another destructive moral crusade against the 'inappropriateness' of various moment-by-moment responses in popular cinema reception, and hence vilify the artists and artworks encouraging these responses along with the audience members who enjoy them, we should instead 'face the fact' and come to accept rooting for any narrative outcome as a potential part and parcel of our makeup. As Cohen claims of laughing unexpectedly at offensive jokes, human beings have these experiences, whether we agree with them or not. Dreams of short-circuiting immoral response may therefore be unachievable. Nor are they necessarily desirable. There is practical danger in thinking that the 'right' reaction is clear-cut, and that viewers who fail to tow the line are automatically engaging in an inappropriate participatory response. To suppose that we know what the correct response should be ignores religious, cultural, and personal differences in what people regard as morally acceptable.

Carr and Davis (2007) counter that this objection is overstated because it is 'a basic tenet of most liberal moral theorising that certain forms of harm–racial intolerance, sexual violence, torture, and drug trafficking–are individually and socially unacceptable' (p. 98). Even so, as rooting in the face of fiction tends to lack a definitive real-world result, which Kieran (2006) implied above, it is difficult to judge between harmful and harmless participation. When Indian moviegoers in Massachusetts shout *'"Kood ja! Jood Ja!"* [Jump! Jump!]' as a leading character in *Hameshaa* (1997) stands on a precipice ready to throw himself off in despair due to ongoing romantic estrangement (cited in Srinivas 1998, p. 336, brackets in original), should we chastise their morality or chuckle at their wit? And if we choose to condemn them for finding humour in others' harm, should we not also condemn the millions who laugh at the antics in *Tom and Jerry* (1940-1967), *Looney Tunes* (1930-1969), and 'The Itchy & Scratchy Show' (a fictitious, ultra-violent parody of such animated shorts in *The Simpsons*, 1989-present)? For those of us who do not, knowing where to draw the line would seem less than clear. Of course, this is the task that these philosophers take on in their search for 'warranted' versus 'unwarranted' responses.

But even if they could rule out typically difficult instances of humour such as satire, parody, and black comedy to focus on more 'realistic' and 'explicit' instances of rooting for harm, there is reason to be wary.

In highlighting our ability to root for bad guys and immoral outcomes, academics such as Bruce Kerievsky (2010) imply that such a response is somehow abnormal, an enigmatic response best avoided or prevented. But Justin D'arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000) argue that although human beings 'tend to be uncomfortable with any endorsement of feelings that are morally objectionable' (p. 86), whether an emotion is *fitting* to a situation is a separate issue to whether the response is *moral*. 'An emotion can be fitting despite being wrong to feel', write the philosophers — in line with Ted Cohen's argument against wholesale condemnation and dismissal of immoral laughter — and they suggest that moralists frequently conflate these two issues (p. 65). Even if we were to dismiss this argument and hold that morally appropriate and inappropriate rooting responses existed, there is another significant problem in seeing things this way.

Many of those we may be forced to accuse of immorality under a rubric of 'response moralism' include oppressed minorities purposefully rooting *against* a mainstream moral framework they regard as immoral. Cuban viewers watching *Miami Vice* (1984-1989) who root for their bad guy 'brothers' (see Fiske 1989b); homeless men who erupt into 'loud and enthusiastic cheers' when the terrorists in *Die Hard* (1988) needlessly kill the CEO of the Nakatomi Corporation (see Fiske & Dawson 1996, pp. 300-301); and women who indulge in what Richard Schickel saw as '"sisterly pleasures of prosecution"' when watching *Fatal Attraction* (1987), taking both 'a certain grim comfort in Dan's discomfiture, and a certain uncomfortable pleasure in Alex's maniacal revenge' (cited in Holmlund 1991, p. 33). Thus the very notion of a correct way to root for narrative outcomes could be accused of political conservatism, favouring dominant ideologies, and any attempt to paint these responses as immoral might quash the ethical and political complexity in such situations.

This becomes even more apparent in screenings of films such as *Ganga Zumba* (1963) where, according to Shohat and Stam, 'it is not uncommon for Black spectators to applaud' when a rebel slave kills a slavedriver 'while Whites (even radical Whites) hold back' (1994, p. 349, brackets in original). Which is the morally apt response? The very notion seems to present morality as purely normative – a system with definitive answers for our every dilemma. When a Bollywood viewer chides those behind her, asking '"Have you no pity?"' because they laugh during a scene in which a nurse holds a candle steadfast, her fingers blistering so that a handsome doctor can complete lifesaving surgery by candlelight (cited in Srinivas 1998, p. 338), is she responding any more

appropriately to the fiction than those she accuses of moral failure? Where some may contend that it is immoral to laugh at the nurse's noble suffering, others could argue the woman has been '"taken" or "done"' by a film that promotes traditional gender roles which continue to support real-world suffering and oppression. How are we to tell the so-called culturally duped from the ideologically resistant; the morally contaminated from the morally clean? For these reasons, any attempt to deride the diverse range of rooting responses across audiences is itself ethically problematic to the emancipatory spirit, and should be viewed with a certain level of suspicion.

'What happens between people and film?', ponders dissident director, Dušan Makavejev. 'A lot of "illegal" things happen--illegal things, psychologically speaking, things people would never confess' (cited in Oumano & Oumano 1985, p. 253). The freedom of audiences to engage in these 'illegal operations'[21] could be considered a place of opposition as much as manipulation, but this virtual space for sexual, racial, and ideological imaginings remains the same territory that all moralising parties, whether Left or Right, hope to police. Although we may feel that any ongoing effort to morally enlighten and improve both viewer and wider world an admirable effort, not only is it potentially unrealistic to believe emotional response at the height of suspense can be controlled, but also the lived consequences of this mission frequently push outcomes in the exact opposite direction. Select filmmakers and their audiences suffer at the hands of these claims, which deride certain forms of popular cinema and those who partake in it under the inadequately investigated assumption that rooting for narrative outcomes is **mechanical** and **manipulative**, **artless** and **immoral**.

Stop Being So Childish

'The emotion of not wanting a hero to die, of wanting a heroine to be happy, is an infantile one', proclaims Parker Tyler (1944, p. 68). And his choice of words is hardly coincidental. Children have long been portrayed as especially sensitive to 'emotional possession' and imitation in the face of film's intense powers of illusion (see Charters 1933; Comstock, Paler & Durr 1980; Giroux 1997; Holaday & Stoddard 1970; Noble 1975; Pecora, Murray & Wartella 2007; Schramm, Lyle & Parker 1961). These attacks on rooting are most likely attempting to combat this 'possession' – whether consciously or not – in their argument that the participatory act of rooting for narrative outcomes is something to be outgrown.

Further support for the supposed trappings of infantile interaction with 'inferior' narrative cinema is offered by Ethiopian-American filmmaker, Haile Gerima, who vividly recalls a childhood spent rooting against his own race. 'Every time that an African person appeared threatening behind Tarzan we screamed with all our strength, attempting to tell

him that "they" were coming', Gerima explains (cited in Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 348). So signals his belief in the allure and danger of rooting, and the implication that, like Tyler, what was enjoyable as a child should be put away as an adult. Exactly why this is the case, however, remains rarely (if ever) disclosed, let alone adequately justified. Instead, there is an assumption that rooting is intellectually, aesthetically, and ethically inferior to alternative modes of reception, and that there are considerable real world consequences to such 'infantile' participatory responses.[22]

Since its birth, cinema has frequently been seen as a site of moral corruption by religious groups, reformists, politicians, and freedom fighters (see Saunders 2011). Many have argued that Hollywood movies essentially encourage audiences to 'leave their brain at the door'. Such folk wisdom fosters claims that unethical rooting responses often remain intellectually unchallenged inside the cinema and may thereby contaminate beliefs and behavior outside it. Thus movies may blind us to oppression and the possibility of social progress (see Adorno & Horkheimer 1997; Comolli & Narboni 1971; Macdonald, D 1953; Postman 1985), or promote the physical and psychological oppression of others (see Bandura, Ross & Ross 1963; Mulvey 1975/1989; Shohat & Stam 2003). Such a view has been aided by the neglect, and at times contempt, of mass moviegoers and their interaction with the screen stories. It is not hard to imagine that this omission of actual audience experience, or its occasional recognition and apparent misuse (see, for example, Jowett, Jarvie & Fuller-Seeley 1996), has been calculated in order to preach a point these parties are convinced *a priori* to be true: that movies either encourage immoral behavior or provide an opiate to the masses that prevents political progress.

'The effects of popular culture are generally viewed apocalyptically by both the left and the right', notes Ava Collins (1993, p. 28). And as cinema is arguably pop culture at its most popular, is it any wonder that so many have seen the need to police rooting for narrative outcomes through subtle forms of censorship or 're-programming'? The urgency of this task is given fuel by movie magic's apparent ability to seduce not only unenlightened children but also the most politically committed audience members. Lydia Sargent somewhat satirically points out that when jilted single career woman, Alex (Glenn Close), infamously boils her ex-lover's family pet in *Fatal Attraction* (1987),

> Even the most hard-hearted of feminists in the audience . . . TURN ON HER. After all, killing men is OK but nobody boils a bunny . . . and gets away with it (cited in Holmlund 1991, p. 34, ellipses and emphasis in original).

And if this evaporation of ethical strength is put down to their 'emotions getting the best of them', it is certainly not the result of sex or gender. Bertolt Brecht, the ultimate advocate of

non-infantile intellectual detachment, admitted to finding himself unable to resist the spell cast by *Gunga Din* (1939) that took his rooting responses in 'unethical' directions.

> I saw British occupation forces fighting a native population. I felt like applauding and laughed in all the right places. Despite the fact that I knew all the time that there was something wrong, that the Indians are not primitive and uneducated people and that Gunga Din could also be seen as a traitor to his people (cited in Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 151).

Brecht's reflection is another good example of Cohen's point about laughter and my own point in relation to rooting. Brecht 'felt like applauding and laughed in all the right places' but remained critical aware that 'the Indians are not primitive and uneducated people, and that Gunga Din could also be seen as a traitor', demonstrating that we might indulge in our participatory responses *and* critically reflect upon them and their construction. It should also be noted that emotionally manipulated rooting responses are not always at the expense of the oppressed. Even white, middle-class viewers have been seen to 'cheer the black heroes of *Shaft* and *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) when they outwitted the dumb white cops' (Stempel 2001, p. 99). Nevertheless, popular movie practitioners and their audiences often take on attitudes that look down on these kinds of participatory responses, policing themselves and their peers.

Self-Censorship

'[O]ne of the things that I've always thought was poppycock was the whole "rooting" notion', says screenwriter Joe Eszterhas (cited in Froug 1992, p. 87). It is therefore no small irony that Eszterhas's scripts could be said to contain clear industry models of rooting interest – *Flashdance* (1983), *Basic Instinct* (1992)*, Nowhere To Run* (1993) – and its abject failure – *Jade* (1995), *Showgirls* (1995), *An Alan Smithee Film: Burn Hollywood Burn* (1998). What Eszterhas takes issue with is not the claimed existence of rooting, nor even its usefulness in retaining audience interest. Instead, he is offended by its supposed simplicity. 'I'm not interested in having to root for someone; I'm trying to get some sort of an understanding as to what makes people tick and what they're about', he explains. 'When you start viewing things in terms of who you're rooting for, you wind up writing formulaic things' (cited in Froug 1992, p. 87).

This mirrors Fred Zinnemann's attitude outlined earlier (cited in Silke 1964, p. 21). The old Hollywood director's reasoning that in the real world there are no good guys and bad guys coincides with Eszterhas's notion of the need for 'lifelike' characters onscreen and 'understanding as to what makes people tick' offscreen, whilst his dismissal of rooting interest as kindergarten stuff takes up the same claims of ethical and artistic simplicity Eszterhas implies here. Another filmmaker who appears to agree with Zinnemann and Eszterhas on this issue is Elia Kazan.

> In nearly all Hollywood films you root for or against somebody. The director organizes your emotions so you know what you're supposed to feel. I try to get the audience bewildered (Kazan 1999, p. 307).

Ironically, given their broadly anti-rooting attitudes, both Zinnemann and Kazan's films often succeed or fail based on an ability to create rooting interest. Where Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954) is arguably a classic case of rooting interest in the cinema, in contrast, the director's main objective in making *Baby Doll* (1956) was 'to break down the convention of having someone sympathetic to root for'. Kazan explains proudly, 'Here you root for nobody,' only to sum up the finished film with, 'I don't think it was entirely successful' (1999, p. 230). Zinnemann's *Behold a Pale Horse* (1964), a box office bomb about a Spanish anarchist guerilla played by Gregory Peck, also struggled to make viewers root for anybody or anything. 'Columbia did all it could to promote the film but audiences stayed away', reflected Zinnemann. 'Perhaps we had no right to take it for granted that the general public would identify with the story and develop a rooting interest in those unfamiliar characters' (1992, p. 189).

In contrast, a decade later Zinnemann managed to make a film that has since been praised by screenwriter, Thomas Pope, as 'one of the best pure thrillers ever made' (1998, p. 167).[24] Nevertheless, and in spite of reporting that *The Day of the Jackal* (1973) 'came out 95 percent as I had hoped it would', the director retained his dim view of rooting and remained eager to assure us that it was 'just a technical exercise in suspense' and 'made purely as entertainment' (Zinnemann 2005, p. 31). But the film seems a far cry from Charles Higham's claimed mechanical and manipulative string-pulling of audience emotions for which he chastised Hitchcock's art — an empty exercise he claimed involved a 'deliberate pandering to mob lust' (1962, p. 4). Pope insists that *The Day of the Jackal* 'doesn't give us an easy choice as to whom to root for', and that Zinnemann 'turned the tables on his usual moral universe, with the antagonist gaining our sympathy even as we're horrified at his growing list of murders' (1998, pp. 167-8). Pope thus concludes that the film is ultimately one 'in which the moral crisis rested not with the hero [as in Zinnemann's previous films], but with the audience, who find themselves rooting for a killer to murder an innocent man' (p. 166). This suggests that rooting is neither a simple formula nor automatically ethically inferior, but rather a key component in conveying the moral complexity that both Zinnemann and Kazan champion. Zinnemann's original statement about rooting's all-too-easy creation, 'If you do it skillfully enough…' (cited in Silke 1964, p. 21), also suggests a similar thing: that the process is not necessarily mechanical or artless, but actually requires a certain level of craft to achieve.

'The power of the rooting interest to me is the essence of movie-dom', proclaims screenwriter, Bruce Joel Rubin, echoing Jack Nicholson's opening statement about its importance to the industry. 'But how do you do it? If everyone could follow the recipe like that we'd have a million great movies out there. I don't know exactly how to do it, either', admits Rubin, even though his successful films have often managed to generate the response (cited in Engel 1995, pp. 3, 5).[25] All this head-scratching by filmmakers about how rooting interest works is a sign that film theory is perfectly poised to step in and shed some light on the issue. Unfortunately the topic remains tainted by its association with primal passion at the expense of intellectual reason that us 'good viewers' espouse.

> The film was great, but the audience was awful. Ladies and children just couldn't stop screaming, and most of the time for no apparent reason. I hated how primitive they were acting (cited in Stempel 2001, p. 224).

So recalls Armando Sanchez of his cinema encounter with *Scream* (1996), painting participatory responses that would seem expected, justified, and arguably morally appropriate when witnessing the horrors of a slasher film, as some form of sub-human behavior. Such was his disdain of these unknown Others that Sanchez literally walked out of the cinema. Even when viewers remain seated and respond as the filmmakers intended, however, they may still have a hard time accepting their own experience.

'*The Notebook* [2004]…is hokum of the first order', Harry Wallop assures the reader of the hugely popular romantic drama, despite admitting that 'it nearly always comes up in lists of the top 10 tearjerkers of all time' (Wallop 2014). Such denigrating statements exist beyond the mere boundaries of 'personal taste', for they are surely influenced by the unspoken assumption that blind appeal to emotion and entertainment is clearly inferior to quiet contemplation. More disturbing is the fact that this dismissal is made despite his own admission that the film's effectiveness extended even to him. 'Embarrassingly, despite thinking the first four fifths was a big clunking cliché, I sobbed like a baby at the end', he admits in service of his newspaper report on the neuroscience of movie effects.[26]

Hence where Hitchcock insisted that 'Watching a well-made film, we don't sit by as spectators; we participate' (1936/1995, p. 109), dominant discourse on cinema has tended to promote the view that this participation should be of a particular sort. And this sort is thought to determine the very definition of 'well-made' movies and 'well-behaved' audiences. Viewers like Wallop can therefore feel caught in a schism between the intellectual impropriety of 'empty' rooting responses and their intense emotional pleasures. But even if the dichotomy between Art and entertainment, emotion and reason, depth and frivolity that props up this distinction were somehow based on sound reasoning, this ignores the one simple fact that led Wallop to weep his eyes out at *The*

Notebook's end: there is no remedy for rooting. There is no remedy for rooting, just as there us no remedy for laughter, for there is no antidote to our own humanity. There is, however, a potential remedy for rooting's evil effects — if they exist — and this can only come from *understanding*.

A Prophylactic For Passionate Arousal

Open inquiry into the nature of rooting may help end the ugly and often ignored oppression of those around us whom we adjudge as inappropriate in either their narrative construction or narrative response (though we frequently do the same). It may also lead us toward techniques that help prevent potential negative effects associated with rooting. These techniques could be of a two-fold nature:

a) those willingly utilised by practitioners *before the fact* during narrative film construction, and, perhaps even more significantly for the politically-minded,

b) those willingly adopted by viewers *after the fact*, reflecting on their own rooting responses, how they were influenced or coerced by the movie, and what they might say about the wider world.

Louise Rosenblatt (2002) argues that readers adopt a variety of 'aspects of consciousness' during narrative encounters, which she calls 'stances'. These range along a continuum between *efferent* (i.e. factual) and *aesthetic* (i.e. emotional) throughout moment-by-moment 'transaction' with the text. Maureen McLaughlin and Glenn DeVoogd (2004) argue for the addition of a third stance to Rosenblatt's (1994) Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum: the *critical* stance. McLaughlin and DeVoogd explain:

> When reading from a critical stance, readers use their background knowledge to understand relationships between their ideas and the ideas presented by the author in the text…In other words, readers have the power to envision alternate ways of viewing the author's topic, and they exert that power when they read from a critical stance (2004, pp. 52-53).

This kind of practice is inherent in any critical thinking familiar to academics. However, in relation to popular narrative reception and rooting, we should note that the critical stance is frequently adopted *after the fact*. In other words, as suggested above, we may take on a broadly aesthetic stance *during* a joke or movie, respond emotionally with laughter or rooting interest, and then become critical of the text, its construction and rhetorical purpose *afterwards*, just as Brecht did of *Gunga Din* (1939). Thus the critical stance need not be performed on-the-fly, preventing our emotional participatory responses in popular cinema. It can involve *critical reflection*.:

'Reading from a critical stance requires not only reading and understanding the words, continue McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 'but "reading the world" and **understanding a text's**

purpose so readers will not be **manipulated by it'** (2004, p. 53, emphasis added). This raises two important points. Firstly, being **manipulated by it** may not be the problem so much as the *undesirable consequences* of being manipulated by it. That these two things are not synonymous is suggested by the fact that 'ethical' stories freely manipulate without drawing widespread condemnation, especially from those who agree with the supposed message these stories transmit. It should also be apparent in our ability to become angry at a film like *Death Wish* (1974), with its vigilant hero played by Charles Bronson gunning down petty criminals in the dark streets of New York, precisely because we experience *both* the tug of its emotional manipulation and disgust at the direction it attempts to take us.

Secondly, the best way to **understand a text's purpose**, short of asking the author (and even this assumes they knew, and/or succeeded in, what they were doing) is to study film and narrative craft. As I will argue, following Henry Staten's fine work on a renewed formalist project returning to the ancient Greek concept of *techne* (2009, 2011, 2012), a text's purpose can be 'read' not through analysis of the author's intention – which leads to the so-called 'intentional fallacy' – but in the *techne-intention* of its craft work. Thus investigating the craft behind the creation of suspense and side-taking that leads us to root for particular narrative outcomes may make an important contribution to reading popular cinema from what we might call a *retrospective critical stance*. Moreover, it is not only the narrow confines of cinema, or even other narrative forms, to which these critical tools may apply.

'We are inveterate storytellers', observes philosopher Owen Flanagan (1992, p. 198). Story surrounds us at all hours of the day, perhaps more than ever in this digital age. So central are these tales to our existence that many claim they are fundamental to our humanity, found as they are across all known cultures. More important still is the belief that they are intimately bound to our identity, shaping it at both an individual and communal level (see, for example, Blume, Leitgeb & Rössner 2015; Elderton et al. 2014). 'As we tell stories about others, we *construct* images or meanings of them and their actions…in a sense, making them up', proclaim Arthur P. Bochner and Nicholas A. Riggs. 'The same can be said about the stories we tell ourselves' (2014, p. 195, emphasis added). On this logic, any potential insight into narrative construction and the manipulative techniques that encourage its audience to make particular meanings of others and their actions, inducing a passionate desire for a particular outcome (i.e. rooting), may also help us to critique the stories outside the cinema that have an even greater, more immediate impact upon our lives.

Adopting a *retrospective critical* stance informed by this new understanding of constructive screencraft may to help prevent any undesirable consequences of our *immediate* affective responses taking hold. We might laugh and then be critical. 'The goal is for readers to become text critics in everyday life', write McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004, p. 53). In relation to rooting for narrative outcomes in popular cinema, any enhanced understanding of the maneuvers and mechanisms that make us emotionally side-take allows for potential reflection upon our own reactions and critical consideration of how the storyteller and/or story aesthetically and ideologically slants things in favour of one side of the argument to manipulate our response. And nowhere is this practice more apparent outside the cinema than in political spin and media scapegoating.

This critical stance need not necessarily occur after the story is over, however, where some may feel the seeds of 'ill effects' at the movies have already been planted. **'**Emotional reactions may be strongly invoked but intellect and judgment are never completely submerged', argues V.F. Perkins (1972/1991, p. 140). Audience members can oscillate between immersion in a story and reflection as to its construction and intention, both during viewing or as a two-step process, engaging in a story then reflecting on its workings retrospectively. Either way, it need not be one or the other — immersion or reflection — as theorists advocating dispassionate engagement often presume. I argue that it is possible to be in both states, the same way children (and adults) can play games in an imagined reality without losing the reality of the real world. This seems difficult to reconcile on purely logical grounds, but we must, once again, 'face the fact' that our minds appear able to run two separate states simultaneously, allowing for both critical consideration of the world around us *and* immersion in an imaginary moment. As Karl Popper pointed out of optical illusions:

> [W]hen they do mislead us, as in a cinema…they do not lead adults to assert seriously that we have before us a world of things. Thus we are not (as Kant and Hume thought) the victims of our 'human nature' or of our mental digestive apparatus, of our psychology or physiology. We are not for ever [sic] the prisoners of our minds. We can learn to criticize ourselves, and so to transcend ourselves (1983/2005, p. 154).

Just because we immediately laugh at an inappropriate joke or hope for an inappropriate outcome does not mean we cannot dispute its moral validity moments later. Media psychologists, Konijn and Ten Holt (2011), lend further credence to this claim.

> Media users can thus be trained to control their initial and emotional responses to media fare in order to undo possible unwanted effects of mass media by realizing how such effects are imposed upon them (p. 53).

The authors give the simple example of a child's own emotion regulation, where a fear response might be cognitively controlled by 'realizing "the blood" is just tomato ketchup', a

practice that may 'undo the automatized response' (Konijn & Ten Holt 2011, p. 52). In the same way, media education about the biocultural mechanisms behind suspense and side-taking could help us better contextualise and assess our own experience. Such a practice need not be a case of 'unweaving the rainbow', as Keats famously said of Newton's scientific explanation of rainbows, because understanding does not kill the immediate effect.[27] Double vision is our gift from the Gods. The oscillation between immersion and reflection, like the subtle and ever-changing shifts in Rosenblatt's stance toward cinematic texts, means that when watching suspense scenes 'you can watch the storytelling gears at work, be fully aware of how the cues are designed to stimulate your emotions and still find yourself tensing up in fear and anticipation' (Mittell 2007). But this does not mean you are unable to critically reflect on the entire experience after the fact.

Although Richard Gerrig points out that readers 'rarely debrief themselves by reference to psychological processes' in order to offset any potential undesirable real world influence of narrative media (1993, p. 234), we might dream of a day when ordinary viewers are willing and able to do this with reference to by-then well-established, simply-explained psychological mechanisms and craft maneuvers. If not for emancipatory purposes, then for purely aesthetic ones. Even if political change via *retrospective critical reflection* is all but a pipe-dream, a sharp rise in both critical appreciation and artistic quality could conceivably be achieved by furnishing filmmakers and their audiences with this knowledge. By this, I am not mounting a prescriptive or elitist argument about the kind of narrative artworks that ought to be created; I refer only to enhanced enjoyment and pleasure, an end too readily (publically) dismissed.[28] To ask for an end to rooting, even when of a 'questionable nature', is to kill a pleasure that means so much to so many. In the absence of solid evidence for the ill effects of rooting, such a move would appear to result in far more harm than benefit, and is thus difficult to justify on purely moral grounds.

Conclusion

All evidence suggests that Hollywood filmmakers and their audiences are both familiar with rooting for narrative outcomes and often eager to induce it. And yet, 'rooting' in the cinema remains a perverse pleasure, privately coveted and publicly condemned. Though children do it, grandmas do it, homeless men and Hispanics do it, the study of rooting and its dance of predictions and predilections that is so pervasive in cinema reception, so explicit in suspense, and so potentially important to cinema construction and critique has been severely neglected. Furthermore, filmmakers and their audiences continue to suffer everyday oppression at the hands of these claims, which deride various forms of cinema and, by extension, the practitioners who make it and the audiences who enjoy it, under the as yet inadequately investigated assumption that rooting in popular cinema is

mechanical and **manipulative**, **artless** and **immoral**. That a pleasure undertaken by so many could be ignored for so long is, to this self-confessed cinema slut, an unforgivable omission for an intellectual tradition that aims to speak fearlessly of lived human experience. I therefore ask that you suspend judgment, take Martin Barker's sage advice to 'distrust easy concepts and theorisations – they are the bane of understanding, and the tools of our enemies' (2002, p. 75), and prepare for a change of tack.

'SECRETS FROM AN EMPTY SAFE'
ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE MAGIC OF CINEMATIC SUSPENSE

Wherein we survey what the Master knew about encouraging rooting...

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

I am The Great Alfredo. For my first trick, I shall make the pages before you disappear with a simple touch of my magic wand. When I learned this episode concerned a certain Alfred J. Hitchcock and the secrets of suspense he keeps, I felt the sudden urge to fill my wand with the most powerful spirits known to man. Please do not try this at home or you may be truly haunted by the results. If all readers can kindly take two steps back, I will then ask the Cigarette Girl beside me to strike a match and hold it to my wand. Ladies and gentlemen, when the flame meets the dark Scottish spirits herein, which have long-haunted the hills of Glenfiddich, they will burst into a ball of blue fire, attesting to their great strength — estimated at over 80% proof. As the scent of flaming single malt fills the air, I shall then, with a mere touch of my flaming wand, make the pages before you disappear in a puff of smoke. Please hold your applause.

What is this magic that is a movie?
(Anderson 1998, p. 111)

For over a century, suspense scenes have provided the most explicit and enduring instances of the impassioned response known as *rooting* for narrative outcomes in popular cinema. No figure has been more inextricably linked to this experience than the Master of Suspense, Alfred Hitchcock, celebrated the world over for his 'genius' in such matters. 'Hitchcock was the ultimate magician of the cinema', writes Patrick McGilligan, 'an illusionist as pleased by his own mastery as he was by his audiences' reactions' (2003, p. 3). What makes Hitchcock an even more compelling starting point in any investigation into the production of suspense and side-taking (and thus *rooting* for narrative outcomes) was his willingness to talk publicly about his practice. 'Unlike the classic magician, Hitchcock, the modern magician, always shows his wand', explains Sidney Gottlieb (1995, p. xviii). More than any other filmmaker, Hitchcock liked to talk shop with industry outsiders. And so, if we are willing to accept that rooting for narrative outcomes is an issue of significance to all parties involved in popular story production, reception, and criticism, we ought to ask about the nature of his magic and how much he knew about the inner workings of its creation, cinematically and psychologically.

The Suspense Solution

'The trouble with suspense', bemoaned Hitchcock back in 1959, 'is that few people know what it is' (cited in Brean, p. 72). One thing we do know is that it is a solution to a practical problem that popular entertainers encounter at every working moment. The entymology of the English word *entertain* derives from the Latin-derived Old French *entretenir*, meaning 'to hold together,' which by the late fifteenth century, came to mean 'to keep up, maintain, to keep (someone) in a certain frame of mind' (*Online Etymology Dictionary* n.d., 'entertain'). And despite the elevation of the Master's art, like all storytellers, from Sophocles to Shakespeare or Homer to Hemingway, Hitchcock the popular entertainer only managed to avoid the ever-present threat of failure when his audience's attention was held by his art.

'"My attitude to film-making is really quite simple', he told Roderick Mann in 1959. 'I just keep reminding myself what are all those seats in the cinema for?"' (cited in Mann, p. 88). This helps explain *Psycho* screenwriter Joseph Stefano's recollection that boredom was 'Hitchcock's greatest bugaboo…about the only thing he was really afraid of' (cited in Baer 2008, p. 82). For Hitchcock, as for popular storytellers before him, suspense was the ideal solution to the problem of retaining audience interest and avoiding the threat of boredom

at all costs. '[S]uspense is the most powerful means of holding on to the viewer's attention', The Master told Truffaut (cited in 1967/1984, pp. 135-136), drawing attention to the peculiar power Oscar Wilde highlighted the year of Hitchcock's birth when Gwendolen gasped in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 'This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last' (1899, p. 146). If we accept that the emotional effect of suspense is primarily a means to an end – a bid to avoid boredom, to hold attention, and keep the (paying) public in their seats – any assessment of the value of Hitchcock's widespread claims about this solution, its origin and its implementation, requires careful consideration of where he might be drawing this knowledge from.

'I believe that filmmakers are like magicians who through sleight of mind can manipulate our attention and emotions', writes neuroscientist Arthur P. Shimamura (2013a). 'Over the decades, filmmakers have developed techniques that enhance this movie magic, though we have very little understanding of how these techniques actually work'. The task of film theory, as I see it, is therefore not to focus on *magic* per se, but on the production of *magical effects* in an intended audience.[29]

David Bordwell has repeatedly expressed an important thought on this issue. He writes:

> Filmmakers are practical psychologists artists who have mastered the skill of playing with our sense… (Bordwell 2009),
>
> …our predispositions... (Bordwell 2011a),
>
> …our habits of mind in order to produce experiences (Bordwell 2011b).

No description better applies to the Master of Suspense and his raison d'être. Martin F. Norden dubs Hitchcock 'the most famous behaviorist filmmaker of all time' (1980, p. 74). George Cukor calls him 'a master of well thought out effects' (cited in Overstreet 1964/2001, p. 30). And Richard Allen uses the verb 'encourage' no less than fourteen times in a single chapter to describe Hitchcock's manufacturing of suspense (2003). According to Allen, the audience is 'encouraged to sympathize with' (p. 166), 'encouraged to root for' (p. 166), 'encouraged to wish for' (pp. 167-168), 'encouraged to identify with' (p. 175), and 'encouraged…to take perverse pleasure in' (p. 168) whatever takes the Master's fancy. But what exactly is the nature of this encouragement? 'Unfortunately for us', laments Bordwell (2013), 'they [i.e. the filmmakers] usually can't tell us' (p. 29). Like any seasoned practitioner, Hitchcock was undoubtedly filled with knowledge. How much of this was in the gut rather than the head, readily available to communicate as craft (even if he thought beneficial to do so) is the question at hand.

'[B]eing a creative person', Hitchcock told John Russell Taylor, 'I am a very technical person. The actual exercise of technique is very important to me, the practical solution to technical problems. I have always needed to do things, never had much taste for philosophising about what I do' (cited in 1977, p. 174). Given the director's widely disseminated discussion on filmmaking, this should come as a shock to most. Is he being tongue in cheek? After all these years yapping, he wants to claim he 'never had much of a taste for philosophising'? If this is true, it suggests that even if Truffaut was right that Hitchcock had 'given more thought to the potential of his art than many of his colleagues' (1967/1984, pp. 11-12), the depth of that thought and his subsequent understanding may have been much less than his mesmerised audience has assumed. And this conclusion could certainly be drawn from the following observations Hitchcock made over the years:

> *Audiences are very strange.* I know their reactions so well I don't have to go to the theater anymore: the emotional anxieties are pretty well standard (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 29, emphasis added).

> [A]udiences love to enjoy the very thing they have built in, and that's fear…[*F*]*or some inexplicable reason*, they like to…put their toe in the cold water of fear to see what it's like (cited in 1960, emphasis added).

Although Hitchcock claimed to have identified the buttons to push to achieve a desired effect, he appears no wiser than the rest as to how or why they actually work. He had, in fact, admitted exactly this in an entry on 'The Film Thriller' for *Film Review 1946-1947*.

> Let me say now that the thing which makes an audience breathless as the heroine's head approaches *is no more understood by me than it is by you* (Hitchcock 1947/2014, p. 40, emphasis added).

Audience response remains strange, and the reason behind it, inexplicable. This conclusion was even more apparent in interviews where the director described the audience's unerring expectation that the hero or heroine is in danger, despite seeing such genre tropes many times before. In 1950 he told David Brady,

> *It's always been a mystery to me* that audiences get apprehensive when the circular saw begins to reach the hero's neck. So far as I know, it never has yet in all the history of melodrama (cited in Brady, D 1950, p. 130, emphasis added; see also MacDonald, R 1954, p. 4).

Twenty-five years and sixteen motion pictures later, the director was equally certain about the existence of this mysterious phenomenon yet none the wiser as to its cause.

> They [the audience] don't stop and analyze it and say, "Well, he'll never be killed." They still believe he may be killed right up until the last minute. *Why they do it, I don't know. But it is a fact* (cited in Knight 1973, p. 180 emphasis added; see also *The Dick Cavett Show: Alfred Hitchcock* 1972, Part 3 – 04:37).

Hitchcock would seem to have remained in possession of a reliable way to induce a magical effect in his audience with no particular idea about how or why it actually worked.

Take the director's famous bomb-under-the-table scenario, offered as an antidote to the supposed ongoing confusion between surprise and suspense. Two characters sit at a table drinking coffee, playing cards, talking about baseball, or anything else the audience considers frivolous. A bomb suddenly explodes beneath the table, causing surprise and short-lived shock in the audience. In contrast, telling the audience a bomb will soon explode beneath the table causes unbearable and sustained suspense. To take the anecdote at face value might lead one to conclude that the key to crafting suspense is to grant the audience superior knowledge to the characters. Indeed, this is the reading Hitchcock repeatedly pushed. 'The point is to give the viewer information which the cast doesn't have', he explained in a 1968 interview (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 31). As general storytelling advice, this might be sound, but as theoretical explanation, it clearly is not.

Suppose the scene were to continue and that in all the excited banter about baseball, a clumsy character spills his coffee. Black brew drips over the table's edge onto his companion's shiny leather shoes. Bending down to wipe the stain from his wingtips, the man eyes the explosive device ticking away under the table and is now on equal par with the audience. Does suspense cease? Certainly not. And a lifetime of anxious movie moments whenever we witness characters fully aware of their predicament as the rope is breaking, the killer gaining, or even the bomb ticking down as the hero must decide which wire to cut should make this perfectly clear. Hitchcock, in fact, advised that my imagined extension should occur; that someone sitting at the table must accidentally tap the bomb with their foot, look down, spot the device, and pick it up in time to throw it out the window (see Hitchcock 1968b, p. 20; Schickel 1975, p. 294; Stevens Jr 2006, p. 259). However, his description fuses the discovery of the device with its safe disposal, masking the fact that suspense would typically *continue*, largely unabated, after discovery as the disposal is stretched out onscreen just like the baseball conversation before it. Thus characters would typically scramble to pick up the bomb, navigate a swarm of hysterical patrons to reach the window, force open its swollen hinges, and toss the device out before it is too late. Clearly, then, suspense is only truly defused once the bomb has safely exploded outside, not when our knowledge matches the potential victims, which suggests that Hitchcock's preferred epistemic mismatches between viewer and character may be an intensifier of suspense rather than a cause per se.

In his entry on 'Film Production' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1968a), Hitchcock again states: 'Suspense is created by the process of giving the audience information that the character in the scene does not have', but the example he offers from *The Wages of Fear* (1953) seems to clash with this claim. The characters in this thriller are fully aware that every bump their trucks drive over may cause the nitroglycerine they are transporting to

explode. At best, Hitchcock might be referring to *specific cues* that an explosion is increasingly likely, which the audience is privy but the characters are not, but this is hardly comparable to a bomb hidden beneath a table. Even if a character attempting to dispose of the bomb cannot see the clock on the device that the audience sees in close-up ticking away, this does not mean she is unaware of looming danger and free of suspense.

What Hitchcock's bomb-under-the-table anecdote actually describes is 'dramatic irony' (Mackey & Cooper 2000, p. 90), a narrative strategy that *may* lead to suspense, but which is by no means necessary for its construction. Susan Smith therefore makes a distinction between 'shared suspense' felt with a character and 'direct suspense' felt by the viewer alone (2000, pp. 20-22), whilst Richard Allen describes a similar division with 'pure suspense' versus 'subjective suspense' (2003, pp. 174-175). Hence the actual insight into suspense in general that Hitchcock offers here is ultimately lacking.[30]

The point, however, is not that Hitchcock necessarily believed all suspense arose from 'epistemic superiority' (Smith, S 2000, p. 20). After all, many of the director's most famous moments, from the crop-duster chase in *North by Northwest* (1959), to the murderous neighbor finally entering the peeping-tom protagonist's darkened apartment at the end of *Rear Window* (1954), encourage suspense in the absence of dramatic irony. And of this he would have been well aware. Furthermore, Hitchcock had long ago implied the same distinction between objective and subjective suspense that Richard Allen (2003) extends (see Brady, D 1950; Hitchcock 1939/1995). The real point to be made here is that, despite explicitly writing, 'Basically it [i.e. suspense] is providing the audience with information that the characters do not have' (Hitchcock 1968b, p. 18), The Master's advice on this matter was often muddied by the 'modern' nature of his magic act.

Bewitched by Hitch

Although Hitchcock's 'pleasure in showing his wand and telling stories' (Gottlieb 1995, p. xvii) may have been authentic, it would be a mistake to believe he had stepped off stage during these moments, candidly revealing the true nature of his magic. His pleasure lay in the magic trick itself, and his explanation of the magic of suspense might still be little more than smoke and mirrors; another attempt to create an entertaining illusion and keep his character alive. The fact that he trotted out these tales of wisdom like well-worn party tricks has often been overshadowed by his enduring reputation as The Master of Suspense, a man brimming with secrets of screencraft born of blessed genius and superior intellect. But this illusion owes much of its debt to his strategic eagerness to show his wand in the first place, offering perfectly contained pearls of wisdom in public. It is

perhaps telling that, like most any magician, Hitchcock conceded in an early article, 'it doesn't do to give away too many tricks of the trade' (1936/1995, p. 110), though even this could be taken as a calculated comment implying that he knew them all.

In 1877, the father of modern day magic, Jean Robert-Houdin, announced an important observation about the entire nature of the art of illusion. A magician, he declared, is merely 'an actor playing the part of a magician' (1877/2011, p. 43). Hitchcock may have been full of something, but that something was not necessarily the secrets of suspense his performance implied. As magic theorist Jim Steinmeyer so eloquently put it more recently, in light of Robert-Houdin's insight about the art, 'Magicians guard an empty safe' (Steinmeyer 2005, p. 16). The secrets that we suppose maestros such as Houdini or Hitchcock hold are mythical, a misdirection to avoid our attention settling on the sad truth behind the trick. The source of the effect is, in actual fact, entirely mechanical and rather mundane. 'When an audience learns how it's done', explains Steinmeyer, 'they quickly dismiss the art: "Is that all it is?"' (Steinmeyer, p. 16). This is why Hitchcock's nuggets of wisdom, self-contained in casual anecdotes, are so popular. They simultaneously reveal and conceal, tantalising us with tricks of the trade, granting a fleeting glimpse behind the curtain, creating an insatiable curiosity for more and a firm conviction that the safe Hitchcock guards is full of fascinating filmmaking secrets.

> Stripped of his self-woven veil of romance…[he] stood forth, in the uncompromising light
> of cold historical facts, a mere pretender, a man who waxed great on the brainwork of others,
> a mechanician who had boldly filched the inventions of the master craftsmen among his
> predecessors (p. 8).

So wrote a young Harry Houdini of Jean Robert-Houdin, who directly inspired Houdini's own stage name. The context was a book by the ambitious newcomer entitled *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin* (Houdini 1908), in which he publically declared his idol an empty PR man who rewrote history, avoided crediting others, and had the audacity to hire a ghostwriter to pen his memoirs.[31] The above passage might well have been written about Hitchcock. But it might also have been written *by* Hitchcock (and his own ghostwriters), for Houdini's pronouncement that Robert-Houdin's autobiography must be unmasked as fiction is itself an act of pure PR. Debunking famous conjurers and revealing a carefully chosen number of techniques is, at heart, another device to suggest to an audience that one has Mastered the *true* secrets of magic. 'Explanations' of awe-inspiring effects are themselves a sort of misdirection, turning the audience's attention away from the fact that conjuring is simply an 'illusion in the minds of the audience' (Steinmeyer 2005, p. 17) toward the infinitely more compelling conclusion that before you stands a man who knows all the tricks. Alfred Hitchcock, Master of Suspense, was such a

man, and he knowingly cultivated this impression in his audience, thereby creating an insatiable curiosity for answers in the same way Houdini's public debunking practices did.

In his bewitching anecdotes, Hitchcock stuck to what worked: short, surefire witticisms and simple party tricks, powerfully suggestive but with limited explanatory power. He recognised the delight an interviewer, listener, or reader could feel when being directed to the wonders of film's ability to affect us that are too often taken for granted. Examples of this occur in his bomb-under-the-table anecdote, where one piece of information is shown to induce a complete change of emotion; in his discussion of the MacGuffin, where the centre of many stories is revealed to be an empty excuse that even the writers do not know their contents (secret plans, government documents, formulas, etc.); and in his drawing attention to the power of pieces of film to tell a purely visual story by describing three simple shots in order during the opening of Chaplin's *The Pilgrim* (1923).

> He had first a scene of prison gates with a guard posting a picture of an escaped criminal, Chaplin. The next scene shows a long, lanky man coming out of a river after a swim to discover that his clothes are gone. The next scene is in a railroad depot where Chaplin is dressed in a parson's clothes which are much too big for him. Here in three brief scenes Chaplin told you everything you needed to know: The tramp has escaped from jail and he has stolen a preacher's clothes (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 28).

This tale seems a perfect illustration of Hitchcock's 'pure cinema,' and so entertaining and enlightening that Hitchcock could retell it (see, for instance, Macklin 1976/2014, p. 54). However, all that the director is drawing attention to is the fact that audiences engage in ongoing Bordwellian hypothesising throughout narrative reception, as they do in virtually every waking moment in the world. Hitchcock might as well have demonstrated the power of cinema by highlighting that when a character dials a telephone in one scene and the film cuts to another phone ringing elsewhere, the audience assumes the person they first saw dialing is on the other end of the line. Hitchcock's offscreen 'genius' is to make the mundane amazing and ascribe it to his eagle eye – to his knowing something what we do not. And he achieves this in spite of the fact that, in many ways, it is not typically conscious to the general public in the first place purely because it is not at all rare, but rather utterly pervasive. This explains why, when Hitchcock claimed to have praised Chaplin for his *Pilgrim* sequence, the comic legend reputedly replied that he 'didn't realise what he had done' (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 28). In other words, Chaplin did it intuitively, for it is standard storytelling, as is dramatic irony (Hitchcock's bomb) and the empty object of desire that provides an excuse for an adventure/thriller plot (the MacGuffin). Hence Hitchcock thoroughly deserves McGilligan's description as 'the ultimate magician of the cinema' (2003, p. 3), for he, too, created wonder in his listeners by alluding to extraordinary explanations rather than mundane realities for the effects onscreen.

In 'Art as Techne, or, The Intentional Fallacy and the Unfinished Project of Formalism' (2009), literary scholar Henry Staten draws attention to the similarity between otherworldly explanations of existence and aesthetics.

> There is a close analogy between intentionalism in aesthetics and the "argument from design" in evolutionary biology; both jump from the evident fact of complex "design" (in the mammalian eye or in a Shakespeare sonnet) to the conclusion that an inexplicable power of intelligence must have created it. These arguments have been soundly rejected in biology but still linger in aesthetics (p. 433).

Evidence of the desire to believe in otherworldly explanations for the origin of creativity, rather than the mundane, is found in John Russell Taylor (2008). After noting that Hitchcock was always incredibly well-prepared and perfectly equipped with 'the memory of a computer', Taylor is still compelled to ignore these everyday explanations for his creative capacity, adding 'And then he was, after all, a genius' as an afterthought.[32] Across Hitchcock studies, unsubstantiated thinking about creative genius remains rampant. David Thomson writes of 'the spirit of art struggling to emerge in the form of a plump, unappealing East London boy, a greengrocer's son, without advantages of class and education, *with only seething brilliance to belie his bulk*', thereby adopting the dumb logic that 'brilliance', an unquantifiable and implicitly innate trait akin to genius, must be trained (2013, emphasis added). The beauty of this argument is that its inherent contradiction means it cannot be falsified. Good quality early Hitchcock can be taken as evidence of his seething brilliance, whilst the mundane or bad can be dismissed as evidence of youth, playful experiment, or forces beyond his control rather than counterevidence that this 'brilliance' might in essence exist.

'A great magic performance consists of a collection of tiny lies in words and deed', writes Jim Steinmeyer, 'that are stacked and arranged ingeniously to form the battlement for an illusion' (2005, p. 17). And Hitchcock, more than any other filmmaker, seemed to realise that the lies best begin before the magician takes the stage.[33] But his ability to mesmerise film critics, theorists, and aficionados has also required the complicity of his audience. Just as the true power of hypnotism does not reside in the mesmerist but in those mesmerised and their own willingness to submit (i.e. their 'hypnotizability') due to the peculiar nature of social psychology and their particular level of suggestibility (see Lazarus, CN 2013), the power of Hitchcock to wow this critical audience has lent heavily on their willingness to be wowed. Almost a century later, as evident in the vast Hitchcock literature and the director's position atop the filmmaking canon, this has come to pass.

The Magic of Movies vs The Science of Suspense

'The humanities have in general suffered from straining for the most far-fetched accounts of how art, literature, and music work', explains David Bordwell, '…often relying on free-association, wordplay, and talking points lifted from favoured *penseurs*' (2011b, emphasis in original). Dreams, voyeurism, regression, mistaken reality, myth, semiotics, suture, identification and artistic genius have all been floated as explanation for movie magic. Explanations selected are heavily influenced by *a priori* assumptions that this magic is a source of ill or artful effects. But there is one other important, albeit invisible, assumption continually made. The magic of movies is too readily taken as evidence of magic itself. To do so is to get off on the wrong foot, for one should not rush out to ask how it is a magician can make a coin disappear and rematerialise; one should stop to ask how it is she can make us fall for the *illusion* that this has occurred when we know it has not.

'[W]e are accustomed to abstain from asking how it became: we rejoice in the present fact as though it came out of the ground by magic', notes Nietzsche of our problematic attitude to art. 'The science of art has, it goes without saying, most definitely to counter this illusion and to display the bad habits and false conclusions of the intellect'' (1886/1996, p. 80). In order to either celebrate or condemn movie magic, most have been blind to Nietzsche's warning and have instead expended their energies straining for 'far-fetched accounts' of the workings of *magic* rather than of *movies* that make this 'magic' happen. The fact that magic and magical effects are not synonymous, and that discussion about the making of movie magic might be intimately entwined with judgmental attitudes to others emanating from mistaken assumptions about the ill and artful effects of this practice is suggested by publication of the very first book on the craft of magic ever written.

Published in 1584, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was written by Reginald Scot neither as a moral lecture or practical manual for wanna-be witches and wizards. Scot took the trouble to reveal the untold secrets of magic as 'an argument against the existence of witches, and as a protest against witch hunts' (Macknik, Martinez-Conde & Blakeslee 2010, p. 142). Ignorance about the creation of magical illusion left a dangerous vacuum filled by fear and speculation that had real world consequences for flesh and blood magicians. Scot recognised this and hoped a little learning could diffuse this dire situation. And now, almost five centuries later, I am suggesting film theorists should adopt a similar strategy to prevent the ongoing persecution of those involved in the production and consumption of movie magic such as suspense and side-taking.

Theoretical explanation of cultural practices bears a significant influence upon attitudes towards ourselves and others. Movies are not simply condemned or condoned on the

basis of the magical effect they are said to emit, whether 'deep' or 'dangerous', 'empathetic or 'evil', 'proper' or 'primitive'. These cultural works are also judged by the manner in which this is thought to have been achieved, for therein lies the difference between 'sinister spell' and 'entertaining illusion'. Immoral artworks pose little threat unless one truly believes they have the ability to take hold. Magic spells, good or bad, require magical methods. Thus films are celebrated or condemned for the long-term magical effects they are presumed to have upon an audience of Others we must monitor and protect. Filmmakers are lauded for their magical genius or derided for their mundane mechanics, and viewers are chastised or admired for the presumed magical properties of the films they choose to enjoy. Such claims appear heavily influenced by ideological attitudes. However, hysteria about the magical power of movies can also have the opposite, equally undesirable, effect by making some turn away and protest that there is no 'power' to popular cinema whatsoever.

In the 70s and 80s, theoretical speculation about the spell cast upon cinema 'subjects' so frustrated some thinkers that by the 90s they began to proclaim a new model viewer: self-gratified, egocentric, and idiosyncratic, endlessly playing with texts and apparently resisting at will (see Fiske 1989a; Fiske 1989b; Jenkins 1992). At the time, viewers like me 'indulging' in movies sought solace in such Fiskean claims of endless play, which provided shelter from the overt determinism of *Screen* theory's chastising of popular narrative cinema (and, by extension, their audiences and makers). But one of the main shortcomings of the emphasis on active audiences that blossomed in response to monolithic psycho-semiotic claims is that it tended to come at the cost of being able to make any statements about shared response across an audience. Where the previous model proposed an audience hypnotised by the medium, the renewed 'uses and gratifications' approach implied an unpredictable roomful of recalcitrant viewers. Thus, as media effects researcher, Robert Kubey, points out, there was often

> little or no recognition of the degree to which the mass media bring about rather uniform and immediate responses in substantial portions of their audiences. Although it is true that moviegoers or television viewers come to the same film or television program with different backgrounds, needs, and expectations, these media are often powerful enough that once involved in an effectively produced drama, say a suspense plot, most viewers will care at exactly the same time whether the hero survives, whether a victim is rescued, and whether the villain is vanquished (Kubey 1996, p. 197).

We must therefore accept that both an unerring belief in the power of movie magic and its complete denial is misguided and mutilating of the full complexity of the rooting phenomenon. For though magic is not real, its effects undeniably exist.

Kubey (1996) draws attention to the fact that television promos and teasers—and, I would add, cliffhangers—can create an overwhelming curiosity to watch something we were not intending to watch. This may be the 6 o'clock news, a crime show we inadvertently caught the opening to, or next week's 'explosive new episode' of a series we have not watched before but suddenly cannot wait for just to find out the resolution of a question dangled before us. 'In such instances', writes Kubey, 'to what degree is the person bending the media and to what degree are the media bending the person?' (1996, p. 198). In answering this question, we would do well to avoid the aforementioned theoretical baggage that mystifies rather than clarifies by providing an *a priori* framework, which is then mistaken as reality, filled in as fact. Instead, following late Wittgenstein, we might see where careful consideration of the phenomenon in full can get us.

For instance, rigorous study of stage magic should logically lead us to conclude that the woman in the box only *appears* to be sawn in half, for she is in fact comprised of two women, 'head' and 'legs' tucked so efficiently into each side of the box that we scarcely consider the possibility. Our vulnerability to this simple little trick, where head and legs are automatically assumed to be of the one being, might then be hypothesized as the result of various biocultural habits as onlookers and investigated further. And the study of movie magic conducted in this same way, resisting the urge to reach for 'far-fetched accounts' and instead observing the artifact unencumbered might also lead us to more mundane, though no less interesting, answers.
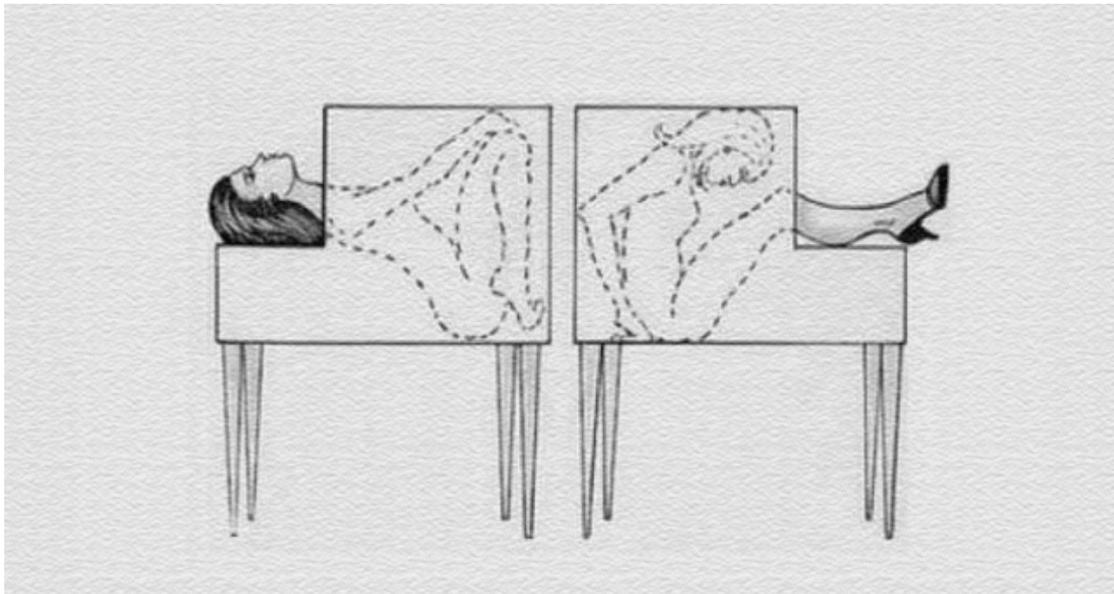
https://www.wittyfeed.com/story/9820/the-logic-behind-these-7-mysterious-magic-tricks-will-leave-you-dumbstruck (2015)

'It is telling that, while the Western art-viewing public…is wedded to aesthetics, our *artists* are not', writes Henry Staten (2011), continuing:

> …[W]hen an artist views the work of another artist, they tend to react in a way that [anthropologist Raymond] Firth's indigenes do, with an 'expression of technical interest,' because the artist thinks, first and foremost, in terms of their own knowledge and practice of art production (2011, p. 225, emphasis in original; see also Firth 1951, p. 156).

Staten wishes to return to an understanding of art as *techne*, the ancient Greek term referring to 'practical knowledge that has been accumulated across generations within any given culture'. In contrast to romantic notions of art, which have helped raised Hitchcock to the top of the filmmaking canon in both popular and academic thought, 'the individual's power…is a derived or delegated power that resides primarily in the art [that is, the productive skill] itself' (2011, p. 226). But Staten cautions against simplistic modern notions that stand in the way of fully understanding this concept, arguing that the word 'technique' is insufficient because it implies a 'simplistic dichotomy' between 'mere technique' and 'genius' (2009, p. 422). Techne is something that all artists need learn to achieve their aesthetic ends.

For Aristotle, Socrates, and others in this ancient era, *art* referred to the practical wisdom to produce a work of art, not to the artifact itself as in modern usage (Staten 2009, p. 223). Though this attitude has been lost to the West, it is still present in cultures that are not blinded by the mystique assigned to aesthetic objects, even though they may still revel in their beauty. This attitude also aligns well with the one Hitchcock himself expressed throughout his career when only wishing to discuss 'how he did it'. Critical attempts to revise or reinterpret his focus on technical talk rather than 'deeper meaning' therefore arguably say more about the academics attempting to do so and their assumptions about art than about the director and his work. In a similar way, Alfred Gell noted that attempts to excuse or account for the lack of 'aesthetic' interest in pre-industrial cultures may say more about Western anthropologists and their 'quasi-religious veneration of art objects' than the indigenes under observation (1998, p. 3 cited in Staten 2011, p. 225).

'[T]he feeling that there is something mysterious or even mystical about artistic creation is nothing but our inarticulate feeling of this depth', argues Staten, echoing Nietzsche's aforementioned observation about our attitude to artistic endeavours (2012, p. 43). Nevertheless enthusiasts, aestheticians, and interpretive critics have often been unwilling to consider this possibility or dissatisfied with its answer. Not only is there the sense that 'there must there be more to it than just this', but there is also an apparent disdain of the mundane, the ordinary, and the earthly. Such disdain might be more than mere boredom of the 'It that all there is?' variety. Instead, it might even originate in what Nietzsche

eventually saw as Schopenhauer's own pessimistic resignation towards our earthly existence (Kirkland 2009, p. 240). Never satisfied with human suffering, Schopenhauer was prone to deny its corporeal nature and ever strive to transcend it via a Buddhist non-attachment to earthly things in hope of reaching happiness beyond the supposed illusion. Nietzsche saw the same pattern in Christianity's denial of earthly pleasures in favour of an idyllic afterlife. In contrast to this 'negation of life', Nietzsche's doctrine of *eternal recurrence* was designed as an antidote when facing suffering and finitude, the 'highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable' (1887/1989, p. 295; see also Reginster 2008).[34] My point is that we may share Schopenhauer's pessimism, and this fear of finitude might extend beyond mere suffering and death.

In explaining the 'magic' behind a mysterious transformation in height when standing at what is known as the 'Oregon Vortex', renowned skeptic, James Randi, points in the direction of both mindsets – Staten's inarticulate feeling of depth and Nietzsche's diagnosis of resignation. Both may prevent people from accepting 'common sense' answers and encourage an appeal to more fanciful explanations. Randi writes:

I appear taller in the left-hand image simply because I'm closer to the camera! Why couldn't the astonished Vortex fans [proposing elaborate answers all over the Internet] have thought of such a simple solution? Folks, it's because *they don't want a solution; they want a mystery, and they cherish it* (Randi 2006, emphasis added).[35]

That humans appear to want a mystery and cherish it is not up for ridicule here. It need not be dismissed or ignored, simply accepted and indulged. And film criticism and screen art appreciation already ably achieves these ends. Yet this in no way need deny the benefit that might be brought by an investigation into the actual answer; an everyday solution to the mystery. The persistent desire to turn away from mechanical solutions in favour of magical mysteries is arguably an example of Nietzsche's resignation in its most crippling form. But movie 'magic' need not come from the heavens, the screen, or even Hitchcock's supposed genius. Its foundation lies within our own bio-cultural makeup, and this means that it automatically highlights an amazing, ultimately unknowable universe within us all that just happened to have allowed for such grand illusions.

Some may be inclined to view this 'art as techne' argument as reductive or outright absurd, unable to distinguish between good and bad artworks or account for innovation. Whilst conceding that of course craft exists, they might feel that filmmakers who peddle in pure craft – whether one calls them competent artisans, metteurs en scène, or Hollywood hacks – must be distinguished from those with true artistic genius who transcend the craft and take it beyond current practice. But a techne of filmmaking no more demands that all movies are of equal value than a techne of fishing demands that the weekend fisherman is as proficient as the Pacific Islander whose livelihood depends on its daily practice. Quite the contrary, an awareness of techne allows the critic to *better* assess the worth of artist or artwork. As Staten explains,

> [O]ut of the infinity of forms that can be mechanically generated, a particular individual in a particular concrete situation makes judgments of better or worse resulting in a work that is a candidate for appreciation…by the relevant valuing community (2011, pp. 226-227).

However, there is no need to appeal to romantic notions about 'Art' and 'genius' as the source of these judgments.

> [N]o amount of mathematical genius will produce an intuition of prime numbers in a culture that has not yet developed mathematics. Why, apart from our theology of art, should we think the case is any different with artists? (Staten 2011, p. 230).

Throughout his career, Hitchcock delighted in telling collaborators, critics, and journalists about his judgments. In a 1948 article for the *Cine-Technician*, he concluded, 'Direction, of course, is a matter of decisions', thereby closing off the essay's opening statement that '[E]ach picture is a problem in itself' (Hitchcock 1948, p. 174 & p. 170). Hence we might say about Hitchcock, as Jean-Luc Godard wrote upon the director's death, that he 'solved filmic problems that many other filmmakers were unable to solve' (1980, pp. 12-13). Suspense was Hitchcock's most pressing problem, and he continually strove to provide better solutions to its ongoing creation.

The Master of Suspense

In light of the often-haphazard nature of creation, the poor logic and lack of evidence for the existence of 'genius' (see Brooks 2009; Weisberg 2006, 2010), and Hitchcock's own admission that he did not know exactly why suspense worked the way he said it did, we might conclude that his comments may be thought to contain interesting observations, true enough in isolation but incapable of providing a theoretical account of the magic of suspense. And yet this fact should not lead us to conclude that these anecdotes are of no worth to film theory. On the contrary, as we shall see in upcoming episodes, his broad body of craft talk provides us with important starting points and counter-claims for any empirical investigation into the origin of our predilections for particular narrative outcomes during suspense. Moreover, any adequate theory of this phenomenon should be able to accommodate or address the Master's passing claims. Although one might be forgiven for assuming that this has already been achieved, I contend that it has not. Instead there is a tendency to roll Hitchcock in for a quote or two and then roll him back out without adequately investigating the veracity or implications of his claims.

For instance, whilst Tony Lee Moral's *Alfred Hitchcock's Moviemaking Master Class: Learning about Film from the Master of Suspense* (2013) dedicates an entire book to the director's presumed practical advice for filmmakers, this strategy suffers from the aforementioned shortcomings of Hitchcock's anecdotes, not intended as craft advice so much as entertaining observations. Where craft education discourse like this arguably fail to fully analyse the logic housed within Hitchcock's public claims about the production of suspense and side-taking, academic texts often note any short-comings and quickly move on to propose a theory which conveniently ignores the Master's more perplexing comments about audience amorality and the resilience of suspense. Hence even the most accomplished theories of suspense by the likes of Noël Carroll (1984/1996, 1996b), Dolf Zillmann (1980, 1996/2013), and William F. Brewer (1996; Jose & Brewer 1984) are yet to fully account for many of Hitchcock's observations about the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. Instead they seem to prefer to leave these unspoken comments aside as mysterious exceptions to the rule.

'Good artists possess a practical knowledge of how the medium that they work with works *on* audiences', notes Murray Smith, 'and one of the roles of the critic and theorist of art is to elucidate this knowledge with an explicitness which we do not expect from practitioners' (2003, p. 15, emphasis in original). Sadly, film theorists have too rarely pursued this opportunity, preferring to focus on the presumed moral and political implications of emotional responses to movies. In the absence of any solid understanding of how these responses are created, however, such claims have relied on *a priori* assumptions, often

based on ideological allegiance, to make their arguments condemning or condoning select films, film makers, and their imagined audiences. The great irony of all this is that these moral and political arguments may have the most to gain from an enhanced understanding of how movies actually work.

Just as stage magic is a cognitive illusion called forth by craft, following Bordwell and Staten we might not only ask what cinematic and psychological processes are involved in encouraging audience members to root for narrative outcomes during moments of suspense, but also what accounts for the intriguing reception patterns Hitchcock points toward in his neglected observations about immoral suspense and side-taking. Rather than simply take him as the last word, we might accept that, like other popular entertainers, he cared almost exclusively about effect, that he learned to intuitively know what usually worked, and that he had little clue as to why. In spite of increasing investigation into the workings of movies upon an audience by cognitive film theorists in the last two decades, as David Bordwell observes, 'craft is something both cinephile critics and academics have neglected' (2011c, p. 41). Hitchcock's vast body of publicised practical wisdom enables us to buck this trend and, as Murray Smith advises above, 'elucidate this knowledge' in ways that Hitchcock could not. Stopping to scrutinise his craft talk about suspense and side-taking under a theoretical lens may enhance our understanding of the mechanisms behind both the most popular filmmaker and the most popular storytelling technique in the history of cinema.

Conclusion

Despite his reputation as the Master of Suspense, Hitchcock — like most magicians — did not know exactly why how and why his wand-waving made his cinematic tricks work. Although we must therefore be wary when Hitchcock speaks of the *how*s and *why*s of the magic of suspense and the passionate arousal for narrative outcomes it encourages, we should pay close attention when he speaks of the *when*s *and what*s of suspense. For it is these moments that mark the familiar patterns of suspense Hitchcock knows. Whenever the director refers to classic scenarios that generate suspense and side-taking, he is referring to the clichés that have been proven time and again to trigger a common effect across viewers. Many of these observations, which lie beyond the bomb-under-the-table anecdote, have been all but ignored and remain bona fide mysteries, unexplained by any current theory of suspense. A more rigorous examination of this effect that incorporates Hitchcock's observations may help attain the kind of understanding film theory should present to one and all about the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, offering new insights into the nature of our moral and emotional manipulation at the movies.

OBSERVING THE MAGIC OF MOVIES
A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE EFFECTS

Wherein we offer an inclusive approach to the study of cinematic effect...

Good evening.

I regret to inform you that there has been a change in programming. We had hoped to bring you another entertaining episode on suspense and side-taking in the cinema, but our academic advisors assure us it is necessary to first outline the 'method' by which such an episode on suspense may be conducted. Fear not. I suspect this will be a short episode indeed, as the only method I can detect so far is sheer madness. I suppose it is therefore fitting that our unstable author appeals to the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, a man who knew intimately about this issue and who has found fame for his bizarre claim that God is dead. This episode proves Nietzsche wrong, for we must surely thank some heavenly being for its brevity.

1. Introduction

'[V]iewers seem to take inherent pleasure in strongly desiring various outcomes for the central characters of a narrative', notes Carl Plantinga (2009, p. 31). If we take Plantinga's claim to refer to moment-by-moment outcomes as the film unfolds, as opposed to some kind of abstract good or ill will, then the origin of this desire remains unclear. Whilst conventional wisdom suggests that these 'predilections for narrative outcomes' (Rapp & Gerrig 2006) result from a combination of *morality* and *partiality*, such explanations fail to predict many reported responses, particularly in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Moments of suspense provide the most explicit and enduring examples of rooting, thus cinema's central proponent of this mass emotion may hold the secret to the creation of rooting for narrative outcomes. Where closer examination of his suspense 'theories' revealed the Master of Suspense to be relatively clueless as to how or why the psychological phenomenon functions, Hitchcock's frequent comments nonetheless, draw attention to unexplained patterns in immoral suspense and side-taking that open up an opportunity for film theory to step in and elucidate this important matter for the benefit of film practitioners, theorists, critics, and audiences alike. This thesis plans to put Noël Carroll's renowned moral theory of suspense (1984/1996) to the test against Hitchcock's public comments and against autoethographic data drawn from over two decades of viewing as a film practitioner. In combination with textual analysis of unexplained 'moral inversion of suspense' scenes (Allen 2007, p. 62) and new research on the nature of moral judgment and emotion, it aims to demonstrate that solutions to *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking* based exclusively upon morality and partiality must be reconsidered.

2. Research Question

> What combination of aesthetic maneuvers and psychological mechanisms might help us understand *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking* – those mysterious moments where viewers find themselves rooting for immoral outcomes and/or characters?

By this I mean much more than merely our ability to root for gangsters or professional criminals, which is often ably explained by their moral virtue *relative* to the unscrupulous characters that surround them (see Carroll 2004/2013, 2010; Smith, M 1999, 2011). I refer instead to scenes that do not make sense by our own logic, where we often fleetingly find ourselves rooting for outcomes favourable to:

a) characters we consciously dislike or do not favour, and

b) further outcomes we consciously oppose and otherwise hope against.

Richard Allen refers to this as an 'inversion of the moral coordinates of classical suspense' and draws attention to the way we can essentially side against the interests of our own preferred characters or against our own preferred outcomes (2007, pp. 55, 57). Based purely on the definition of 'moral allegiance', 'moral disposition', and 'rooting for', which (via *morality* and/or *partiality*) emphasise exclusivity, many theorists using these terms (Carroll, Murray Smith, Zillmann, Raney) would seem to find this impossible. Nonetheless, as semantics is not a solid foundation for predicting human behavior, I ask that the reader suspend judgment and see where this investigation into rooting for moment-by-moment outcomes at the movies takes us.

3. Worldview

'In essence, every conscious action by an artist, all art, is a "trick"', writes Roman Jakobson, 'On the understanding that you regard it as a skill, as a purposeful employment of rules, as *techne*' (cited in Dąbała 2012, p. 21). Learning how these tricks work can help us better understand and appreciate the effect, enabling informed celebration and critique. Some, however, may fear that such an approach is reductive, potentially killing the magic of movies, ignoring cultural differences in viewers and, in typically avoiding ideological and political analysis, inherently political. I shall address each issue in turn.

3.1 Killing the magic

In *Ninotchka* (1939), Ernst Lubitsch's sublime romantic comedy scripted by Billy Wilder, Charles Brackett, and Walter Reisch, the titular title character (Greta Garbo) makes the cold scientific observation that 'Love is a romantic designation for a most ordinary biological – or, shall we say, chemical – process'. And yet she soon finds herself falling under the spell of this chemical reaction. The lesson? That reason cannot override experience. Our taste buds may 'explain' the science of 'sweetness,' but nothing can take away the taste of honey. The sensation remains, in spite of its mechanical nature, simply because the magical effect transcends the trick. Fear that a renewed focus on practical wisdom and material process might squeeze all the joy out of film and other magical arts is misguided, for such sweetness cannot be reduced. A theory of suspense can no sooner explain away a scene in a Hitchcock film than the 'golden ratio' could lessen the charms of the Mona Lisa, though either might help us understand, appreciate, improve, or contest these works and their magical effects.[36]

We need not be scared of pragmatic or prosaic answers, nor avoid them out of fear they will devalue the cinema experience we wish to champion, for mystery and magic are not slain by the hands of 'science'. James Randi may be a skeptic, but he is also a magician with an undying passion for the art, and though he knows the techniques behind the

tricks, he can still appreciate the artfulness of a performance and still fall for the trick, experiencing its effect when watching peers perform (see Randi cited in Lamont & Wiseman 2008, p. 8 & 145). This same fact accounts for filmmakers' continual astonishment at their own tricks. After overseeing some cutting-room changes undertaken to improve suspense and sustained conflict on *Boomerang* (1947), Darryl F. Zanuck informed director Elia Kazan:

> BY REVISING THE EARLY CONTINUITY AND MAKING SOME DEFT
> ELIMINATIONS, THE TRANSFORMATION IS REALLY ASTOUNDING…
> (Behlmer (ed.) & Zanuck 1993, p. 116).

Zanuck knew the editing changes would do the trick, but was still astonished by the effect. It is thus also reasonable to assume that Zanuck had no solid explanation for *how* or *why* the trick worked, just as Hitchcock had no particular idea about the origin of suspense.

'[A]s a filmmaker, I had learned to work some of the magic', recalls cognitive film theorist Joseph D. Anderson in reference to his emerging interest in the psychology of cinema way back in 1970, 'but I had no idea how the magic worked' (1998, p. ix). Most filmmakers, in lieu of rigorous investigation into the workings of their tricks, nor any particular desire to do so, fall back on the same old folk explanations for these effects when pressed for an answer. Unfortunately this only serves to mystify rather than clarify the phenomena and pose further danger that those finally willing to acknowledge practitioner wisdom will mistake filmmakers's appeal to these popular explanations as evidence of their inherent truth. That is, a sign of support based on artistic insight rather than mere unconsidered assumption. Theory can therefore make a major contribution to our understanding of magical effects such as suspense and side-taking, and the subsequent urge to root for particular narrative outcomes in the cinema.

3.2 Ignoring cultural difference

For those who are understandably wary that an emphasis on craft ignores cultural and personal differences across audiences, we might note that Hitchcock studies has been built upon assumptions about authorial intention and monolithic audience effects yet rarely challenged on this point (see Leitch 2002, pp. 12-13). 'All film analyses embed claims about the audience', notes Martin Barker, 'but the claims are of different kinds, and some come closer than others to admitting tests of their claims' (2000, pp. 8-9). The key underlying claim embedded in my own research is that there is both a 'universal cognitive core' and 'varying cultural horizons of understanding' at work in popular cinema viewing (Wilson, T 2009, pp. 4, 70). This means that 'reception patterns' (Ang 1990) become possible when mental operations, experience, and cultural codes and competencies are shared. And it helps explain how practitioners like Hitchcock can aim to encourage

'common' responses such as *rooting interest* and *suspense* amongst a collection of individual biocultural beings we call an audience: by 'preying…on our habits of mind in order to produce experiences' (Bordwell 2011b).

Empirical studies also suggest that reception patterns exist across audience members. Strong levels of synchronicity during popular movie reception has been observed in brain scans (Hasson et al. 2008) and eye-tracking (Smith, TJ 2013). Even suspense and surprise ratings have consistently shown striking patterns between viewers (Nomikos et al. 1968) and between viewings (Hoffman, J & Fahr 2007). An important qualification in my own research is that the reception patterns I am searching for in regard to rooting for narrative outcomes need only equate to a significantly higher rate of support for one particular outcome than that predicted by purely random distribution.[37] The filmmaking practices to which this thesis refers – suspense and rooting interest – demonstrate that it is both possible and pragmatic to transfer individual responses from colleagues, test audiences, or oneself to a broader 'implied audience' when weighing up creative revisions 'so as to generate intended or preferred responses' (Plantinga 2009, p. 13). Whilst this practice is far from perfect or universal, it can be 'approximately true' and perfectly appropriate for my purposes. As Martin Barker points out, '[the] tendency to singularize "the audience"…sadly couples too easily with a false opposite that "of course everyone's response is different"' (2006, p. 124).

3.3 Avoiding ideological and political analysis

A poetics of cinema is not inherently political. Any increased understanding of the psychological and cinematic mechanisms behind immoral suspense and side-taking is of the utmost importance to an ideological critique of particular films and their makers. One could even argue that the dismissal of an updated formalist aesthetic centred on techne unwittingly lends support to the exact kind of oppression that critics of this approach claim to oppose. As Henry Staten points out at length:

> Among the most culturally pernicious effects of this mystification [of art] is what the radical anthropological theorist Alfred Gell called the 'mismatch' between 'the spectator's internal awareness of his [sic] own powers as an agent' and the conception of spectator forms of 'the powers possessed by the artist' (Gell 1992: 53-4)…[T]he more the nature of a know-how is hidden behind an ideological curtain, the more likely it is to stymie the spectator's sense of their own agency, and the more serviceable it becomes to the power interests to which art is so easily wed. By contrast, to the degree that the spectator learns *what art is* – productive know-how that human beings learn as they learn any other social practice, and which, like any other social practice, some people are better at than others, in large part thanks to a combination of hard work and favourable circumstance – the visible work loses its aura of mystery, and the cowing of the spectator by the feeling of mismatch correspondingly diminishes (2011, p. 224).[38]

Hence a political poetics of cinema is not only possible, but also arguably intimately entwined with a greater understanding of film and narrative craft. This offers renewed hope for an engaged and effective praxis of cinema production and reception through a return to the kind of practical film theory conducted by early Russian filmmakers who, in the words of Ivor Montagu, 'studied the science of cinema [and] tried to find out why things were good or bad or effective or non-effective' (cited in Wollen, Lovell & Rohdie 1972, p. 85). If the reader is still wary of the word 'science' here, I might point out that early film theory was filled with this kind of psychological approach to cinema.

Works such as Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), Béla Balázs's *Visible Man/Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924), Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art/Film als Kunst* (1932) and the thirteen volume Payne Fund Studies (Charters 1933) took into account the interaction of artwork and audience. Moreover, this approach did not dwindle because it proved to be a dead-end, but because a competing purpose soon took precedence. The study of cinema in the United States shifted within the academy away from Social Science across to the Humanities after the creation of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in 1935, which constructed a cinematic canon that could be investigated 'legitimately' in the same vein as literary criticism (see Polan 2007).

Whilst the psychological tradition continued in media effects and communications studies, film theory came to focus predominantly (though certainly not exclusively) on:

> a) establishing film as an artform through interpretative practices and the championing of directors as auteurs (see Sarris 1962–1963; Truffaut 1954),

> b) exposing the supposed monolithic effects emanating from the ideological apparatus of cinema (at the expense of craft and viewer psychology) (see Metz 1975/1982; Mulvey 1975/1989). And, in a direct challenge to this overly reductive view of the audience,

> c) diversity amongst viewer response (see Ang & Couling 1985; Barker 2009; Barker & Brooks 1998; Fiske 1989; Staiger 1992).

However, with the rise of 'cognitive film theory', there has been a steady increase in this empirical cognitive approach in recent years seen in the work of scholars such as Ed S. Tan (1996, 2013; Tan & Diteweg 1996/2013), Monika Suckfüll (2000, 2010; Suckfüll & Scharkow 2009), James E. Cutting (2005, 2016; Cutting & Candan 2013), Daniel Levin (2012; Levin & Simons 2000), Katalin Balint (Bálint & Kovács 2016; Bálint & Tan 2015), and Tim J. Smith (2010, 2012, 2013).

4. Ontological & Epistemological Considerations

My so-called practical film theory approach is not concerned with chasing eternal truth. Rather, it follows Stephen Toulmin's proposal in 'The Recovery of Practical Philosophy' (1988), striving for ideas about our (cinematic) experience that are 'timely not timeless, concrete not abstract, particular not universal, local not general' (1988, p. 341; see also Bordwell 2011). This study seeks *useful-truths*; those we might put to beneficial use in our own lives as film makers, theorists, critics, or viewers. The notion of *usefulness* may ring alarm-bells, however to automatically conflate the value of usefulness with an absence of ethical consideration is surely misguided. The *usefulness* of an idea and the *ethical value* of that idea are separate issues. Far from wishing to ignore our ethical responsibility as academic thinkers, my separation of these concepts is designed to encourage it. In weighing up ideas, we should not only ask how useful they are in solving the problem at hand based on upon all known empirical evidence, but also consider what other functions they might serve that (often unconsciously) encourages our acceptance of their claims.

For example, ideas such as the denial of the biological brain or the denial of cultural influence upon that brain appear to draw great power from what their argument grants beyond the immediate debate. Thus 'use' often has a hidden impact upon the ideas we are convinced by and committed to. This would not be a problem if such influence were conscious, or if such ideas did not have detrimental consequences on how we view the world and those around us. A focus on *usefulness* is a reminder to ask questions like '*What* use?' and 'Useful to *whom*?'. Answering these questions can be the difference in separating ideas that cannot otherwise be separated empircally. In other words, it may serve us well to be wary of ideologically attractive answers and to retain a dose of healthy skepticism against ideas that conveniently perform functions other than that they were reputedly designed to do. This is not an alternative to empirical evidence; it is an addition to it. And it is more or less my criticism of highly judgmental yet commonly-held ideas about rooting, identification, emotion, moral judgment, and genius throughout this thesis.

'Truth claims based on *usefulness* tend to be less universal and "objective" than those based on correspondence theories [i.e. absolutism], but also less solipsistic and more verifiable than those resting on coherence theories [i.e. relativism]', argues Marshal Mandelkern in a review of *Psychoanalytic technique expanded*, a book he argues takes this approach to knowledge (2012, p. 437, emphasis added). Although the position might be termed 'pragmatist', it is more appropriately referred to as contextualist (see Flyvbjerg 2012, p. 40; Williams 2007). The label, however, matters much less than the thinking behind it. As Mandelkern goes on to explain, the book he describes uses the approach to

present a series of convincing clinical stories, and to show how a certain theoretical
approach, or technical precept, helps make sense of the vignette, and indeed provides a
context for thinking about, and moving forward in, the interpersonal situation (2012, p. 437).

My thesis essentially aims to do the opposite. That is, offer cases which demonstrate that current theories built on *morality* and *partiality* **cannot** make sense of my viewing vignettes and those of other viewers I cite, but that if we were to pull these explanations apart and rebuild them with some modification, they might. Towards the end of the thesis, I then go on to make some recommendations on these potential modifications, presenting new ideas and approaches that might enable Carroll's moral theory of suspense to make sense of the immoral suspense and side-taking occurring in these problematic vignettes.

'[T]he *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing', argued Nietzsche, 'the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be' (1887/1989, p. 119). The idea that a narrow theoretical perspective may impose *a priori* restrictions on the thoughts canvased about an object under investigation also finds a parallel in Wittgenstein's late thinking which, according to John Gunnell (2013), held that

> …all the philosopher can do with certainty with respect to understanding and interpreting
> human practices is to seek clarity, which means first and foremost doing justice to the
> subject matter in the sense of not imposing, either in conception or practice, the *Weltbild* [i.e.
> worldview] of the interpreter (pp. 751-752).

This philosophy is echoed in David Bordwell's own advice about a poetics of film, wherein 'we don't use a method—that is, I take it, a prior commitment to a system of thought that blocks our seeing the object in its own terms' (2010). Although this is easier said than done, and may even be thought by some to smack of utter naivety, it should be viewed as a matter of degree, much as Barker argued of assumptions made about 'the audience' being either entirely monolithic or entirely diverse. If we can accept that *some* research is more inclusive and open-minded, and less imposing of preconceptions than others – and I think we can – then I believe this enhanced outcome should always be aimed for.

In service of this aim, we should put Nietzsche's observation into practice by considering any viewpoint that might help us identify the shape of the phenomenon we are attempting to describe and better understand the many mysterious components of its make up. As Edgar Morin warns:

> The deep cause of error is not error of fact (false perception), or error of logic (incoherence),
> but rather the way we organize our knowledge into a system of ideas…All knowledge
> operates through the selection of meaningful data and the rejection of data that are not
> meaningful (2008, p. 2).

Thus we might say that, in Morin's view, the leading cause of error is an 'error of omission' arising from a lack of attention to conflicting or alternative perspectives, ideas, and

evidence. Despite our best intentions, our understanding of the world will always be reduced in some way by our biases and assumptions. Nevertheless, making a commitment to empirical verification (as opposed to empiricism — a vastly different view) and to 'transdisciplinarity' (wherein the research is '*inquiry-driven* rather than *discipline-driven*' (Montuori 2013, p. 46; Nicolescu 2008) are steps to help combat this error.[39]

5. Methodology

This investigation into the mechanisms that help direct our desire for moment-by-moment narrative outcomes during cinematic suspense and side-taking will include perspectives from **theory**, **film**, **craft**, and **viewer**. To leave any of these angles out is, following Nietzsche and Morin, to reduce our view of the phenomenon at the outset. The same philosophy should also apply to the academic pool from which we draw ideas. Rather than remain locked into strict disciplinary boundaries or theoretical models, this research adopts a *transdiciplinary* approach, distinct from an *interdisciplinary* approach in which two or more disciplinary perspectives are combined that thereby still imposes *a priori* restrictions on the thoughts that will be canvased about the topic under investigation.

> In transdisciplinarity, scope is defined by the needs of the subject matter, not determined
> and guided by the parameters of the discipline (Montuori 2013, p. 46; see also Morin 2008).

Recognising that what we 'see' is influenced by the perspective we have, *transdisciplinarity* also acknowledges the researcher. Instead of playing this important fact down, it is committed to 'integrating rather than eliminating the inquirer from the inquiry' (Montuori 2013, p. 46). This accounts for the annoying presence of my 'voice' throughout.

Much of the other evidence for this transdisciplinary approach exists mostly 'off the page'. My willingness to turn to any potential source that might enhance understanding of *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking* has led me into complex foreign fields such as: moral and evolutionary psychology; the neuroscience of empathy, social cognition, and emotion; media effects studies on 'identification' and 'affective disposition'; endless philosophical debate about empathy versus sympathy and the moral virtue of antiheroes like Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*, 1999-2007); and advice from craft manuals and practitioner interviews found in the most obscure of sources across the history of cinema and beyond. To report on all these readings in under 100,00 words proved both impossible and impractical. Many chapters and in-depth discussions were excised. The result is that evidence of my transdisciplinarity might be less than obvious and the thesis read as mere interdisciplinarity. I can only assure the reader that this is not the case, and that the foreign ideas I have chosen to bring to my topic are drawn from a casting of the widest of nets I could afford over my many years of interest in 'rooting' at the movies.

In contrast to this approach, I would argue that interdisciplinarity in cognitive film theory often entails stumbling across an idea and instantly importing it on the basis of its perceived utility without bothering to take a second, more sustained and skeptical look. Paying more attention to both its supposed empirical basis and to the often unacknowledged consequences of its claims that might make it unconsciously appealing, adopted at the expense of more grounded and less oppressive claims, could greatly improve the quality of film theory across the board. The consequences of this tendency to fail to attend to such matters might be glimpsed in 70s Screen theory, which selectively took from fashionable political and philosophical ideas of the day (e.g. Althusser and Lacan) with the aim of providing ideological critique and audience emancipation. For many, however, the approach was highly reductive and dogmatic, calling judgment upon everyday filmmakers and audiences who associated with popular cinema deemed morally and politically inappropriate (Buscombe et al. 1975,1976; Carroll 1988, 1996c; Lesage 1975; though see Stoneman 2013). And there is every risk that cognitive film theory may make the same mistake, settling for the most immediate, convenient, and intuitive answers without considering the full consequences of these on our attitudes to film production and consumption and ultimately to one another.

Much of this threat comes from the simple fact that research is so time consuming. In addition, other fields and ideas involve skills and discussions that we film theorists know little about. One solution is to stick to those theories that have become most popular inside and outside our own field. The other is to spend hour upon hour, day upon day, week upon week striving to survey each theory and its competitors, all arguments and counterarguments, and the consequences of believing in, and committing to, one or the other. While most understandably take the former route, turning to ideas that have already taken hold of many in the academic and non-academic community, I have chosen the latter path. Whether this is solely because I have a crippling, overly curious condition and an incredibly low level of confidence in the value of anything I claim is for the reader to decide. But where other film theorists I admire have turned, in one way or another, to popular theories about 'moral intuition', 'mirror neurons', and 'hardwired emotions' to explain *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking*, I have been drawn to doubt these answers. Instead, I have searched for other, less 'appealing' but arguably less though arguably problematic and less 'outdated' theories to help account for these puzzling reception patterns.

5.1 Theoretical Inclusions

Given the nature of rooting for narrative outcomes as a mental process of varying levels of awareness, this thesis adopts Carl Plantinga's broad 'cognitive-perceptual' approach that recognises both cognitive appraisal and automated affect below conscious awareness (2009, p. 11). The investigation draws upon cognitive film theory and its primary sources, analytic philosophy and psychology, aiming to extend this approach by rectifying Plantinga's self-confessed 'weakness...that the social science research is not sufficiently taken into account' (2009, p. 250). It also attends to his lack of due consideration of technical writings, such as film and screenwriting manuals, which may also shed important light on rooting interest and suspense.

5.2 Theoretical Exclusions

Although some readers may question the absence of a theoretical approach in my study that could be thought well-suited to the topic at hand, given its intense focus on *desire*, *instinct*, and *anxiety*, there are valid reasons for the conspicuous absence of *psychoanalysis*. Much like magic, the idea that psychoanalytic theory can offer access to secret knowledge is undoubtedly seductive. But this skeleton key it claims to provide, able to unlock all human behavior, also accounts for much of its appeal. As Ian Jarvie explains,

> Popper [1963] offered an intellectual explanation of the appeal of Marxism and psychoanalysis. They are, he argues, comprehensive theoretical systems that explain everything. This is their attraction (1999, p. 438).

Despite being imported into contemporary film theory in the 1970s as a tool of ideological critique to fight perceived class and gender-based oppression, psychoanalysis could be simultaneously seen as functioning as a tool of ideological oppression in its claims about unobservable viewer activity. Martin Barker, for instance, finds its parallels with media effects studies, which build pseudo-scientific claims about 'weak-minded' audience members from the lowers classes atop theoretical constructions such as 'identification', entirely unacceptable (see Barker 2005). What's more, psychoanalytic claims 'resolutely refuse any kind of empirical verification' (2000, p. 13; see also Plantinga 2009, p. 231), rendering them practically unchallengeable and potentially twisted to any agenda.

All this is not an argument against the existence of unconscious activity. Even if viewers do unconsciously desire outcomes, my research is interested only in (more or less) conscious *hopes* and *fears* whereby we root for preferred narrative outcomes. My demand for an awareness of *what* we are rooting for moment-by-moment should not be mistaken for a demand that we are aware of *why* we are rooting for such an outcome, as this is precisely what my investigation aims to clarify, and may involve nonconscious mechanisms. However, this need not warrant a resort to psychoanalysis. As Plantinga

(2009) points out, the 'unconscious' is not restricted to Freudian or Lacanian models (p. 8). Cognitive science, and psychology in general, holds that many processes operate below overt consciousness, hence Plantinga's preferred appeal to a 'cognitive unconscious' (p. 49).

6. Research Design

The heart of this exercise is to put Noël Carroll's esteemed moral theory of suspense (1984/1996, 1996b) to the test against personal responses I have experienced over the past two decades that appear to fly in the face of his claims. Although the suspense scenes I invoke are sourced in an unsystematic way, my focus on ill-fitting examples will help paint a fuller picture of the complexities of my own moment-by-moment desire for narrative outcomes during suspense which I refer to as 'rooting'. The hope is that these discrepant participatory responses might be more adequately understood by adjustments in current thinking. Thus, in addition to holding Carroll's widely accepted argument up to scrutiny alongside my reported real-world suspense and side-taking, I will also subject his claims to theoretical critique. This will involve frequent reference to the words of Alfred Hitchcock, Master of Suspense, who draws attention to an array of unexplained and too often ignored effects that add further fuel to the debate.

Although the selection of Carroll's account of suspense may represent a potential error of omission, this decision has been made on (mostly?) conscious grounds. Carroll's theory is arguably considered the best account of narrative suspense. It dovetails with Dolf Zillmann's (1996/2013) account, which has robust empirical support over many studies by many researchers over many years. And, perhaps most important of all, the theory appeals to me, has long-been a source of inspiration and introspection as a viewer and practitioner, and deserves to live on for others to enjoy in the future. The focus on Carroll's theory leads me to forego a standard survey of the literature, however this is further justified by my belief that retreading all too familiar territory covering suspense or identification or empathy/sympathy or emotion or morality literature may lead to the same old answers. This would not be a problem if these answers were adequate, but given that the enigma of immoral response remains unsolved, I contend that they are not and therefore hope to avoid being locked into previous mindsets on this issue.

An entire chapter will be devoted to convincing others of what Richard Allen has long claimed is possible, and which Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, and Dolf Zillmann have more or less denied or ignored: 'a moral inversion of the classical coordinates of suspense' (Allen 2007, p. 56). The thesis then addresses potential solutions to this enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. In individual chapters, two of the most intuitive and up-

and-coming answers, Margrethe Bruun Vaage's (2015a) turn to dual process theories of moral judgment and Murray Smith's (2003/2010) appeal to mirroring and emotional contagion, will be critically assessed. The answers offered by these close friends and colleagues overlap in their view of the nature of emotion and their ongoing commitment to the intuitive notion of allegiance to character as the driving force in virtually all predilections for narrative outcomes arising in the viewer. After outlining objections to these views, backed up old and new empirical evidence and the expert opinion of others in foreign fields, and submitting the two solutions to the test of my autoethnographic data and the logic of their own argument, a final chapter will present three new potential solutions worth our consideration. These solutions emerge from new theory that challenges previous answers to the enigma at hand and extend upon untapped ideas already contained in Carroll, Plantinga, Vaage, and Zillmann's own theories. The thesis ultimately attempts to demonstrate how these new proposals 'help make sense of the vignette', as Mandelkern (2012) previously put it, and allow us to move forward in more focused empirical quali-quantitative research with real world viewers.

7. Data

There is a vast array of untapped ethnographic data buried in audience and media effects research, film reviews, discussion forums, practitioner interviews, craft manuals, and other people's autobiographical recollections of film going experience. However, this study takes the view that the best source of specific psychological data on rooting for narrative outcomes that *I*, the researcher, could currently hope for (in the absence of extensive qualitative experimental research as per future plans) is to be found in *I*, the viewer. 'Academia is still very suspicious of "subjectivity," which essentially amounts to the everyday experience of life, and particularly to the subjectivity of the academic', argues Alfonso Montuori in his forward to Edgar Morin's book on transdisciplinary methodology, *On Complexity* (2008, p. xix). Although there are thus likely to be multiple misgivings about such a subjective source, and though mere access to data is hardly sufficient grounds to warrant its use, there is reason to believe that my experimenter-as-subject approach to the psychology of cinema has already long been in use in academic research. Furthermore, as Corti, Reddy, Choi and Gillespie (2015) argue, it has an even longer tradition within the field of psychology itself, and arguably 'deserves its own conceptualization as a valuable tool on the mantle of acceptable, recognized modes of inquiry' (p. 305). As the authors explain:

> [E]xperimental psychology began as a discipline of researcher-as-subject *self*-experimentation. Though this orientation was largely abandoned in the early 20th century, traces of this approach have survived in genres of psychology closely aligned with

anthropology and sociology, fields in which a non-experimental researcher-as-subject investigatory model is alive and well. Arguably, it also persists in experimental… psychology itself, feeding into the design and development of experiments, but it is rarely reported and given the legitimacy that it deserves (Corti et al. 2015, p. 289, emphasis in original).

My qualitative data on rooting for narrative outcomes during suspense is sourced on the premise that it is possible to perform the dual roles of participant and observer. In essence, the assumption is that we are able to watch outcomes watching. V.F. Perkins believed anyone could do this. 'In the cinema we can observe our involvement while it is taking place', wrote Perkins (1972/1991). 'We enter the film situation but it remains separate from ourselves' (p. 140). My background as a film practitioner also suggests I may be more adept than most at assessing my own 'gut response' to scenes and sequences, remaining objective and accurate in the face of even the slightest onscreen adjustment. This is because filmmakers must essentially 'test the outcome (that is, how their programs will be handled in the minds of viewers) by becoming viewers themselves' (Anderson 1998, p. 13). This practice aligns well with the belief held by the founder of experimental psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, that 'the ideal experimental subject was an expert observer…trained in methods of self-perception capable of carrying out experiments on his or her own self' (Corti et al. 2015, p. 290).

It is important to note that my data, however, is not the result of 'formal data-gathering' (2015, p. 304). Nor is it a 'thick description' of my viewing experience (see Geertz 1973, p. 6). Instead it is a simple record of *what* I was consciously rooting for *when* during a suspense scene or sequence (broadly defined, for suspense potentially falls across *all* genres and scenes). Regardless of the relative obscurity of my outlined approach, autobiographical recall of responses to popular cinema has, as mentioned above, long played a part in film theory and criticism. And all with little argument as to its veracity. It would seem to play a major part behind the scenes in proposals about 'ideal audience' response prevalent in the work of Bordwell, Carroll, Plantinga, and Smith (all four).[40] These theorists are unlikely to claim a reaction they have not either personally experienced or witnessed in others, yet they rarely report the experience as personal or personally observed. The convention is simply to – as Plantinga (2009) puts it of his own claims – 'bolster such interpretation with an appeal to psychological theories and philosophical understandings of the nature of human affect in response to the movies' in order to justify its applicability to other viewers (p. 11).

Although I am sympathetic to such an approach, as a film practitioner and craft theorist I would argue that we must not lose sight of the fact that response comes first, theoretical explanation second. The lack of adequate focus on the reported response of real-world

viewers and, in particular, moment-by-moment hopes and fears for narrative outcomes during popular cinema reception has enabled the explanatory gaps in current theories of suspense and side-taking to remain unchallenged. For this reason, the current project will place increased emphasis on reporting autobiographical responses, acknowledging this as a fundamental source of data by which explanations of the magical effects of movies might be evaluated.

8. Validity

8.1 Temporal contagion

One concern with data sourced from autobiographical reflection is *temporal contagion,* 'the possibility of using current circumstances to understand past experience' (Owen et al. 2009, p. 186). Movie scenes can take on a life of their own in our memory. Quotes become misquotes, shots we recall seeing never existed, and things we believe were said or done turn out to have been enacted by a completely different character.[41] Whilst many of my autobiographical reflections on rooting for narrative outcomes concern viewing experiences stretching back up to two decades, the experience itself was *not* recalled and reported expressly for the writing of this thesis. These emotional experiences have been noted and recorded *at or immediately after* the viewing experience, not in hindsight, providing further testament to my long-term interest in this topic. Moreover, all experiences have been since verified by revisiting the cinematic stimuli. Any scenes that significantly failed to reproduce the original recorded effect, or that instead produced an experience counter to my original experience, were treated as suspicious or unconvincing data and discarded. I therefore argue that the threat of temporal contagion is low. However, my data faces another problem, highlighted by Peter Ohler.

8.2 Temporal cooling

> If we stop the film to apply a boring questionnaire, the spectator's emotions accompanying his [sic] cognitions while viewing will cool down. If we measure his physiological reactions we can not [sic] be sure whether they are the result of cognitive or emotional processes (Ohler 2006, p. 21).

Collecting data during moment-by-moment movie reception offers unique challenges, hence the potential problems that may arise from differences between hot and cold processing. Previous research has attempted to record this unfolding experience by asking viewers to select from a limited range of responses on an electronic interface in real time. Used by Gallop Studies in Hollywood in the 40s (see Ohmer 1991) and by Ed S. Tan in *Emotion and the Structure of the Narrative Film* (1996), this collection method

can result in quantitative data that may not tell the full picture because it relies on a pre-determined range of responses, thereby forcing participants' choice.[42]

Much like this method, my own reporting took place as close to parallel with the viewing process as possible. In a technique akin to a 'concurrent think-aloud protocol', a method of data collection that involves participants explaining their thoughts aloud during performance of a cognitive task (see Lundgrén-Laine & Salanterä 2010; Trabasso & Magliano 1996), I self-monitored my conscious moment-by-moment hopes and fears for narrative outcomes inside my own head, just as Perkins and Anderson suggested possible. Although the think-aloud paradigm has primarily been adopted in research focusing on *comprehension* in regard to *written* texts (see Kurby & Zacks 2012; Magliano, Trabasso & Graesser 1999; Van den Broek et al. 2001), it has been applied to cinema comprehension in at least one experiment involving retrospective written self-reporting conducted immediately after pausing viewing at particular points in the narrative (Magliano, Dijkstra & Zwaan 1996). More significantly, however, it was recently employed in a study led by Richard Gerrig designed to expose 'participatory responses' (Bezdek, Foy & Gerrig 2013). Participants were instructed to think aloud during concurrent verbal self-reporting as they viewed suspenseful scenes.

My own think-aloud technique involved *internalised* concurrent verbal self-reporting, and was extended by the inclusion of I, the researcher, to facilitate a questions-answering procedure (see Goldman, S, O'Banion Varma & Sharp 1999; Graesser & Clark 1985). Thus I asked questions of myself at specific points and followed up where necessary to clarify emerging evidence and place it in the appropriate context. In other words, I conducted conversations with myself where necessary to ensure I reported on expectations about potential impending narrative outcomes and my preferences in regards to these expectations. Once this *concurrent verbal* report had taken place inside my own head, I then transcribed the response, either a moment later when reaching for a pen or for my iPhone, or as soon as logistically possible. If the mental record was not physically recorded in brief immediately after the scene or sequence, this typically occurred during the next commercial break, after the screening was over or, at most, after I arrived home from the cinema with no previous opportunity to self report. In general, however, any experience was recorded in brief as close to the experienced rooting response as possible, both as mental note and as textual or aural physical record for reliable recall in the near future. Although these later transcriptions are theoretically vulnerable to temporal contagion, the period was so short and the response so vivid, specific, and singular in valence (i.e. Do you currently desire option A, option B, or remain indifferent to impending outcomes?) that there is minimal risk of data contamination.

8.3 Demand characteristics

Another potential problem is *demand characteristics* (Orne 1962). The danger that participants may adjust their behavior in light of awareness of the aims and expectations of the researcher (see McCambridge, De Bruin & Witton 2012) might be thought particularly pronounced when one is researcher and experimental subject, and thus has full knowledge of the researcher's aims and intentions. While there is little danger of adopting what Weber and Cook (1972) label a 'negativistic' participant role (outside a nonconscious desire to self-sabotage my research – the so-called 'screw-you' effect (Masling 1966)), there is the potential to inadvertently adopt a 'good' participant role. This is where one reports in a way that avoids 'ruining' the results for the researcher. An 'apprehensive' participant role, in which one is worried about how they will look to others and therefore responds with the express purpose of keeping up appearances, is also a theoretical possibility. 'Researchers must recognize the self-serving bias that is at play when someone is asked about his or her own behavior', warns Joanne Cantor (2009, p. 199). My response to this issue is twofold.

Firstly, it should be noted that argument for the validity of my self-report of rooting responses does not come with a claim that I have knowledge of the reasons for, and mechanisms behind, my responses. It is simply that I can observe and report the existence of some responses no less accurately, and likely much more so, than I could that of other viewers. Secondly, though Cantor's warning is no doubt warranted, the anecdotal evidence I report can hardly be accused of being self-serving in terms of public image of participant or of researcher. My data is mostly confession of complete indulgence in, and 'immoral' response to, a wide variety of motion pictures, many of which have no particular claim to artistic status or aesthetic distinction. Given the dominant academic attitude, self-reports portraying oneself as an unethical viewer lacking in appropriate artistic sensibility are unlikely to garner social esteem, and may well result in the exact opposite. Short of viewing my data as an act of pure provocation or an attempt to portray myself (particularly *to* myself) as a committed outsider, any claims that egocentric reporting may be self-serving would be more convincingly made not on the grounds of apprehension about the *participant*'s public or private image but upon on the grounds of serving the needs of the *researcher* and his status. However, this ignores the fact that almost all of the reported experiences were recorded well before I, the researcher, had ever considered many of the theoretical ideas about suspense and side-taking floated in this thesis and thus before I had any particular expected behaviour to live up to in my self reporting.

8.4 Selection bias

Yet another problem regarding data collection and contamination is *selection bias*. In setting no strict criteria for scene selection and in tending towards extreme examples of unexplained rooting interest that might be considered outlier experiences, my researcher self may have unconsciously exercised control of the data, thereby leaving a false impression of the ability of current theories to explain *most* rooting responses. This is unavoidable, however, as these examples have been selected in a *deliberate* attempt to falsify these theories, finding holes in their explanatory power in order to improve upon them. My focus on enigmatic moments of immoral suspense and side-taking may encourage the belief that rooting is rarely, if ever, explained by *morality* or *partiality*, or that a 'moral inversion of suspense' occurs far more frequently that it actually does. Nevertheless, so long as we keep this pitfall in mind, my focus seems entirely justified. One way or another, unexplained responses to scenes such as these – however rare – require explanation. Overall I argue that, far from weakening the data, my participant-observer approach makes it more reliable by excising the problem of observer coding and unnatural laboratory environments, and by reducing the impact of temporal cooling and unknown inter-personal demand characteristics. This leaves only one final, significant issue that naturally arises in a sample size of one.

8.5 Generalisability

My research seeks to uncover the biocultural patterns that movie magic taps into (deliberately or inadvertently) to 'bend' audience members to their will when rooting for narrative outcomes. In adopting an approach of public confession, this thesis allows each reader to independently verify my autobiographical data by comparing one's own recollection and guestimated gut response to the same filmic stimuli described throughout. As Carolyn Ellis argues of autoethnographic texts, which happen to share my overall researcher-as-subject approach,

> generalizability is always being tested – not in the traditional way through random samples
> of respondents, but by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their
> experience…The focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers (2004, p. 195).

Moreover, in mixing this with third party confessions drawn from a variety of film theory, industry, criticism, craft, and fan sources, an opportunity emerges to further 'test' the legitimacy of my personal data, offsetting the possiblity that my responses are highly unusual and further establishing the argument that reception patterns exist in rooting for narrative outcomes during moments of suspense (on this point, see also Plantinga 2009, p. 11). It is hoped that the reader's own self-reflection, in combination with the third party reports cited in this thesis, will reveal that there is no particular idiosyncrasy in my

responses that might be indicative of conscious or unconscious tampering with the 'raw' phenomenological data to support my hunches. It is also hoped that my reported rooting experiences may generalise to other viewers, regardless of inevitable and often extensive differences during moment-by-moment movie reception. As Barker (2006) pointed out earlier, this need not be an all or nothing argument (see also Bordwell 2012b, p. 123).

9. Ethical Considerations

Apart from the psychological pain caused to my wife, family, supervisors, university administrators, emailed academics, and my good self, there are **none** to report.

10. Limitations

Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie (1998) argue that one of the virtues of mixed-methodology is that it allows the researcher to engage in 'qualitative data collection and analysis on a relatively unexplored topic, using the results to design a subsequent quantitative phase of the study' (p. 47). Limitations in the generalisability of my evidence should be taken in this context given the purpose of this study, which also hopes to build upon this qualitative phase for future investigation into 'rooting' patterns during suspense. The lack of attention given to the influence of genre, mood, viewing conditions, length of clip, music, actors, personality, fandom, moral beliefs and values, race, gender, class, age, or culture are a necessary evil in taking this first step towards what I argue is a sizeable and largely unrecognised gap in understanding as to the origins of our passionate desire for particular narrative outcomes. Even if overlooking these variables means that my data is actually highly idiosyncratic, the reported responses remain relevant because any adequate theory of suspense and side-taking should be able to account for any outcome – those who root for option A, those who root for option B, and those who remain indifferent. As current theories struggle to explain the responses I report, the need for revision to these explanations remains. In other words, we would still need a theory of how I manage to be such a strange rooter.

Any further limitations may be put down to the deliberately wide lens utilised in order to stomp out the terrain. This investigation might even be viewed as a pilot study, the first stage in a much longer research project that hopes to culminate in the screening of experimentally manipulated movie scenes to real viewers self-reporting their rooting responses in both concurrent talk-aloud protocols and interviews/questionnaires post-screening. Pilot studies are often thought of as lesser or unrealised research due to a number of common shortcomings (such as limitations in sample size, question construction, evolving conceptual framework). A subsequent publication bias has also

meant they have been 'underdiscussed, underused and underreported' (Prescott & Soeken 1989, p. 60; see also Kezar 2000). Nevertheless, there remain good arguments for the importance of conducting and reporting preliminary such studies. Three of many possible reasons listed by van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) ably sum up the purpose of my own proposed 'pilot' study:

- Collecting preliminary data

- Developing a research question and research plan

- Convincing other stakeholders that the main study is worth supporting
  (van Teijlingen & Hundley 2001, p. 2).

11. Conclusion

To propose to investigate the science of suspense and side-taking within the Humanities is fraught with danger. Accusations of absolutism, positivism, and the unethical ends these viewpoints have sometimes served are barriers to conducting scientific investigation within cinema studies. Equally off-putting is the belief that science involves a narrow range of appropriate subject matter and practices, which one must be officially qualified to undertake. In demanding open investigation, academic rigor, and empirical verification, I am satisfied that this study transcends traditional pigeonholes in the Humanities and counts as science in the Nietzschean and Morinian sense. Claims about viewer response and cinematic effect need always be set against the limitations of diversity and individual difference, but this does not discard the (ethical) utility of such claims. '[H]uman scientists cannot be asked to give accurate forecasts of people's actions', writes Stephen Toulmin. '[T]he virtue of the social sciences is that they sometimes help us understand just why, under what special conditions our expectations of people's behavior – either as individuals or institutions – can reasonably be relied on' (2001, pp. 108-109).[43] My own research might be described as a search for the special conditions of suspense that encourage viewers to suddenly root for immoral outcomes and/or immoral characters. And the reason for this search is entirely ethical, opposing oppressive assumptions and increasing ideological awareness and aesthetic enjoyment.

DISMANTLING HITCHCOCK'S BOMB
THE CULKIN COMPLEX, THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT, AND OTHER MYSTERIOUS & IMPLACABLE LAWS

Wherein we challenge Carroll's moral theory of suspense and side-taking...

Oh, good evening.

You know, I've always been intrigued by the psychology of those who choose to dismantle bombs for a living. Keeping a clear mind when working through those false leads and irrelevant connections, an ever-ticking clock hanging over you with death its only destination, is surely the ultimate test of what psychologists call our Intelligence Quotient. So should any of you have the good fortune to meet the kind of man who dares spend his days staring into the abyss in a defiant attempt to unravel the inscrutable workings of these wicked little devices, kindly recognise him for what we now know him to be — a fully certified moron. Which brings me to tonight's tale, a fool's errand for which I shall leave you in suspense no longer.

Sitting in your lounge chair, increasingly annoyed by the ads on your television screen, you switch channels and are plunged into a gripping scene. High atop a rocky ocean cliff, a woman clings to two young boys dangling above icy winter waters crashing far below.

Lest you fail to recognise the full import of the situation, slipping fingers and terrified faces fill the screen as music pounds on the soundtrack. The weary woman holds on with every last drop of strength, but it is clear she is incapable of pulling both boys to safety.

Even such a brief and seemingly familiar movie scenario is, I suspect, enough to enable all to imagine the distinct possibility that viewers somewhere might find themselves in a state of suspense, hoping the woman can save the boys and fearing that she cannot. In other words, *rooting* for the woman to rescue the boys from the clutches of certain death. But where does such a response come from?

'SUSPENSE is made up of desire that a given event shall or shall not occur', wrote Howard T. Dimick in 1922. '[C]ertain people are presented to [the viewer]…in certain dynamic circumstance; and these together excite in him [sic] an *anticipation*…of some probable events about to take place, some outcome shortly to be realized, together with a *desire* that they shall, or shall not, be attained' (pp. 107-108, emphasis in original). Although suspense can be felt in the face of a wide variety of impending outcomes, from a kiss to a card game, these may also be anticipated and still leave us unmoved. Without a desire for or against anticipated outcomes, a kiss is just a kiss.

'Make me care', advises Pixar writer/director/ producer Andrew Stanton (2012), for this is the starting point of popular storytelling. The all-important rule. What appears to matter most is not the anticipated event so much as what we might call our care factor about its potential outcome. Thus for the filmmaker, the key question concerns how one can incite a desire for or against impending narrative outcomes. What is the secret ingredient that allows storytellers to avoid dreaded indifference in their audience?

Given that the description of our cliffhanger neglected to reveal that one of the boys in peril is cute-little-white-kid, Macaulay Culkin, one of the highest grossing child stars in Hollywood history, hanging there in his box-office prime,[44] – –

– – one might surmise that Culkin's star power is a strong factor in influencing viewer's 'desire that a given event shall or shall not occur', as Dimick puts it. But our cliffhanging example involves an explicit instance of playing against type, as Culkin goes all evil-seed in his role as 'the bad son'. Would it then surprise if I were to speculate that most viewers therefore hope that he, rather than the 'good son' alongside him (played by then no-name nice-guy, Elijah Wood Jr.) were the one to fall into the rocky ocean waters below?

I strongly suspect not. But on what basis might we build this suspicion?

Two possibilities spring to mind. The first is 'The Culkin Complex', a deep-seated desire to see any of the Culkin kids suffer onscreen.[45] The second is what David Bordwell has described as '[t]he most influential current theory of suspense in narrative' (2007), Noël Carroll's moral account of suspense, which just so happens to closely coincide with the Cain and Abel scene in question.

Moral Concern

Carroll claims that suspense occurs when a story cues the possibility of a 'good' outcome alongside an 'evil' outcome, with the 'evil' outcome appearing more likely (1984/1996, 1990, 1996b, 2006). 'Under "evil," I am including natural evils – any threats to human life and limb that result from natural causes and which need not be set in motion by evil agents', he writes (1984/1996, p. 104). The more likely the 'evil' outcome (and, conversely, the less likely the 'good' outcome), the more suspenseful the situation.

'Rocky Balboa' and 'Ivan Drago' dolls by JAKKS Pacific (2006), www.collectionstation.com. Photoshopped by C. McCormack.

According to this proposal, the audience adjudges undesirable outcomes based upon moral concerns. As Carroll explains:

> In constructing suspense, authors must find some way of engaging audience concern. Of course, the author has no way of knowing the personal concerns and vested interests of each and every audience member. So in order to enlist our concern, the author must find some very general interest all or most of the audience is likely to share. One such interest is what is morally right…The care and concern required for suspense are engendered in audiences of fictions by means of morality (1996b, p. 77 & p. 84).

This theory adds an addendum to Hitchcock's own 'explanation' of suspense, allowing for instances where we fail to automatically fear the proverbial bomb going off. If we believe an explosion is 'morally right' –to blow up the bad guy, for instance – we may even hope, rather than fear, the bomb goes off. Carroll's outline would also theoretically allow for indifference if we were to feel an explosion is not such an injustice one way or the other. For instance, we may not care whether two drunken teenagers happen to have casual sex, but if we knew that one of the characters was HIV positive, a clear Carrollean moral dichotomy concerning the coupling might be reasonably predicted for most viewers. And if the HIV carrier was aware of their sexual disease and deliberately spreading it to as many teenage girls as possible, as in Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995), many may well be outraged.

Carroll's theory also neatly applies to our cliffhanging scene, as the good son plunging into the rocky sea far below would seem to be morally wrong, whilst dropping Culkin – who has already killed his younger brother and attempted to drown his sister – might well be considered just desserts. The filmmakers also appear to amplify suspense in the manner Carroll's theory hypothesizes, by increasing the likelihood of the undesirable 'evil' outcome. Close-ups of the adopted 'good son' slipping out of reach and squealing like a pig about to be sent off to slaughter is offset by Culkin's biological 'bad son' coolly informing his mother that he needs *both* her hands or he will surely slip into the sea.

Carroll's theory is intuitive and clearly comes with a wealth of anecdotal and behavioural evidence from the history of popular cinema reception and construction. Experimental studies have also demonstrated that preferred narrative outcomes can be altered by manipulating the moral value of an outcome, and that suspense is greater when the

feared 'evil' outcome seems more likely than the hoped for 'good' outcome (see Comisky & Bryant 1982; Gerrig 2007; Jose & Brewer 1984; Polichak & Gerrig 2002; Zillmann & Cantor 1977). So it might seem that the question as to the outcomes for which audiences root is already solved. That is, *undesirable outcomes* are defined according to the viewer's own moral evaluation, which, despite its obvious variation across cultural groups, remains uniform enough to lever care and concern from sufficient numbers in the audience as to make the magic of cinema suspense possible. As Martin Rubin puts it, 'The moral factor might be rephrased…as "rooting interest"' (1999, p. 33). And Ben Brady agrees, stating:

> *Rooting interest…* is the viewers' desire to see the struggle come out fairly, righteously, and, to their minds, decently in the end (1994, p. 9, emphasis in original).

However, despite the impressive predictive nature of Carroll's theory, there are some rooting responses that his focus on moral preference fails to predict.

A Major or Minor Hitch?

In an appendix to his 1984 essay 'Toward a Theory of Film Suspense' which first outlined his moral framework, Carroll acknowledges that 'there are some ambiguous and troublesome counterexamples to it, clustered especially in the work of Alfred Hitchcock' (1984/1996, p. 111). If it is true that viewers root for outcomes based on morality, rooting for *immoral* outcomes should be impossible. And yet there exist cases in which openly immoral rooting appears to occur. Carroll goes on to cite two scenes that purportedly produce an intense hope for immoral outcomes in many viewers (though notably not in himself). The first scene, which I shall refer to as 'Bruno and the Lighter', comes from Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951).

Charismatic psychopath Bruno (Robert Walker), is disgruntled that the protagonist, Guy (Farley Granger), has not fulfilled his end of what he takes to be an implicit agreement. After meeting on a train as pure strangers, Bruno suggests they could swap murders, committing the crime on each other's behalf in order to avoid providing any obvious motive. Bruno has already strangled Guy's selfish ex-wife, who had been holding off on a divorce just to prevent his happy marriage to a woman he truly loves.

But Guy denies a deal was ever made, believed Bruno was only kidding when they first met, and refuses to return the favour by murdering Bruno's father. To enact revenge for this perceived slight, Bruno plans to plant Guy's monogramed cigarette lighter at the scene of his ex-wife's death to frame him for her murder.

Although aware of Bruno's evil plan, Guy, a fading tennis pro already under suspicion, is stuck playing in a tournament under close observation by two detectives eager for evidence of his guilt.

But as Bruno steps off the train near the carnival, convinced of his plan's imminent success, he is accidentally knocked by a passerby, – –

– – causing him to fumble the precious cigarette lighter. It falls from his hand – –

– – and tumbles into the storm drain.

According to Carroll's moral theory of suspense, when the lighter drops into the drain, viewers should express *relief*, as Bruno's goal to frame Guy for murder is surely immoral. However, many viewers instead report expressing *distress* at this unexpected turn of events. 'Oh no…', I find my own inner voice gasping. And when Bruno desperately reaches down through the grate into the drain soon after, these feelings grow stronger.

His fingers feel around for the lighter on a ledge of the dark drain.

He manages to pincer it precariously.

But it slips from his fingers and falls to the bottom far below. 'Oh, no!', I cry out inside.

Frustrated, Bruno kneels on the curb and reaches down through the grate as far as humanly possible, arm extending, fingers closer and closer to the key item in his evil plan.

When witness to this I am on the edge of my seat for what seems like an eternity. Bruno's fingers are only inches away from success. But when he finally manages to secure the lighter, I am relieved. Such an expression typically occurs at the successful *avoidance* of

an undesired outcome. And thus Carroll's claims about morality as the guiding principle for desired and undesired outcomes seem to hit a pothole, as my response is consistent with a desire that Bruno *retrieve* the lighter.

The second Hitchcock scene Carroll cites as a potential challenge to his moral structure of suspense, which I shall call 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck', is from *Frenzy* (1972).

After raping and strangling his latest victim, the 'Neck-Tie Murderer', Bob Rusk (Barry Foster), hides the corpse in a hessian sack in the back of a potato truck at Covent Market.

But as he relaxes in his bachelor pad across the road waiting for the truck to return the load of unsold potatoes to the farm, he notices his signature jeweled '*R*' tie-pin is missing.

Realising the victim (Anna Massey) must have clutched it as she tried to fend him off, – –

– – Rusk races back to the potato truck before it leaves for the farm, the tie-pin on the corpse connecting him directly to her rape and murder. A darkly comic sequence unfolds as the charming psychopath searches for her body amongst a pile of identical sacks, – –

– – his mission complicated when the truck starts up and drives off to do its delivery – –

– – and a series of unfortunate events including a sneezing fit from the dust and a pocket knife snapped in two trying to prise open the corpse's rigid fingers to free the tie-pin.[46]

As with 'Bruno and the Lighter', 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' scene is difficult to define because its morality is foreign to standard Hollywood set-ups. Nevertheless, it seems clear to me that I am rooting for the killer to retrieve the incriminating evidence throughout, even though it will allow him to avoid arrest, continue raping and murdering, and will likely lead the victim's innocent lover and ostensible protagonist, Blaney (Jon Finch), who is already under suspicion, to be jailed for Rusk's disturbing deeds. My predilection for an 'immoral' narrative outcome is illustrated when the driver stops the truck to check on sacks mysteriously spilling out the back all over the road due to Rusk's anxious search.

Under Carroll's moral structure, I should hope the sex-killer is caught red-handed with his latest victim. Instead, I fear he will be discovered and hope he can hide in the shadows.

This desired narrative outcome appears consistent with the *relief* I express when Rusk avoids detection and when, minutes later, he finally retrieves his tie-pin and escapes. In contrast to my experience, Carroll (1984/1996) claims only that to have responded with laughter at Rusk's comic struggle to find the body and prise his tie-pin from the stiffened corpse whilst bouncing around the moving truck. He reports finding the sequence

> a hilarious, surreptitiously obscene, and sustained exercise in black humor. In this case, my laughter interferes with any feeling of suspense on my part. But it is likely that others have responded differently (Carroll 1984/1996, p. 117).

I am one of these 'others'. Like Carroll, I also find the sequence amusing. Alongside the black comedy, however, I experience suspense and concern for the killer and his quest. In stating that 'my laughter interferes with any feeling of suspense on my part', it reads as if Carroll feels laughter and suspense cannot – or frequently do not – co-exist. Such a claim seems unsustainable. Suspense has been associated with comedy since the likes of Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and Buster Keaton. Although viewers howl with laughter when Hrundi V. Bakshi (Peter Sellers) is involved in a series of sustained exercises in potential public humiliation in Blake Edwards' *The Party* (1968), they would also seem to gasp when yet another thing goes wrong, just as in 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' sequence. Indeed, it would seem difficult not to laugh *and* be anxious at the same time as Rusk is put through the ringer trying to retrieve the evidence, bouncing around in the dark with an uncooperative corpse on the back of a dusty old potato truck dressed up in his sharp suit and French-cuffed shirt.

Hampered by his self-confessed lack of suspense when watching these two troublesome Hitchcock scenes outlined above, Carroll struggles to explain away these instances in his original article (1984). According to Martin Rubin, 'Carroll finally accounts for these deviations by classifying Hitchcock as an original and even subversive artist who defines himself against the established norm' (1999, p. 33). But any attempt to explain away the issue by posing Hitchcock as a master magician is clearly inadequate, for it is no explanation at all. Even if these enigmatic moments of immoral suspense and side-taking were born of Hitchcock's heaven-sent brilliance, we still need to know exactly how and why the magical effect actually works. Surprisingly, despite the questions they still seem to pose for his moral theory of suspense, Carroll has remained largely silent on these two scenes in the thirty years since he flagged them as 'troublesome counterexamples' (1984/1996, p. 111).

The Enigma of Immoral Suspense

In order to solve the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking which leads viewers to root for 'evil' outcomes at the movies, Carroll and others who place *morality* at the centre of suspense and side-taking (e.g. Dolf Zillmann, Murray Smith, and, to a lesser extent, Carl Plantinga) must either:

> a) Deny that such side-taking is actually immoral, by arguing that it is, in fact, moral relative to opposing (less moral) options presented by the narrative, or

> b) Deny that suspense, and thus immoral side-taking, is truly occurring in these instances.[47]

Carroll has argued for option a) in regard to our endorsement of morally shady characters such as professional thieves, colonial armies, guns for hire, and gangsters like Tony Soprano from *The Sopranos* (see 1996b, pp. 79-80; 2004/2013, 2010). Murray Smith (1999) has also taken this line of argument and again used it to explain away audience connection with Tony Soprano (see 2011). In many cases, this reasoning is convincing. Morally dubious protagonists in popular narrative are often surrounded by other characters who engage in far more loathsome activities.

For instance, although a character like Harry Callaghan in *Dirty Harry* (1971) embraces law enforcement tactics that might be considered immoral when viewed in isolation, his character and behavior remains morally virtuous in context relative to the psychopaths and sickos he is attempting to stop. Carroll and Smith claim this is (mostly) true of the characters that surround Tony Soprano who make him look morally virtuous in comparison. However, this defense does not seem to apply to Hitchcock's two troublesome scenes. Bruno and Rusk, though charming, are portrayed as psychopathic killers opposed to innocent heroes (regardless of 'transference of guilt' readings – see

Rohmer & Chabrol 1957/1979). In other words, they are clearly *immoral* relative to the protagonist, even if Carroll has clarified that the moral virtues to which he is appealing are 'more often Greek than Christian' (1993/1996, p. 280). Carroll therefore appears to have adopted option b) in more comments about 'Bruno and the Lighter', denying suspense is truly occurring in this scene.

In 2007, Carroll wrote of watching Bruno reach down the drain for the lighter: 'our arm muscles flex…in a manner like his in order to help us feel his intention with our body', thereby providing 'an echo of the *feelings*' Bruno has (pp. 107-108 & p. 109, emphasis in original). In 2008, Carroll recycled this passage in a chapter entitled 'Affect and the Moving Image' in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, adding another sentence immediately afterwards. 'It is not that we identify with Bruno morally or emotionally, but we ape his gesture in order to help us determine a glimmer of what he is feeling', Carroll writes before claiming we may 'involuntarily mimic' facial expression, which then leads to 'a feeling' (2008, p. 187).[48] Nowhere in print since his 1984 article has Carroll referred to the existence of suspense in the 'Bruno and the Lighter' scene. It nevertheless seems clear he is using the example to combat claims that viewers have 'identified' with Bruno and his hope to reach the lighter, which would itself be a direct contradiction of the moral account of suspense and side-taking to which Carroll is committed. 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' sequences from *Frenzy* has been even more conspicuous in its complete and utter absence from Carroll's post-1984 writing on suspense, emotional response, and moral allegiance (see 1990, 1996b, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014).

When quizzed about both 'Bruno and the Lighter' and 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' scenes, Carroll replied:

> Nowadays I try to handle those cases in terms of the notion of mirror reflexes (which may or may not be connected with mirror neurons). I regard these as automatic information gathering responses whereby we use our motor reflexes to clarify the intentions of others. The mobilization of these reflexes comes without moral allegiance (Personal correspondence, April 16th 2014).

Unfortunately this still fails to explain my hope that Bruno reaches the lighter. To that, Carroll has only one answer: option b) Deny that suspense, and thus immoral side-taking, is truly occurring in these instances. To be clear, Carroll is willing to accept the presence of suspense, but argues over its origin. This allows him to dispute that viewers like me are truly rooting for the bad guy's success. He explains:

> [T]he scene is suspenseful because it raises our anxieties about how close Bruno is to destroying Guy (Personal correspondence, July 17th 2014).

Thus my suspense is real but its origin is *fear* that Bruno will reach the lighter, not *hope* that he does. What then accounts for my *relief* when Bruno finally reaches the lighter?

> The sensation marks the relaxation of our own mirror tension. It is noncognitive
> (Personal correspondence, July 20th 2014).

I find this answer unconvincing. Not only am I quite conscious of hoping Bruno retrieves the lighter, but I also exhibit other responses at odds to those Carroll predicts a scene such as this should produce.

'[H]owever motivated, audiences evolve concerns regarding the situations portrayed in films', writes Carroll in *Engaging the Moving Image* (2003), 'and when those concerns are threatened, we tend to react with dysphoric (or discomforting) emotions, whereas when the concern in question is abetted by narrative developments, our emotions tend to be euphoric' (2003, p. 71).[49] Thus, following his moral account of suspense and side-taking, viewers who worry about Bruno's nefarious plan coming to fruition should feel delight or relief when the lighter tumbles into the drain, and again when his fingers fumble it on the ledge and it falls even further down to the bottom of the drain, seemingly forever out of reach. I am in perfect position to test this claim, for I am one of these viewers. I am entirely conscious of *not* wanting Bruno to succeed in planting the lighter to frame Guy for the murder of his ex-wife. And yet I express a *dysphoric*, not euphoric response as Carroll's above statement predicts, gasping 'Oh no!' on both occasions as the lighter falls. And I do not feel or express a single hint of delight in these moments.

Also against his explanation is what we might call Carroll's own 'calculus of suspense' (with reference to Carroll 1996b, p. 82). This intuitive equation claims that the hoped-for moral outcome must appear (relatively) unlikely, whilst the feared immoral outcome should seem (relatively) likely.

'Scales of Justice' image from www.vector.me by johnny_automatic (2009). Photoshopped by C. McCormack.
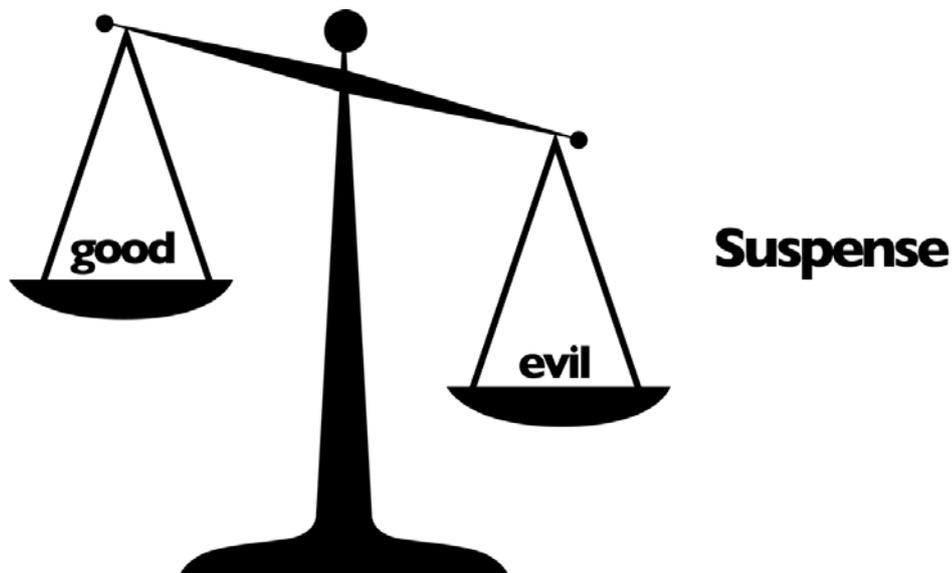
Based upon these criteria, however, Hitchcock seems to mess the entire scene up, painting Bruno's efforts as nigh impossible, particularly once the lighter drops a second time way down to the bottom of the drain. And yet Hitchcock's error in his presentation of the likelihood that the lighter will be retrieved appears entirely deliberate, the result of numerous creative decisions. These include:

- ❖ Tilting the camera down slightly and tracking back to reveal its resting place on the bottom of the drain, which emphasises the extra depth to be reached compared to filming the entire fall in wide shot where the lighter would land *within* the frame.

- ❖ Cutting to a horrified reaction shot of Bruno. If it's easy to reach that extra distance, why react? If it is reachable, it should be easier to pick up now that it has hit the bottom and has no further to fall.

- ❖ The speed at which Bruno's straining arm reaches down, its stretch so theatrically slow that it leaves time for another cutaway to Guy playing tennis.

- ❖ The new position of Bruno's sweaty face close at the ground, his arm deep down the grate, practically up to his pit, suggesting he is at his limit of physical extension.

- ❖ Bruno's fingers wiggling an inch or two away from the lighter, feeling for it in vain, which allows for yet another cutaway to the tennis.[50]

In contrast to this portrayal of Bruno's goal, which clearly communicates that the odds are against it, Guy's aim to win the tennis match seems highly likely because he only has one game to win to secure victory. This goes against Carroll's aforementioned explanation that 'the scene is suspenseful because it raises our anxieties about how close Bruno is to destroying Guy' (Personal correspondence, July 17th 2014). Even if Carroll were to insist that Guy's actual goal is to win *quickly* to rush off to stop Guy planting the cigarette lighter, an outcome that is difficult when the score becomes locked on deuce, Hitchcock has again 'misconstructed' for suspense. Guy's efforts on the tennis court are primarily presented as a montage, summarising events rather than playing them out for the viewer to participate in the unfolding action, whilst Bruno's plight is portrayed in more than real time detail, 'agonizingly extended [rather] than tightly compressed' (Rubin 1999, p. 215).

The events in dispute for Guy to successfully achieve his goal therefore remain abstract and unspecific compared to Bruno's predicament. Most of the tennis shots are framed like a Russian montage, with Guy and his opponent swinging the racket this way and that, the sound of a tennis ball hit and the commentator's voiceover the only clue as to what is going on. Onscreen geography is barely established. It is often impossible to tell where one player or the other is on the court. The ball is also rarely shown. All this means the viewer lacks the necessary information to generate anticipation and concern about a shot landing safely in or a being safely reached and returned across the net, let alone the temporal space to root for an outcome one way or another.

One thing that may have made the suspense in 'Bruno and the Lighter' so difficult for film theorists such as Carroll to fathom is that Hitchcock's crosscutting here is unconventional. A staple of cinema suspense since D.W Griffith, cross-cutting typically intercuts parallel events that will eventually converge, one ultimately *impacting* the other. For instance, whilst the hero's wife and children are at home terrorised by another lower class criminal, our middle-class hero races home before they come to harm. Intercutting between the two competing lines creates suspense, as the viewer wonders if the hero will return in time. In contrast, what is peculiar about 'Bruno and the Lighter' is that the two lines of action have no direct impact on one another at all. That is, they do not exist in competition, struggling to see which outcome will win. They are two separate outcomes with no direct link. Should Guy win his tennis match, the result will prevent Bruno from retrieving the lighter. Nor will Bruno's retrieving the lighter prevent Guy from winning the game, or from catching a cab, train, and second cab to finally converge with him at the murder site later that night. The action therefore remains *resolutely parallel*. Since the two local goals – to win a tennis match and to retrieve a lighter – are not at cross-purposes, it seems perfectly permissible to root for the success of *both* men (see also Allen 2007, p. 57 & p. 147 on this important point).[51]

A similar argument may also be made about the design of the 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' scene from *Frenzy* (1972). There are indications of a directorial intention to create a desire for the 'evil' outcome that Rusk retrieves his tie-pin and escapes detection. The drawn-out sequence would scarcely even make sense unless the viewer were to assume it had been constructed to encourage sympathy for the killer's plight. The dramatic music that erupts when Rusk, relaxing on the sofa with a glass of wine after dumping his victim in the potato truck, suddenly realises his tie-pin is missing and bolts back down the stairs to find the corpse before the truck departs would be completely out of place if the viewer were supposed to feel delight at his setback. The calculus of suspense in the extended truck scene so clearly weighed against Rusk's success, as he encounters problem after problem, would also be completely back-to-front, producing little tension in viewers Carroll presumes already hope the psychopath fails. In other words, the odds are so stacked against him, viewers rooting against Rusk's success have little reason to worry at all, whereas viewers rooting for him have everything to be nervous about.

Again, my own euphoric and dysphoric emotional responses fail to match predictions made by Carroll's theory. When the truck driver pulls over to check the rear tray from which potatoes have been tumbling across the road, I should feel euphoric at the prospect that Rusk may finally be discovered, and dysphoric when he is not spotted. Instead I feel gloom and consciously hope he avoids detection. Carroll has suggested that

this may result not from fear for Rusk but for the truck driver (Personal correspondence, July 20th 2014). Although this remains a distinct possibility, we might note that Rusk is unarmed, highly fatigued, and only obviously versed in the art of rape and strangulation of vulnerable women. Thus there is little clear threat to the driver aside from a handful of potatoes and a presumed desperate desire to avoid jail. Discovery would still seem the 'moral' outcome, regardless of any fear for the driver's safety, and to fail to agree to put his life at risk might still be labeled 'immoral' in the scheme of things. Even if Carroll is on the right track that my relief as Rusk and Bruno retrieve their key piece of evidence 'might be just that the tension of the scene has been dissipated' (Personal correspondence, July 20th 2014), this does not explain why I fail to feel any dysphoric emotion whatsoever when this immoral outcome occurs.

Despite all this, Carroll is clearly welded to his moral structure, kindly reporting:

> Recently I saw Frenzy again and find it hard to believe that the audience is on the rapist's side as he struggles to get the jewelry out of Anna Massey's hand.
> (Personal correspondence, July 17th 2014)

We are thus completely at odds on this scene, for I find it hard to believe that most audience members are not hoping for the tie-pin's retrieval. Am I really a rare exception to Carroll's moral rule, or somehow misreading my own rooting response? Evidence from other viewers suggests I am neither, and that Carroll may need to revise his position.

Mass Immorality?

Many film theorists, film critics, and filmmakers have reported hoping that Bruno reaches the lighter and Rusk retrieves his tie-pin. 'In *Strangers on a Train*, one of the thing[s] Hitchcock does is he manipulates the audience into rooting for Bruno, the villain', says scholar Steven DeRosa in the documentary, *The Master's Touch: Hitchcock's Signature Style*. 'The cigarette lighter drops down into a storm drain. And now, we, the audience, *although we're rooting for Guy*, we find ourselves hoping that Bruno's gonna be able to get that cigarette lighter out from the drain' (cited in 2009, emphasis added, 17:12). In line with this claim, mirrored by my own experience and by Richard Allen's aforementioned description of the moral inversion of classical suspense, James Davidson argues that though we root for Guy, 'we can't help but *also* root for Bruno to retrieve the lighter' (2015, emphasis added). David George Menard states that viewers are 'placed in a duality of contradictory or contrary positions', simultaneously rooting for and against Bruno's respective local and global goals (Menard 2008). George Toles talks of our '*temporary* pact with Bruno' (2011, p. 550, emphasis added) whilst, in a potential challenge to Carroll's moral structure of suspense, screenwriter William C. Martell surmises that

'[s]omewhere early in his career, Hitchcock realized that…suspense can be built around the Villain's problems as well as the Hero's' (2013, 'Poking the Tiger'). Todd McGowan would seem to agree, claiming that 'Hitchcock constantly places the spectator in the position of desiring the evil outcome' (2011, p. 526). Greg Orypeck believes that this maneuver 'reverses the audience's sympathies', which therefore explains why the audience 'wants Bruno to retrieve the lighter' (2013). Phillip Kemp concurs. 'Watching his fingers reaching desperately down we…even find ourselves rooting for the villain' (Kemp 2012, p. 14). And Robin Wood takes this response to be so common as to ask, '[W]ho hasn't *wanted* Bruno to reach the lighter?' (1965, p. 58, emphasis in original).

Similar logic has been applied to 'The Tie Pin in the Potato Truck' scene. 'Hitchcock invites us to root for Rusk during this ordeal', argues Richard Allen (2007, p. 64). We are 'evidently in suspense' as Rusk tries to retrieve his tie pin, according to Nitzan Shaul-Ben, and Carroll's theory 'fails to account for our feeling of suspense when an antagonist is endangered' (2012, p. 23). Martin Rubin sums up both these scenes as clear-cut cases where 'the audience is encouraged to root for the bad guy, or, in Carroll's terms, to desire an immoral result' (1999, p. 33). And Anthony Macklin reports widespread belief in this possibility, observing: 'A lot of people have said that the audience for *Frenzy* is supposed to sympathize in a sense with the killer. They want him to get away' (1976/2014, p. 51). In contrast, I find no mention of the opposite response, rooting *against* Bruno or Rusk's immediate goal in these two scenes, from anyone but Carroll.[52]

This is not to argue that Carroll is somehow mistaken about his own emotional response to these two scenes. It is merely to point out that any good theory should seek to explain responses, not escape them. It only takes one person to root for an immoral outcome in one scene to demand some sort of fallibilist adjustment to Carroll's moral theory of suspense, even if this is simply an exemption clause to explain how 'deviant' viewers like me are able to root against morality. Based on the weight of evidence above, however, a much bigger adjustment is required. It is Carroll who appears to have deviated from the norm in rooting for 'moral' outcomes during 'Bruno and the Lighter' and 'The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck'. If Carroll's theory is currently unable to explain such common response, the worst is to come, for there is one significant figure at odds with his moral structure of suspense whose argument might be thought to hold more weight than most.

In his 1968 *Action!* interview with Bob Thomas, the biggest name in filmmaking, Alfred Hitchcock, argued directly against the assumption that morality lies at the centre of suspense and side-taking.

> Audiences are very strange…The emotional anxieties are pretty well standard. And they do not necessarily relate to right and wrong. Those anxieties can be so powerful that, if you

show a burglar in the bedroom and then cut to a woman opening her front door, the
audience says to the burglar: "Get out!" They don't care about the fact that he is involved in
a criminal act (1973, p. 29).

This tale, which I hereby dub 'Hitchcock's Thief', should be familiar to many readers, not
only because the director repeated it so often (see also Bogdanovich 1963, p. 46; Macklin
1976/2014, p. 51; Schickel 1975, p. 294; Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 272), but also
because the trope is so recurrent in one form or another in popular narrative, which is
precisely why the example is instantly understood by these interviewers.[53] Film critic,
David Denby, takes such moments to be so widespread as to suggest, 'Narrative art
forms like novels and movies are governed by certain mysterious but implacable laws,
and one of them is that when people are in danger of being caught—even if they are
doing something awful—we root for them to get away" (Denby 1991, p. 32; also cited in
Gerrig 1993, p. 69). Hitchcock, too, described the immoral response contained in his
anecdote as 'a general rule' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 272). In a prior
interview with Peter Bogdanovich, he explained:

> This comes under the heading of rooting for the evildoer to succeed–because in all of us we
> have that eleventh commandment nagging us: "Thou shalt not be found out." The average
> person looking at someone doing evil or wrong wants the person to get away with it.
> There's something that makes them say, "Look out! Look out! They're coming!" I think it's
> the most amazing instinct-doesn't matter how evil it is, you know. Can't go as far as murder,
> but anything up to that point. The audience can't bear the suspense of the person being
> discovered. "Hurry up! Quick! You're going to be caught!"
> (cited in Bogdanovich 1963, p. 46).

The Master of Suspense even links the 'Hitchcock's Thief' tale and his eleventh
commandment directly to the *Frenzy* scene Carroll struggles to explain. In the director's
view, this instinct explains why – contrary to Carroll's aforementioned skepticism – 'we're
rooting for him all the time to get that tie pin back' (Hitchcock cited in Schickel 1975, p.
294; see also Macklin 1976/2014, p. 51). It seems strange that Carroll has never
mentioned the 'Hitchcock's Thief' anecdote, if only to counter its explicit claim that immoral
rooting exists. If he had somehow avoided encountering the tale in Truffaut and Scott's
famous interview book (1967/1984), Carroll must surely have encountered the tale in a
work that appears to have had a major impact on his own analytical approach to film, V.F.
Perkins' *Film as Film* (1972/1991, p. 144), which quotes the entire 'Hitchcock's Thief'
anecdote direct from Truffaut and Scott. Although I asked Carroll about his response to
the anecdote, and to other explicit claims Hitchcock made about the existence of immoral
suspense, on several occasions (Personal correspondence 16th April 2014, 20th July
2014, 21st July 2014), he seems to have overlooked this and focused purely on his
doubts about rooting for Bruno and Rusk which I initially asked about.

Carroll's original (1984) essay did, however, highlight Hitchcock's comments about rooting for Rusk to retrieve the tie-pin in *Frenzy*, but he reported that his own response was 'at variance with the claim' (1984/1996, p. 117). Carroll does allow for the possibility of suspense in the scene when conceding 'it is likely others have responded differently' (1984/1996, p. 117), but this concession is curious because it marks one of the rare times in his career that he has not gone to further lengths to understand an unexplained (and arguably common) response pattern. Additionally, given his comment that he recently watched *Frenzy* again and finds it hard to believe that the audience is rooting for Rusk's success in retrieving the tie-pin, it sounds as if Carroll has withdrawn much of his 1984 concession to other viewing responses. If so, this only serves to make it all the more strange that he would not wish to explain how so many viewers could be under the illusion that they are rooting for Rusk to succeed in the scene. Even if Carroll could explain away my apparent rooting for Rusk or Bruno, 'Hitchcock's Thief' presents a direct challenge to his moral theory of suspense and side-taking. In the absence of any official position on this anecdote, and given Carroll's commitment to ongoing clarity and precision, we might anticipate several objections to the tale on his behalf. As it is Carroll and his cognitive colleagues whom I most wish to convince on this matter (for I consider myself of the same school), we must give these objections due consideration and assess their ability to explain away Hitchcock's claimed mass-concern for his immoral thief.

Hitchcock's Thieves

An immediate objection is that the ability of Carroll's theory of suspense to explain the anecdote renders Hitchcock's talk of strange behavior, natural instincts, and amazing yet unknown commandments redundant. That special '*something* that makes them say, "Look out! Look out!' (cited in Bogdanovich 1963, p. 46, emphasis added) is nothing more than moral evaluation, for the viewer worries more about the woman's safety than the thief's escape with her jewels. Hitchcock often tells the tale with a woman coming up the stairs (see Macklin 1976; Schickel 1975; Thomas 1973), thereby suggesting that viewer concern may well be for *her*, not the thief. But just as often he does not assign or imply any gender to homeowner or thief at all (see Bogdanovich 1963; Hitchcock 1963/1995, pp. 293-294; Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73). Regardless, there is no reason why vulnerability here is necessarily gender-dependent, as Carroll was clearly willing to consider fear for the *male* truck driver in *Frenzy* (1972) as explanation of my own self-confessed fear that Rusk may be discovered. However, given that the burglar in Hitchcock's anecdote is a criminal and that the audience is not exactly unfamiliar with scenes such as this resulting in physical altercations, injury and even death, we might be

inclined to side with Carroll's well-defined and well-supported moral account of suspense rather than pursue Denby's 'mysterious and implacable laws'. Were this the end of the story, such a conclusion might be warranted. But dismissing this problem is far more difficult a task for Carroll and other proponents of moral suspense and side-taking.

In Truffaut and Scott (1967/1984), Hitchcock makes the even more astounding claim that an audience en masse would fear a bomb blast under the table of evil incarnate, Adolf Hitler, sitting there with his henchmen at the height of World War II.[54]

> I don't think the public would say, "Oh, good, they're all going to be blown to bits," but rather, they'll be thinking, "Watch out. There's a bomb!" What it means is that the apprehension of the bomb is more powerful than the feelings of sympathy or dislike for the characters involved (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73).

This claim is clearly at odds with Carroll's moral structure, and it allows no easy escape via counterargument that suspense and rooting responses are based on danger to other innocent parties. Unfortunately the claim is one that Carroll failed to ever acknowledge or address in my repeated communication. Nevertheless, there is still the nagging problem that Hitchcock's statement is mere speculation. In the absence of experimental testing of such a scene, can we really find any evidence for this claim? Although Hitchcock never did film a scene that would allow us to gather data about suspense felt over an explosive device ticking away beneath an 'evil' character's feet, there is one scene in the director's canon that appears to induce sustained suspense for such a character under threat.

The above image, well-known to cognitive film theorists as the cover image of Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995a), is taken from the climax of Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942). It shows the film's antagonist, Fry, clinging for his life atop the Statue of Liberty. Although Fry is portrayed as a heartless anarchist, according to Truffaut 'the scene is so powerful that the public can't help being terrified just the same' (Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 147 & p. 150). Indeed, one would seem to require either an extraordinarily low pulse or a stone cold heart not to feel at least some fear that Fry will fall, and some hope that his sleeve stitching will hold out until help arrives.

Carroll has not, to my knowledge, commented on this scene in print and I am unsure how he would attempt to account for it. The easiest move might be to claim that the viewer is actually fearful that the innocent protagonist, Barry Kane (Robert Cummings), will fall during his attempt to save the undeserving antagonist, Fry.

This would retain the moral structure of suspense, in the same way as Carroll's previous suggestion that my fear when Rusk is under threat of discovery by the truck driver is actually fear *for* the truck driver, not the villain. There is certainly suspense to be had as the hero puts himself at risk. However, much of the focus in the scene is on Fry's precarious position. Whereas Fry's life is literally coming apart at the seams before our eyes, the hero has confidently climbed down to save him without so much as a thought and seems little threat to fall. There is no close-up of his hand straining to hold onto the statue, or his face straining under the weight. The focus of the threat to fall is Fry.

Another possibility is that Fry undergoes a kind of moral redemption in this moment, as he hangs there and promises the innocent-hero-on-the-run, 'I'll clear ya. I swear I will. I'll clear ya' of the sabotage Barry has been blamed for. He seems suddenly genuine, humbled by his predicament. And it is immediately after this moment that his sleeve begins to break and the suspense over his fate is most explicit. Such an answer might seem to leave Carroll's moral structure intact, but it creates another considerable problem over the strength of our so-called moral allegiance to characters that Carroll, Zillmann, and Smith see as central to viewer response. If Fry can say a single sentence to undo the antipathy viewers have felt for him throughout, then it would barely seem worth proposing that suspense and side-taking is steered by *partiality* based upon *morality*. Instead, moment-by-moment moral judgment without an additional 'attachment' claim would seem

to be a better predictor of our suspense and side-taking. Moreover, this explanation of the scene is easily tested by editing out Fry's promise. In doing so, I notice no difference in my own level of suspense, and certainly no absence of suspense as Fry clings there.[55]

An alternative explanation is Murray Smith's proposal that despite any antipathy for Fry, 'a truly repugnant character' (1995a, p. 103), we are overwhelmed by emotional contagion to feel the immoral antagonist's fear and ultimately sympathise with him in spite of ourselves. Smith writes:

> [A]ffective mimicry has an extraordinary power to disrupt and force a reorganization of the moral structure at a given moment in a film…[outweighing] other forms of response which comprise the structure of sympathy (1995a, p. 106).

This move would require some rethinking from Carroll, however, for he does not yet grant that emotional contagion is capable of this feat. Instead, he is of the opinion that mirror reflexes merely give us a glimpse of understanding into another, not full-blown emotion. As cited earlier in Carroll's explanation of the relief I reported feeling when witnessing Bruno stretch to pick up the cigarette lighter:

> The mobilization of these reflexes comes without moral allegiance
> (Personal correspondence, April 16th 2014).

In referring to these as mirror reflexes (rather than mirror effects) Carroll stresses their knee-jerk nature, akin to a startle, which other cognitive film theorists have already accepted is a rapid survival response; a primal affect, not an emotion (see Baird 2000; Bordwell 2012a, p. 51; Carroll & Seeley 2013, pp. 67-68; Ekman, Friesen & Simons 1985; Plantinga 2009, p. 29; Smith, M 1994, p. 39; Tan 1996, p. 147, though see also Robinson 1995). For Carroll, (moral) emotions are cognitive appraisals of the situation, whilst mirror reflexes are 'noncognitive'. Following this logic, he is free to claim that, despite being instantly *affected* by Bruno's effortful expression and ever-extending arm, viewers do not actually root for his success in retrieving the light. Much here turns on Carroll's ability to dismiss the entirely conscious sense that viewers like me are hoping Bruno reaches the lighter. Even if the foundation of this hope is somehow built on false grounds – i.e. that we mistook our own affective reflex for a sign that we desire Bruno reaches the lighter – it seems beside the point to claim that our conscious sense of hope for that outcome is not real. My desire that Bruno and Rusk succeed in the two problematic scenes, just as my hope that Fry does not plunge to his death in the Statue of Liberty climax, is more than just the interpretation of my arousal. It leads to conscious hopes and fears for narrative outcomes, and euphoric and dysphoric emotional responses consistent with the holding of these preferred narrative outcomes.[56]

Rather than alter his view on this and follow Smith's affective mimicry proposal to explain 'immoral' suspense for Fry, Carroll might instead reach for his own concession that:

> at the limit, I suspect that even a vicious character and his plight can become the object of suspense when he is portrayed as an utterly helpless victim, since the audience's sense of rectitude recoils at the prospect of harming truly helpless victims (Carroll 2006, p. 231).

This statement could explain many personal rooting responses I have noted over the years that would otherwise break Carroll's moral structure. These include, the pity I take on the poor alien Predator, laying on the ground with broken fang, spewing up bright green blood, – –

– – which leads me to hope that Dutch (Arnold Schwarzenegger) does not smash the rock in his hands down upon the 'evil' creature's face at the climax of *Predator* (1987).

Or the momentary concern I feel for the abhorrent right-hand man trafficking sex slaves in *Taken* (2008) when the hero (Liam Neeson) turns the evil man's own knife back upon him and struggles to keep it at bay.

The idea reinforces Murray Smith's (1995a) view that 'the creation of a local situation in which an otherwise undesirable character is herself victimized, or placed in a dreadful situation' (pp. 217-218) may lead to 'the oft-noted "sympathy for the devil" elicited by Hitchcock's films' (p. 217). Smith even cites Fry's clinging to the Statue of Liberty in example. However, Carroll and Smith's escape clauses still fail to explain sympathy for Bruno and Rusk, who are hardly 'truly helpless victims' (Carroll 2006, p. 231) or 'in a dreadful situation' (Smith, M 1995a, p. 218) in this same sense. And the fact that neither Carroll nor Smith has bothered to appeal to this concession to explain 'Bruno and the Lighter' or 'The Tie-pin in the Potato Truck' suggests that they may well agree with this assessment.

The Eleventh Commandment

Further evidence of Hitchcock's contention that audience anxieties 'do not necessarily relate to right and wrong' (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 29) can be found in numerous scenes that evoke Hitchcock's eleventh commandment, 'Thou shalt not be found out' (cited in Bogdanovich 1963, p. 46; see also Morehouse 1972 and Schickel 1975, p. 294), that have been committed to celluloid. The opening of Samuel Fuller's *Pickup on South Street* (1953), for example, presents a crowded New York subway carriage where two dark-suited men are subjecting a female passenger to hidden surveillance.

The train stops at a station, and more passengers embark. As commuters stand in silence after the train departs, a single figure in the distance catches my eye, his movement and his forward stare in stark contrast with the rest of the passengers' side composition. He slowly makes his way through the crowded carriage toward the camera.

The man (Richard Widmark) soon finds himself standing beside the watched woman. He takes out a newspaper, gives her a surreptitious glance, lowers his eyes and reads.

And so the suspense begins…

His nimble fingers unclip the woman's handbag and delicately explore its insides in search of booty. Under Carroll's moral theory of suspense, at this point 'standard' viewers should be hoping the woman notices the evil crime before it is too late. Although the moment is a prime opportunity to scream out 'Look out, Lady!', – –

– – I find myself expressing the opposite response, holding my breath hoping no one notices the crime. Is this not a prime illustration of Hitchcock's eleventh commandment?

It is possible that, in the absence of an explicit 'I hope he robs her' response, the source of my suspense is simply a standard moral response misread. In other words, that I once again am not in suspense out of *hope* that Widmark is undetected, but *fear* that he will get away with the crime. I would dispute this explanation on the basis that I feel no conscious fear whatsoever that the crime will be successful, and fully conscious fear that it may be discovered. We might also test this explanation by adjusting the scene in the editing suite. When the pickpocket, Skip McCoy, begins his crime, all shots of the two suited men watching the woman at the start of the scene are notably absent. This is presumably to ensure the audience assumes they are unaware of the crime until it is too late. By the time another shot of the monitoring men finally appears, it is as Skip closes the purse to cover up his crime. One of the men stares slightly perplexed as the petty thief swiftly exits the train and the doors close behind him, blocking the man's belated rush to stop him.

But what if we were to shift this late shot of the staring suited man back *earlier* in the scene so that it occurs *during* Skip's pickpocketing as illustrated below, thereby implying that he witnesses the crime unfolding?

Based on Carroll's calculus of suspense, if I am truly hoping Skip's immoral act *fails* – that is, if my suspense is due to *fear* that he will *get away with* the crime – then this adjustment should reduce suspense. This is because the suited man's stare would seem to suggest that the crime has been detected and that Skip is more likely to be caught. Recall that Carroll claims suspense *increases* with the likelihood of an immoral outcome, and *decreases* when the moral outcome becomes more likely. I can report having already conducted this editing experiment on myself and finding no reduction in suspense (as Carroll's theory should predict) nor any inclination to advise the suited man to intervene in Skip's immoral act. If anything, I feel only *increased* suspense. In the absence of wider audience data comparing the original scene with this re-edit, however, readers might prefer to take my 'researcher-as-subject *self*-experimentation' (Corti et al. 2015, p. 289, emphasis in original) comments with a grain of salt.

One could instead attempt to explain my response to the original scene as *relatively* moral. That is, rather than deny the direction of my concern, it might be argued that pickpocketing is a minor crime, that anyone performing it clearly needs the money, and that if the victim can afford the loss it is no worse than stealing a loaf of bread. Whilst this interpretation might apply to the opening crime at the racetrack in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), where the victim's attire and the thick wad of cash the protagonist takes from her luxurious leather handbag conveys a sense of wealth, – –

– – the same cannot be said of the victim in *Pickup on South Street*. Nevertheless one might claim that audience concern for this young woman is reduced by the inclusion of shots where she appears to be flirting with Skip, licking her lips, flapping her lashes, and throwing her head back in a doe-eyed stare as he rummages through her handbag.[57]

Perhaps these shots make me feel she deserves her fate for being so darn dopey? After all, if she were not flirting so hard, she might notice what was happening. Again, we might test for this possibility with an adjustment in the editing suite by removing these flirty looks entirely to retain the victim's 'innocence'. And again I can report having done this and, for what it's worth in the absence of tests with other viewers, found no obvious change in my own suspense and side-taking, suggesting this is not the cause of my 'immoral' response in hoping that the crime remains undetected.

There is one final potential explanation to consider for my desire that Skip is not caught in the act. As in Bresson's film, the pickpocket is the protagonist. This may automatically encourage sympathy with the character's plans and goals, regardless of moral consideration. For instance, in response to Cass Sunstein's (2005) work on moral heuristics – mental shortcuts that may lead us to overlook moral considerations and jump to conclusions about a given situation – Richard Gerrig wonders if a heuristic such as '*The hero should succeed*' might be responsible for cases of momentarily losing our moral compass (Gerrig 2005, p. 550; emphasis in original). The problem with this explanation is that it is not entirely clear who the protagonist is in this opening scene in *Pickup on South Street* (1953). Even if we were to agree that Skip becomes the protagonist by virtue of the fact that he has a clear-cut and actively pursued goal (in contrast with the other three characters in the scene), if viewer embraced morally dubious goals so rapidly at the

outset of a film on the back of Gerrig's mental shortcut then we might expect to frequently root for abhorrent opening acts. For instance, *Dirty Harry* (1971) begins with the Scorpio Killer (Andy Robinson) atop a San Francisco skyscraper actively aiming his gunsight on a woman swimming in a rooftop pool on a nearby building, – –

– – but I feel no desire for his success or excuse for his horrific behavior. Even less appalling opening goals, such as an elaborate plan to take over the world at the start of a James Bond-style movie, do not appear to lead to instant embracing of the bad guy as a protagonist. Moreover, apparent concern is not only felt immoral *protagonists* like Skip, but also for characters like Fry whom we openly consider the *antagonist*.

Rooting for the Bad Guy

When disgruntled former CIA agent, Mitch Leary (John Malkovich), tries to load his makeshift gun beneath the table during a huge campaign dinner in readiness to assassinate the President at the climax of *In the Line of Fire* (1993), I fret when he fumbles a bullet which falls to the floor.

Despite Leary's clear-cut bad guy status and my continuing hope that the hero, Frank Horrigan (Clint Eastwood), arrives in time to stop the assassination, I find myself hoping Leary can not only shift the bullet with his foot, but also safely retrieve it without arousing the suspicion of those around him. And the film appears to be constructed to achieve this response, based upon the selection of shots and Carroll's calculus of suspense. Even the film's director openly agrees with such an interpretation, offering reasons reminiscent of Hitchcock's own explanation of immoral response. In commentary on the 2001 Collector's Edition DVD, German director Wolfgang Peterson explains (in his non-native tongue):

> [I]t always works like that. Even if he's the bad guy and we don't want him to succeed – you want him not to pull the gun and…shoot the President – but always in the scene when…Malkovich puts the little…spring [sic] into the gun and it falls down to the floor, right? [*Gasps*] "Ahhh," the audience is always, "Hopefully he gets it back and put[s] the gun together." …That's how…drama works. You just want him to the very last second to built [sic] it up and succeed. Of course and then hopefully Clint [Eastwood] comes in and…clears the situation (Peterson, W 2001).[58]

Peterson is not only the director to publicly express Hitchcockian claims of a mass audience's enigmatic yet highly reliable immoral response, even when they clearly recognise the character's lack of moral virtue, the evil of their plans, and simultaneously root for the infinitely more moral characters opposing them. Despite noting that Pierre Brossard (Michael Caine), the French Nazi war criminal evading capture in Norman Jewison's *The Statement* (2003), is 'a terrible man…almost the personification of evil' (cited in Hernandez 2004), the director also admitted that

> he, too, found himself rooting for Brossard and it took him some time to figure out why. "You always empathise with the fugitive," he [Jewison] said. "You're never on the side of the hounds, you're always on the side of the hare or the fox, the person who is being hunted down"' (Jewison cited in Anonymous 2003).

If things do not already look rather problematic for Carroll's moral structure of suspense, worse still is that Hitchcock's eleventh commandment appears to apply even in instances where the criminal is amidst an abhorrent sexual crime that may culminate in death.

The most primal rooting response to dramatic art is arguably the impulse to scream, 'Look out! He's behind you!'. I, like many others, have reacted this way time and again to countless horror films and thrillers. It is the proven reliability of this response and the filmmaking methods to achieve it which make it so perplexing that I fail to respond this way during disturbing scenes in two separate films.

The first is during George A. Romero's *Martin* (1977), which begins with young man (John Amplas) boarding a train. He stares back at a woman on the platform waiting to board.

'Travelling alone?' the train conductor asks her. 'All alone,' she replies. *Gulp*

As the train crosses the country later that night, the young man makes his way down the creepy sleeper carriage corridor to the bathroom, unwraps a set of syringes, and fills one.

My anxiety rises in anticipation of a highly undesirable outcome ahead. Sure enough, the young man is soon picking the lock of a sleeper cabin door. Although he has not uttered a word, he is clearly on an unsavory mission. So when he bursts through the door, I am relieved to discover the cabin unexpectedly empty. But my joy is short-lived. A toilet flushes in the tiny bathroom behind him. He backs up against the wall, syringe held high.

When the woman from the platform (Fran Middleton) enters from the adjoining bathroom, pausing in the doorway to blow her nose, what do *I*, the viewer, scream? Strangely, sweet nothing. Though this is a prime opportunity to gasp, 'Look out, Lady! He's behind you!', my inner voice is conspicuously silent. And it remains so throughout the scene, even as she ambles across to her sleeper bed, back turned to the intruder. Even after I have witnessed this disturbed young man, Martin, drug the innocent woman and suck her blood like a vampire, I am still prone to apply Hitchcock's eleventh commandment.

Later in the same film, in what may be the most harrowing scene I have ever witnessed onscreen, Martin sneaks into a woman's home garage ready to commit another hideous crime that will see her naked body bloodsucked as she drifts off to death.[59] Again, the victim (Sara Venable) enters, assuming the noise she has heard signals the unexpected return of her husband. Martin ducks behind her parked car, then backs up against a pillar as she moves to the open garage door.

As an onlooker, I have ample opportunity to warn her, particularly when she glances back and fails to see Martin behind the pillar, then turns away to pull down the garage door and seal her fate. But again I fail to offer a single word of warning or advice.

The second film in which I fail to respond in the expected 'He's behind you!' way when a relatively moral character is about to be attacked by a relatively immoral character hiding behind her is Hitchcock's *Dial M For Murder* (1954).

As the blackmailed killer-for-hire (Anthony Dawson) stands there waiting for the perfect moment to loop his stocking over her neck and squeeze the life out of her, my inner voice is again inexplicably tight lipped. Were I simply psychopathic, Carroll would have no case to answer, for such responses could be put down to a perverse sense of morality that views these women as somehow deserving of sexual assault and death. But these reactions are made all the more mysterious because they occur in spite of the fact that I do not want these women harmed. Proof of this, should the reader require it, is my failure to hope scantily clad, sexually active teenagers in slasher films receive the same treatment. In those cases, I do scream 'He's behind you!' over and over, yet in *Martin* and *Dial M for Murder* I remain mysteriously tight-lipped. Even if Carroll were to take pity on me by pointing out that a failure to voice a rooting response is not necessarily evidence that I fail to root in a (standard) moral manner, a final example makes my ability to be concerned for a character in the middle of a disturbing criminal-act all but unquestionable.

The Evil Eye

When loving child-psychologist, Dr. Carter (John Lithgow), suddenly and violently holds a chloroform-soaked cloth over the mouth of Karen (Teri Austin), a family friend driving him and his child home from the playground in the opening sequence of Brian De Palma's *Raising Cain* (1992), it seems the moral depths that I am willing to sink knows no bounds.

The scene generates suspense over whether or not Carter will get away with his horrible, but as-yet-uncertain, crime in several ways.

At first, two joggers approach in the background after Carter has managed to drug Karen.

Then Carter's young daughter begins to rouse from her slumber in the backseat.

Finally, he tries to sit his comatose victim upright in the seat so all looks innocent to the approaching joggers, but her limp body flops head first onto the steering wheel. Carter is sent into a mad panic as an excruciating elongated horn blast attracts attention.

His daughter awakens and the joggers stare his way. Carter seems doomed to be caught.

De Palma draws out the moment more than Bruno's stretch in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), literally switching to slow motion as the joggers pull up beside the honking car parked and walk alongside to get a better glimpse of the suspicious happenings inside.

If suspense experienced when watching this scene were, as Carroll's theory demands, due to my hope for the *moral* outcome that Carter be discovered before he does anything truly horrific to the woman or children, it would utterly misfire. Every obstacle De Palma brings forth in this scene makes it seem increasingly *likely* that Carter will be caught in the act and, according to Carroll's own calculus, should *reduce* rather than raise suspense. The joggers, the waking daughter, and the horn blast can only logically produce an increase in suspense by making the viewer's preferred outcome seem more and more *unlikely*. Hence I must be hoping Carter's crime remains undetected, and Carroll's moral structure appears long overdue for revision to explain how this is so.

This is where my argument regarding the *existence* of 'immoral' suspense and side-taking ends. If Carroll refuses to accept that at least some of the cases illustrated throughout this episode truly contradict his moral account, I can do no more to convince him. Standing his ground in claiming that morality underlies all classical suspense, however, seems to invite additional problems outside of the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. Morality may have been the key to Carroll's groundbreaking 1984 proposal, but in continuing to view cinema suspense through this singular lens, his theory risks reductionism and may well be imposing a moral framework upon actions and events that do not truly involve such deliberation.

'[M]orality is a topic in which people often use all-inclusive and vague definitions', warns moral psychologist Peter DeScioli, an approach he believes 'loses the distinctive characteristics of morality' (Personal communication, 3rd July 2014). In attempting to apply morality to all instances of movie suspense, Carroll's own use of 'moral' arguably does just that and remains questionably loose. In 'Towards a Theory of Film Suspense', Carroll openly acknowledged this possibility and offered an immediate defense.

It may be felt that a debit of my theory is that what is included under the labels of "moral" and "evil" in the formula for suspense turns out to be too broad. "Evil" is unpacked as human and natural evil. "Moral" encompasses ethical purposes and efforts, virtue, and simply opposition to natural evils. This is a far more extensive concept of "moral" than we find in ethical theorizing. Nevertheless, it does, I think, capture the wide range of things that people are wont to call "good" and "bad" in a nonpractical, nonprudential sense in everyday language (Carroll 1984/1996, p. 105).

Although the evidence for morality's involvement in our participatory responses at the movies is compelling, and Carroll's appeal to common-sense might seem to settle the matter, there is a lingering problem. Even if viewers refer to impending outcomes as 'good' and 'bad', this is not necessarily indication that use of these labels or the feelings behind them is based upon any kind of moral deliberation, even by Carroll's broader definition. Appealing to the viewer's ability to intuitively recognise 'good' and 'bad' outcomes has the same shortcomings as Berys Gaut's claim that *identification* exists purely because real viewers frequently refer to the term (1999, p. 200). Describing one's relationship to characters as 'identification', or one's assessment of impending narrative outcomes as 'good' and 'bad', may suggest the existence of underlying psychological activity of some kind. Just what that activity might be, however, it is not at all clear. If so, how can we be sure that a) the activity is moral judgment and b) that it is the singular, unchallengeable influence upon suspense and side-taking that Carroll makes it out to be?

To clarify, I am in agreement with Carroll's assessment that rather than dispense with morality altogether on the back of Hitchcock's challenging counterexamples and settle instead for the weaker claim that viewers simply hope for 'desired' outcomes, it is preferable to retain the claim that morality helps define the outcomes viewers desire (Carroll 1984/1996, p. 113). The problem is that Carroll implies that the argument is all or nothing and appears to retain his proposal that moral judgment is central to suspense simply because to dispense with morality altogether is a lesser option. But morality in or morality out are hardly the only options. A more conservative approach would be to split the difference and assume that morality is involved but not alone in the construction of narrative suspense.[60]

The Moral of the Story

'I don't think morality underlies all rooting or suspense', continues DeScioli. '…I would say that most suspense is non-moral' (Personal communication, 3rd July 2014). For instance, what exactly is the moral issue at work in *There's Something About Mary* (1998) when Ted (Ben Stiller) opens the front door after a hasty self-stimulation session to greet Mary (Cameron Diaz) with ejaculate hanging from his earlobe?

When his high school crush squints and stares closer in disbelief, asking 'Is that…? Is that…?', I feel undeniable suspense and pray Ted can avoid impending social humiliation. But this would not typically considered a moment that requires *moral* deliberation. Nor would many other common story moments that induce suspense and make viewers root for one outcome over another, such as whether one person or another wins a race, dance contest, student election, or date to the prom.

Carroll's ready answer to this issue lies in his claim that one of the main carriers of moral virtue which viewers weigh up during suspense is character (1984/1996, p. 105). Although a movie race, dance contest, student election, or date to the prom are amoral events, the characters involved offer a way to lend such events a moral charge (1984/1996, p. 102). Rather than a toss up between two or more competitors, these moments are often a contest between a morally virtuous David and a morality vacuous

Goliath. If the Goliath were to win, 'evil' could be said to triumph. Thus the suspense over Ted's ability to explain away the high sperm-count hanging from his ear is, on Carroll's account, 'moral' in the sense that Ted is a 'good' person, and 'bad' things such as sexual embarrassment should not – in principle – happen to good people. Although this answer is perfectly understandable in lay terms, it nevertheless raises a further question. If these amoral conflicts are essentially granted a moral charge based on the moral virtue of the characters involved, what happens when the conflict/event already has its own moral charge? If a morally virtuous person commits a moral transgression such as murder, a split between moral judgment based upon the *action* itself and moral judgment based upon the *character* appears to arise. Which would Carroll claim holds greater weight in our moral deliberation that he contends steers our suspense and side-taking: the immoral *act* or the morally virtuous *character* who committed it? Either answer – *action* or *character* – would appear to contradict claims that the other factor is responsible for our moment-by-moment hopes and fears for narrative outcomes.

The continuing haziness around Carroll's model of morality makes it harder to contest his claims, easier for him to ignore critique, and arguably 'loses the distinctive characteristics of morality' as DeScioli warned above. Moreover, if DeScioli's claim that most suspense is non-moral in nature is somehow true, or if character virtue is not the influence upon moral judgment that Carroll and others presume it to be (see also Zillmann 1995, 2006, 2012 and Murray Smith 1995, 1999, 2011), a moral account of suspense would be severely undermined. Ignoring this challenge is not a solution. The adoption of what we might call an exception-to-the-rule approach to isolated instances of apparent immoral suspense is clearly inadequate unless the rule under which they are exempt can be outlined. Not fitting the theory's predicted response is insufficient grounds for exemption and instead serves only to falsify Carroll's current claim that onlookers root for moral outcomes during moments of suspense. We cannot pick and choose which examples our theory applies to *after the fact*. In order to exempt these scenes, we must come up with a new prediction as to which kinds of scenes are exempt and why. And this would seem to require a specific proposal about the nature of moral judgment.

Although moral philosophers and psychologists are still arguing over exactly what the 'distinctive characteristics of morality' might be, the convenience of leaving the specifics of moral judgment undefined has ultimately come at the cost of increased understanding of suspense and side-taking that Carroll originally set out to achieve. The great strides made in moral psychology since Carroll's original 1984 article and his 1990 and 1996 follow-ups on the matter surely warrant, if not outright demand, consideration. I grant that there is inevitable danger in attempting to make claims about the intricate workings of

psychological mechanisms as complex as moral cognition, and that to do so may make things worse by leading to unfounded speculation, basing a theory of suspense on *unexplained* assumptions about these things as Carroll has done seems equally problematic. I therefore propose that moving forward in our understanding of rooting for narrative outcomes and the enigmatic scenes Carroll's moral theory of suspense struggles to account for requires a willingness to peek into the black box he has left closed and ask ourselves, 'What does "moral" mean?'.

Conclusion

'How is it that he can so easily make us root for even a vicious rapist-murderer, as we do in the famous potato truck scene in "Frenzy"?', asked Richard Schickel of The Master of Suspense (1972, p. 42). Over thirty years since Noël Carroll first proposed the leading theory of cinematic suspense and flagged this exact same 'ambiguous and troublesome counterexample' to his otherwise compelling moral solution (1984/1996, p. 111), his best answer to Schickel's question is to deny that we actually do. But Hitchcock's own comments regarding the eleventh commandment and his claim that the audience's 'apprehension of the bomb is more powerful than the feelings of sympathy or dislike for the characters involved' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73) — combined with my reported responses drawn from two decades of participant-observer viewing — suggest that rooting for immoral outcomes and/or characters during suspense is not only a very real possibility, but also relatively common. This is not a minor quarrel over a handful of enigmatic scenes. To fail to address this issue threatens Carroll's entire theory, for if suspense and side-taking is not driven by morality in scenes highlighted throughout this episode, a question mark is raised over every other scene supposedly explained by his theory. Though our hopes and fears in the cinema *appear* to be driven by morality much of the time, this too may turn out to have no causal influence. François Truffaut has noted, 'The viewer's emotions are not exactly wholesome' (Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 272). Thriller writer, Andrew Klavan, has stated, '[S]uspense is amoral' (1994, p. 13). These comments exist in direct contradiction to the entire basis of Carroll's moral solution. Hence it is no longer enough for those who have an interest in the mechanics of suspense and in Carroll's invaluable theory to toss troublesome scenes into an exception-to-the-rule basket. Schickel, Hitchcock, Truffaut and Klavan's comments must be adequately addressed if morality is to retain its place at the centre of suspense theory. But I am afraid I shall have to leave you hanging, because time has well and truly run out. Before I leave, I will say one last thing: I am willing to drop the Culkin Complex for good if you are willing to consider that *morality* may not be the source of all narrative suspense. Agreed?

Bombs away.

MORAL BIAS AT THE MOVIES
IMMORAL INTUITION, SELECTIVE PERCEPTION & PARTIALITY

Wherein we examine a new solution to the enigma of immoral suspense...

Oh, pardon me. I'm afraid you caught me in the act. I was just searching for something here in the drawer… a script, so I can see how this episode ends. I say this purely in jest, of course, for beneath this elaborate disguise it is I, Alfred Hitchcock, performing strictly for your benefit. My snooping act here is an elaborate charade designed to demonstrate how viewers like your good self are capable of rapidly attaching to cardboard characters and their unsavory goals. The giveaway was that it is by now painfully clear that the author of this so-called academic text has no script to steal. Nonetheless he seems determined to press on, so I must bid you farewell as I take another option: *poison*. Perhaps I shall see you on the other side.

'How exactly do Hitchcock's films sometimes make the spectator root for immoral characters?', asks Margrethe Bruun Vaage in her important new contribution to the issue, *The Antihero in American Television* (2015a, p. 68). Her entry point into this debate is built upon personal experience rooting for recent television protagonists and their goals which, upon later reflection, morally horrify her. Given that Carroll, Zillmann, Murray Smith and others (see also Brewer 1996; Vorderer 1996) have argued that moral considerations steer the viewer's hopes and fears for narrative outcomes, Vaage sees her own participatory response as a mystery to be solved. 'Rationally speaking, cheering for the murderous drug dealers and mobsters would be a non-starter', she writes, 'as the antihero is clearly not morally good' (2015a, p. 23). Vaage's proposed solution to this mystery is simply that most of the time when viewing fictional narrative we are not rational at all. Appealing to dual-process theories of cognition that propose a distinction between fast intuitive thinking and slow deliberative thinking (see Kahneman 2011), Vaage claims that intuition ensures our moral cognition is heavily biased by our connection to particular characters. This reflexive bias manifests itself via moral emotions, moral disengagement, and embodied empathy that directly influences, if not all-but-steers, moral assessment of 'our' character's current actions, goals, and impending narrative outcomes. Intuitively, this seems entirely reasonable. However, it arguably collapses what may be two entirely different and potentially unrelated psychological processes: moral judgment of *character* and moral judgment of *act*. This episode will discuss Vaage's solution to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, taking issue with her adoption of dual-process theories of morality on theoretical, logistical, and ideological grounds. I argue that her turn to such a heuristics and biases approach is built on an unfailing belief in the power of *morality* and *partiality*, which I believe is both misguided and ideologically problematic.

Immoral Intuition in the Cinema

Over the last decade and a half, a revolution has occurred in the way psychologists conceive of moral cognition. Once almost exclusively viewed as a rational process (see Piaget 1932; Kohlberg 1981; Turiel 1983; though see also Hume 1777), many now argue that moral judgment is frequently, and even overwhelmingly, based upon intuitive emotional response rather than rational deliberation (see, for example, Appiah 2008; Gigerenzer 2008; Kahneman & Sunstein 2005; Sunstein 2005). Perhaps most influential of all are Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Greene's dual process theories, which posit a split between fast, reflexive and slow, reflective judgments (see Greene 2007, 2015; Haidt 2001). Although the notion of reflexive and reflective thinking is well-established in various incarnations across psychology (see Keysers et al. 2008, pp. 232-233), it is less certain that moral judgment can be neatly split between these two pathways, or that our moral response at the movies is any more 'intuitive' than outside the cinema. Nevertheless, Vaage turns to the power of *partiality* and its presumed ability to encourage 'fast thinking' during both moral judgment and empathy to what she sees as explain our otherwise mysterious willingness to root for immoral characters and outcomes and her own moral hypocrisy in rooting for characters and outcomes that she would not support outside the cinema. She writes:

> [T]here is one kind of intuitive, moral response that undermines a fully rational evaluation of the antihero, namely partiality: we tend to become partial to those we know the best, and see them as morally preferable over complete strangers (Vaage 2015a, p. 61).

Vaage cites well-known research by Robert Zajonc that demonstrates the robust and unconscious influence of familiarity during decision-making (2015a, pp. 42-43). Zajonc's *mere exposure effect* (1968) predicts that 'repeated exposure of the individual to a stimulus object enhances his [sic] attitude to it' (Zajonc 1968, p. 1). By 'enhanced attitude', Zajonc means that we typically exhibit a preference for the familiar object over unfamiliar objects. Vaage previously applied this idea to our relationship with television characters in a paper co-written with Robert Blanchet (see Blanchet & Vaage 2012) and has since argued that the effect helps account for our *partiality* (see Vaage 2014; in relation to movie stars, see also Plantinga 2009, p. 58). Despite familiarity and partiality having considerable influence over our preferences in terms of affection for others (Zajonc 2001), however, its influence in the realm of moral judgment is less clear. The fact that moral decisions appear far more subject to social influence than a decision over which word (see Zajonc 1968), face (see Mita, Dermer & Knight 1977; Moreland & Zajonc 1982), or food (see Pliner 1982) one decides upon suggests any comparison may be unwarranted.

The primary reason Vaage appears to assume that bias plays such a prominent role in our moral intuition is that Haidt (2012), Greene (2013), and other moral psychologists (see also Frank 1988; Gintis 2005) claim its adaptive function is to foster cooperation towards our in-group. 'This is one of the basic and most important assumptions in current moral psychology', explains Vaage. 'Morality is not primarily seen as a truth-seeking, rational enterprise, but rather as a "set of psychological adaptations that allow otherwise selfish individuals to reap the benefits of cooperation" (Greene 2013: 23)' (2015a, p. 17). Vaage appears to take this as an argument for *partiality*; that we will be morally biased towards our in-group and to those closest to us from whom we most stand to reap the (adaptive) benefits of cooperation. However, though partiality may well exercise an influence upon our moral judgment, often creating emotional response and pushing up against moral rules and principals, there are also clearly limits to our loyalty to others. Where this limit lies is crucial to the veracity of Vaage's claims.

For all the talk of our deep allegiance, even to those we love, behavioural data shows it to be highly conditional. One study, for example, found that children were willing to lie to protect revealing their parents' wrongdoing (breaking a puppet in the laboratory) until they were under threat of blame for the incident themselves (Talwar et al. 2004). Another study set out to examine the relationship between our social ties and our moral judgment, finding that both kin and group membership did not dictate reported 'moral wrongness' of a transgression – the theft of $1500. Both kin and friends were judged on par with an out-group stranger (Lieberman & Linke 2007). Is there any particular reason to expect our connection to characters onscreen, a mostly private relationship with no apparent real world consequence if we fail to remain loyal, should be any more durable?

One reason might be that the lack of consequence, which Vaage argues grants us 'fictional relief', means that we are free to exercise extreme moral latitude, favouring our preferred characters without threat of retribution. However, I have already cited numerous instances where I find myself foregoing characters whom I favour without apparent care or remorse. The pull of moral judgment, and whatever other influences may be at work in rapidly evaluating impending actions and outcomes, frequently appear to be stronger than my attachment to, or affection for, the character's involved.

Another objection might be that these experimental results are irrelevant to movie viewing. Whereas laboratory participants were asked to publically declare their moral judgment of action, in the cinema they need not. This may grant viewers the kind of relief and moral latitude Vaage presumes. The question then becomes whether moral judgment operates differently in private than in public. Although it seems reasonable to assume a difference exists, Vaage, Greene, and Haidt's appeal to intuitive mechanisms

does not obviously allow for such conscious interference. Other theorists also assume that humans habitually morally monitor their environment in their own heads (see DeScioli & Kurzban 2013; Flesch 2007; Gottschall 2012; Zillmann 2012).

This suggests that moral judgment may be the same whether privately held in our heads or publically declared, even if the *consequences* of such judgment (e.g. perceived deservingness of punishment and virtue of character) vary based on our allegiances.

For instance, although Lieberman and Linke's aforementioned study revealed no difference in moral *judgment* of the hypothetical $1500 theft, levels of suggested *punishment* and remorse assigned or attributed to the thief varied based upon social tie (2007). Participants assigned kin less than half the punishment assigned to the out-group member, and just over half to a friend. They also claimed that family and friends would experience approximately a third as much remorse over their transgression. Although this is clear evidence of partiality, it speaks to our ability to *excuse* antiheros (rather than abandon our affection for them) and may bear little impact upon our willingness to morally *condemn* their impending actions and hope against them as participants. As rooting for narrative outcomes is reputedly built upon moral judgment of characters and of impending outcomes, our partiality in the amount of punishment and remorse we assign to a cared-for character appears largely irrelevant to this participatory response.[62]

More problematic for Vaage's assumption that the evolved cooperative function of morality equates to *partiality* during moral judgment is DeScioli and Kuzban's conclusion that game theory calculations reveal a moral judgment mechanism based primarily upon the identity of those involved would statistically lead to a great reduction in the fitness of the human population (2013, p. 482). This is because judgments based upon alliances often escalate into inter-personal conflicts and incur far greater cost to third parties. 'Consistent with this idea, ethnographic research shows that societies are more violent when individuals have a stronger sense of community and loyalty because disputes escalate as individuals'[s] allies get involved', explain DeScioli and Kurzban, citing several studies in support (2013, p. 482).[63]

Even if one were to accept that the adaptive function of morality is to secure cooperation for the benefit of our genetic population, the way this cooperation may be achieved is less than clear. Many moral philosophers from Aristotle and St. Augustine right up to Haidt and Greene have associated morality with cooperation (see Curry 2016, p. 28), but have been in no particular agreement as to how it functions. The causal connection between moral *judgment* and moral *behaviour*, which Haidt and Greene seem to take as direct, may also lead to logistical issues upon Vaage's adoption of their proposed altruistic moral

mechanisms to illuminate suspense and side-taking. '[R]esearch has turned up surprisingly little evidence that moral judgment motivates morally compliant behavior' write DeScioli and Kurzban. '[I]nstead, it often motivates efforts to *appear* moral' (2009, p. 289, emphasis in original; see also Batson 2008). Thus even if Haidt and Greene's 'altruism' were to explain the human tendency to *behave* morally at levels far above pure chance, it may not explain our *judgment*. And as it is moral judgment, not moral behavior per se, which is presumed to lay at the heart of rooting for narrative outcomes, Vaage's entire answer to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking may be misguided.[64]

Nevertheless, Vaage's much needed investigation into the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking of deserves due consideration, and her claim regarding the inevitable influence of partiality upon rooting for narrative outcomes is bolstered by her reference to three separate fields of study:

1. Moral emotions
2. Moral disengagement
3. Embodied empathy

We shall therefore consider each of these in turn before returning to the nature of morality and the relationship between moral judgment and moral behaviour in more detail at the end of the episode.

1. Moral Emotions

More than anything else, movies are associated with emotion. Much of this emotion is sympathetic, arising from the fate of characters onscreen (Plantinga 2009, p. 72). In other words, our emotional attachment to select characters generates powerful emotions in their favour that laboratory experiments like those conducted by Lieberman and Linke (2007) may not capture. Extended periods of togetherness with characters onscreen may lead to deep familiarity, vividness of suffering, and many other potential factors that may enhance our partiality (Blanchet & Vaage 2012) that is entirely lacking in a one paragraph experimental scenario referring to a hypothetical family member or school friend. 'We have developed moral emotions such as anger, disgust, righteous indignation, shame, guilt and vengefulness', writes Vaage. 'These are all pieces in the emotional moral machinery that makes cooperation intuitive' (2015a, p. 17). But this seems to raise a problem in relation to partiality.

What happens when a 'moral emotion' *opposes* a character we are supposedly partial toward? We might presume that this is a rare occurrence, and that our emotional connection to character ensures a steady stream of emotional response in their favour.

But given that Haidt and Greene's prime examples of moral intuition involve emotion arising from an act and/or moral rule associated with it, these could potentially clash with our loyalty to character. When you learn your husband is a serial killer, the *act* is seemingly at odds with your *partiality*. While Haidt (2003) appears to allow this dispute to be played out below conscious awareness, Greene (2007) argues that conflicts between our quick moral emotional intuitions trigger a shift to slow, reasoned moral deliberation he likens to manual mode (as opposed to quick, rough auto mode) on a digital camera. Vaage makes this claim a central part of her argument about the virtues of US television shows such as *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), and *Dexter* (2006-2013) which she feels deliberately introduce such conflicts as 'reality checks' to force the viewer into slow, reasoned moral thinking in order to make critical comment on the viewer's immoral sympathy for the antihero (2015a, p. 20). But Vaage's interpretation of this process appears problematic.

For instance, Vaage writes:

> [W]e are willing and able to justify murder in a fictional context, as the [moral] anger first and foremost triggered by a murder is open to justifications…[W]e are able and willing to turn a blind eye to this when we know the perpetrator well. We are thus prone to be partial to the antihero's reasons for killing someone (again, in a fictional context) (2015a, pp. 140-141).

Her argument here is consistent with her views on the power of partiality. She calls this process offering 'pleas for excuses' for our characters (2015a, p. 47). Haidt and Greene call it *rationalization*, which Vaage describes as 'finding rational reasons for a moral judgment that you actually reached quickly through moral intuitions and emotions' (Vaage 2015a, p. 20). She reports rooting for forensic investigation, Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall) as he hunts his latest serial killer to put his murderous tendencies to good use, only to withdraw support when the antihero prepares to carefully dissect this evil victim on the operating table. This, she believes, is due to a 'reality check'. She has suddenly become aware of the full consequences of Dexter's actions. This 'manual mode' moral thinking is supposedly distinct from rationalization which occurs during 'auto mode' to justify moral judgment reached via intuition, not reason. But when Vaage admits that 'the narration in this series in fact builds up…a consequentialist justification of Dexter's killings', whilst still arguing that '[i]mpartially and rationally, the best thing for Dexter to do would be to hand himself over to the police' (2015a, p. 24), the distinction blurs.

Given that the narrative does not present the audience with any clue whatsoever that Dexter might actually turn the serial killer over to the police, it is arguably pointless for viewers to hope it happens. Within the confines of the narrative, which 'builds up…a consequentialist justification of Dexter's killings', one could even view Dexter's vigilante

killing of the serial killer as *the next best thing on offer*, for it would rationally lead to greater good than if he were to do nothing. If that were the case, such a judgment is not based on biased moral intuition at all, but moral reason given all the information at hand. As Greene himself argues:

> All consequentialist decision making [i.e. 'manual' moral thinking] is a matter of balancing competing concerns, taking into account as much information as is practically feasible (Greene 2007, p. 64).

Vaage admits that the nature of fiction unchains us from the demand of slow moral deliberation, but she views this 'fictional relief' as an invitation to make automatic, morally intuitive judgments at the expense of reason. A more precise explanation might be that it allows us to make judgments *within the current narrative context*. Arguably, little exists outside of that. In order to play the game, we must submit to the story. Although Vaage happily accepts the view that story is a game and that asking some questions is 'silly', as Kendall Walton has argued (1990, p. 174), she seems only to consider this lack of wider real world context as a license to switch to Greene's automatic mode moral thinking for the majority of our viewing. I see no particular reason to make this assumption.

We might instead view the movie as a narrow contextual framework in which to make moral judgments. If the real world can deny us potential preferred actions or outcomes during moral deliberation, why should this same issue be any different in the world of fiction? If, for example, we want to save a fellow soldier suffering horribly on the battlefield but do not have the medical means to do so, we may morally reason that the best outcome would be to shoot her in the head to end her suffering. Why can't agreeing to Dexter's pursuit of a nasty serial killer be based on the information the narration offers us making it the greater good, rather than intuition built on partiality and moral bias? To dwell on actions or outcomes that would be morally preferable *if available* seems beside the point. We can only morally deliberate within the known context and hope and fear for *probable* outcomes as cued by the narrative and/or genre conventions and other non-diegetic expectations.

Imagine that my wounded soldier scene was unfolding onscreen. Is it really legitimate to claim that the most moral thing to do is let her suffer a painful death or pray for medical supplies to fall from the sky when there is no reason to believe that is a realistic possibility? In the same way, hoping that Dexter does the dirty deed in dissecting his latest unconvicted serial killer is arguably the reasoned utilitarian (i.e. consequentialist) response that Greene's dual-process theory demands within that particular dramatic context. And hoping that Dexter does not continue would seem to be a far more emotional, gut response than her assessment that it is impartially and objectively 'wrong'.

It might even be seen as an overly-idealistic moral fantasy that bears no relation to the reality of the specific situation the viewer is faced with. In terms of my focus on the narrative outcomes that viewers root for in the cinema, it seems important not to assume that we are rooting for moral principles. If morality is involved in the narrative outcomes that viewers desire, it is moral *outcome*s, not moral *principles*, which concern us. We do not root for principles. Our principles are applied in particular contexts, and help output particular preferences. They are therefore confined by those contexts and cannot be blindly applied.

According to Heath and Hardy-Vallée (2015), moral sentimentalists such as Haidt and Greene are guilty of

> a certain amount of selectivity in the way that empirical research has so far been taken up and addressed…[T]hey have tended to emphasize empirical results that reveal the emotional or non-cognitive aspects of moral decision-making. The literature on alcohol intoxication, however,…focusing, as it does, on the psychological concept of "disinhibition"…presents some serious problems for proponents of moral sentimentalism (Heath & Hardy-Vallée 2015, p. 311).

Contemporary studies conclude that alcohol 'weakens normative control' and 'executive function' crucial to deliberation and planning (p. 311). According to Greene's distinction between fast and slow moral thinking, which Vaage adopts in her answer to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, intoxicated individuals should engage in more fast, intuitive moral thinking because their ability to perform slow, deliberative thinking is impaired and their emotions are uninhibited. As stated previously, Greene proposes that the moral mechanisms behind this fast moral thinking have evolved to favour altruistic, cooperative, deontological (i.e. rule-based or 'Kantian') decision-making. However, the overwhelming statistical and anecdotal evidence that alcohol is, as Heath and Hardy-Vallée put it, 'perhaps the single greatest source of antisocial behavior in our society' (2015, p. 310), flatly contradicts Greene's theory. A recent experimental study also found that rising blood alcohol levels during the deliberation of moral dilemmas significantly and positively correlated with increased *utilitarian* decisions to push a large man to his death to save five men under threat rather than Greene's predicted *deontological* decision due to an altruistic emotional alarm bell at the prospect of pushing (Duke & Bègue 2015).

Even leaving aside this considerable challenge to Greene's dual-process theory and returning to the issue raised at the outset of this section, we might imagine how his supposed strong emotion *not* to push could be overturned by Vaage's emotion emanating from partiality towards a character who is attempting *to* push? 'An alarmlike emotional response presents itself as unyielding and absolute', writes Greene, 'until an even more compelling emotional or "cognitive" rationale comes to override it' (2007, p. 66). Based on

Lieberman and Linke's aforementioned study revealing no difference in moral judgment of the hypothetical theft of $1500 (as distinct from proposed punishment for and remorse resulting from the act), I question whether *partiality* can perform this overriding task in instances where impending actions, such as pushing a large man to his death, are strongly emotionally aversive. Moreover, when Vaage takes the fact that she fails to be morally angered by Dexter's murderous ways as support for the power of partiality, she would seem to accept the *a priori* existence of triggered moral emotions. But if such emotions failed to exist, alternative explanations might explain our willingness to be lenient towards certain 'immoral' acts.

The argument that fast moral judgment is based upon 'moral emotions' is tied up with the neo-Darwinian claim that the human brain evolved distinct mechanisms for so-called 'basic emotions' (see Greene & Haidt 2002; Haidt 2003). We shall discuss this at length in episode seven. For now let us merely note that a recent review of the literature concluded there is 'little support for these specific morality-emotion links', such as harm's purported link to anger or purity's link to disgust (Cameron, Lindquist & Gray 2015, p. 371). This accords with an earlier conclusion that 'current neurological, behavioral, developmental and evolutionary evidence is insufficient to demonstrate that emotion is necessary for making [intuitive] moral judgments' (Huebner, Dwyer & Hauser 2009, p. 1).[65]

Consider what Vaage, following Haidt and Greene, offers as the most empirically robust moral emotion: *disgust*.

> We are more able to make exceptions to moral violations triggering [moral] anger than we are to violations evoking [moral] disgust: a murder can appear legitimate depending on consequences and circumstances. Moral disgust triggered by rape makes the rapist categorically repulsive (Vaage 2015a, p. 140).

Although Vaage acknowledges that there are cases where viewers do manage to feel sympathy for rapists, she fails to explain how this moral disgust is mysteriously overturned. Instead, Vaage simply excuses the example from her argument that rape is rarely committed by sympathetic antiheroes because it automatically triggers hardwired moral disgust (even if culturally shaped) that makes the perpetrator unsympathetic. '[S]ympathy for rapists in the alternative film tradition is not necessarily the best counterargument to the observation that this is rare in commercial entertainment', argues Vaage (2015a, p. 133). This may be so, but it is a perfectly reasonable counterargument to the observation that 'moral disgust triggered by rape makes the rapist categorically repulsive' (p. 140). The absence of raping protagonists in mainstream movies is no evidence for hardwired moral disgust if this mysteriously fails to eventuate in art-house

films, unless we take art house audiences to somehow process disgust differently to mass movie audiences.

At least one of the art films that Vaage excuses on these questionable grounds, Todd Solondz's *Happiness* (1998), seems to present a significant problem for her claims by somehow encouraging me to sympathise with a man who plans to sodomise his prepubescent son's school friend. Although the rape does not occur onscreen, one might reasonably expect that the middle-class psychotherapist protagonist's coldly calculated plan to drug the boy and rape him during a sleepover should easily trigger moral disgust and/or moral anger that overwhelms my ability to sympathise with the character. But even after the act is committed, the rapist remains sympathetic. And his final admission to his son that he 'fucked' his school friend, and his son's teary question as to whether he might one day be tempted to try to 'fuck' him too, is arguably the most powerful scene in the entire film, inducing not disgust but sympathy.

The suspenseful scene where Bill Maplewood (Dylan Baker) makes his victim, Johnny Grasso (Evan Silverberg), a late-night sandwich laced with a powerful sedative that will allow the rape to occur undetected is also problematic for either of Vaage's explanations, be it partiality or disgust.

Despite my initial hope that Johnny does not eat the drug-laced sandwich, as the scene progresses and Bill stares, waiting impatiently for the boy who suddenly claims to have lost his appetite, I momentarily, inexplicably *hope* that he devours it. A second later, as Johnny picks it up and looks it over ready to take a bite, I revert back to *fear* that he will do so. The sudden changes in side-taking do not seem to be based on any cues that might obviously raise or reduce partiality or disgust. If Vaage's 'pleas for excuses' are really to blame for our ability to overrule moral emotions, it sounds like they apply even to what she considers the most powerful moral emotion, rendering its influence lesser than the power of narration itself which controls our access to those pleas. Although Vaage accepts that the narration frequently offers justification for antihero's immoral acts, she assumes that our willingness to adopt it is dependent on our partiality. Vaage appeals to another popular psychological claim that supposedly illustrates our ability to be selective in our moral perceptions of information at hand and therefore reinforces her solution to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking.

2. Moral Disengagement

Long before Vaage's book-length excursion into the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, media psychologist Arthur A. Raney was similarly baffled by our ability to root for 'immoral' characters and their goals. As a then-recent adherent of Dolf Zillmann's moral disposition theory, Raney noted that it struggled to account for viewers' affection for, and subsequent side-taking with, immoral protagonists. Raney therefore proposed that rather than act as 'untiring moral monitors' (Zillmann 2006a, p. 230) as Carroll (1984/1996, 1996b, 2010) and Smith (1995a, 1999) also presume, viewers might frequently exercise moral leniency based on their emotional attachments (Raney, Arthur A 2004). Raney's argument built upon a series of psychological claims:

I.   Human beings are 'cognitive misers', preferring to avoid expending energy on cognitive tasks unless highly motivated (Raney, Arthur A 2004, p. 353).

II.   Viewers might therefore take mental shortcuts, jumping to stereotypical conclusions about the moral virtue of protagonists and antagonists based on preexisting 'story schema' before even witnessing a character's behaviour (2004, p. 354).[66]

III.   Moral reason is presumed slow and deliberate whereas moral intuition is presumed to be rapid and effortless, thus it may be less mentally taxing (i.e. more miserly) to switch off and go with our gut (2004, p. 363).

IV.   The desire to be entertained and to make connections with the protagonist means that viewers may 'morally disengage for the sake of drama enjoyment', excusing the hero's

immoral behaviour and engaging in a process of selective perception to avoid cognitive dissonance and retain their positive moral disposition toward the immoral protagonist (2004, p. 364).

Raney has pursued this line of thought over the last decade (see also Raney, Arthur A 2010, 2011; Shafer & Raney 2012) and Vaage recently adopted the argument (2014). Like Raney, she believes that our desire to be entertained manages to overturn otherwise powerful moral considerations, whether emotion or rule.

> There are number of reasons why the consequences of Dexter's killings are unacceptable to me on principle. However, *in order to enjoy the story* about Dexter, I grant myself fictional relief and turn a blind eye to all of these principles (Vaage 2015a, p. 23, emphasis added).

Vaage cites a parallel idea in Gregorie Currie's notion of 'narrative desire', wherein we long for particular outcomes for the sake of the story, independent of our concern for characters (see Currie 1999). Though we fear the tragic hero is doomed, we would be disappointed if the tragedy ended happily. Thus we are, in some sense, simultaneously hoping for the hero's doom. Vaage argues that our (amoral) desire for a better story may encourage moral disengagement during immoral acts that promise entertainment. There are several problems with Raney's listed claims upon which Vaage builds.[67]

Firstly, Raney appeals to the highly-loaded claim that escapist entertainment allows the viewer to 'leave their brain at the door' and not think. 'Who hasn't overheard a video store conversation in which a patron describes his or her desire to select a film "that I don't have to think about"?', Raney writes in an attempt to lend anecdotal evidence to his cognitive miser explanation of immoral response (2004, p. 262). Such common statements cannot, however be taken as necessarily referring to engaging in moral reasoning. The 'thinking' the viewer does not want to do might just as well be about the subject matter of the story itself. Just because we do not want to be reminded about how complex human relationships or oppression is tonight, this does not necessarily mean it is because we find it any harder to morally evaluate the supposed moral complexity of a Shakespearean drama than the 'escapist' entertainment of a superhero movie. This falls into the dubious distinction between Art and entertainment (see Shusterman 2003).

Secondly, Raney presumes that the processes he claims are widespread in popular drama (moral disengagement and/or selective perception) are *less* cognitively taxing than 'standard' moral judgment. Whether this may be true is difficult to ascertain, for Zillmann, like Carroll and Murray Smith, has never outlined the processes behind this judgment in any detail.[68] But commonsense might suggest the opposite is just as well true, as Raney's 'attitude-maintenance strategies' (2004, p. 361) seem infinitely more involved than simply evaluating the action and impending outcomes as per Zillmann's original moral monitoring

claim. '[P]erhaps it is presumptuous to think that morally monitoring characters' behaviours and motives is cognitively taxing', admits Raney (2004, p. 353), and this would seem to be the case. If we deliberately switched our brains off to 'exercise our rights as cognitive misers…trade our lens of moral scrutiny for one of partiality and favoritism…[so that w]e do not think; we feel' (Raney 2004, p. 363), we might even expect that we could not tell when our character/s were engaging in morally dubious behaviour at all. Under moral disengagement or selective perception theory, where we are presumed to reinterpret the event in order to, in a sense, morally cleanse it, this should be impossible. That is, being consciously aware that the behaviour is morally dubious should lead to the very dissonance that Raney claims motivates us to engage in these biasing processes and overcome that dissonance in the first place to render it invisible. Clearly, however, we frequently do recognise when our favoured characters are acting immorally.

One might argue that this realisation is only made in hindsight, but that ignores what I take to be a vital part of the enigma of immoral rooting: that viewers *know* the behaviour is morally inappropriate but root for it (see Allen 2007, p. 55). Eleventh commandment scenes are a perfect illustration of this. I am under no illusion that Skip McCoy's thievery in *Pickup of South Street* (1953) is morally justifiable behaviour any more than Bill Maplewood serving the drug-laced sandwich to his son's school friend in *Happiness* (1998) or Dr. Carter's smothering a family friend with chloroform in *Raising Cain* (1992). Nevertheless I still root in their favour and ultimately enable their evil plans to continue by failing to take the kind of moral stand Vaage seems to associate with impartial judgment.

Even if fully rational, slow moral thinking is cognitively taxing, as Vaage also argues following dual-process theory, and if viewers instead rely on intuitive, fast moral thinking at the cinema because they are granted 'fictional relief' and are cognitive misers at heart, this bears no relation to the argument that *moral disengagement* avoids cognitive effort. Providing all those 'pleas for excuses' and 'rationalization' to enact Raney's claimed process would seem to be highly effortful.

His assumption is that we will want to like the protagonist and despise the antagonist because it is more enjoyable and less cognitively taxing to do so. But if the moral transgressions were as clear-cut as Raney and Vaage imply, and if cognitive consistency is as important to us as they believe, ensuring we avoid cognitive dissonance when being affiliated with a morally inappropriate character, this begs the question: why bother to continue to root *for* such an immoral hero when we can simply root *against* her? We are not obliged to root for the hero, and rooting against is an equally, if not more, enjoyable activity. This fact is suggested by Hitchcock's maxim, 'The better the villain, the better the picture' (Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 316) and the delight audiences take in booing.

Although middle-class etiquette has equated this practice with bad manners (see Levine 1988; Ross 1999), it is still openly encouraged in dramatic forms such as pantomime and professional wrestling to enhance enjoyment. Booing aside, many stories, from romance to perfect murder plots, are built around rooting *against* the protagonist's goals, even whilst remaining generally sympathetic to the character and their welfare. Why wouldn't Raney and Vaage's imagined viewers simply do that when their characters set out to perform an immoral act? It sounds far less cognitively taxing than generating non-stop pleas for excuses.

The only obvious reason that Raney and Vaage would seem to think that moral disengagement was necessary is if they assumed that viewers were somehow *obliged* to condone and – more importantly – root for each and every action that a preferred character performs, and therefore had to deal with the cognitive dissonance of being affiliated with someone who has behaved so badly. The entire moral heuristics and biases approach they adopt is built on the assumption that dispositions are more or less durable. '[T]he spectator basically forms stable dispositions' and 'hopes that the characters she likes will make it, and fears that disliked characters will win', explains Vaage of the premise behind Zillmann's moral disposition theory to which she and Raney subscribe (2015a, p. 11 & p. 8). But where Zillmann claimed that this connection was constantly in process through moral monitoring, Raney and Vaage see this as potentially contaminating our moral eye. We become 'stubborn sympathizers…blinded by familiarity', writes Vaage (2015a, p. xvii). What this leaves, however, is the problem of how this immoral attachment first occurs given Zillmann, Carroll, and Smith's emphasis on *morality* as the basis for so-called allegiances.

Raney turned to *schema* theory to explain how we can initial biased moral assessments of television antiheroes that allow us to form our affective disposition (i.e. partiality). Vaage, however, sees this solution as problematic and takes another approach, observing that the television shows under her investigation begin by presenting the antihero in a morally sympathetic light before they 'break bad'. In this way, she claims, standard moral attachment is permitted and bias arising from our purported natural tendency to be partial may then excuse later, immoral behaviour. This argument is intuitive, and it is plainly true that antiheroes often do not commit their most morally offensive acts until they have already garnered sympathy. But does this make that sympathy 'stubborn' and explain immoral suspense and side-taking felt in their favour?

Further consideration suggests this is not so. Firstly, it implies that commercial television producers are willing to design a show that prevents new viewers from joining the series after the initial 'favourable' portrayal of the antihero in the pilot episode and/or early episodes in the first season. Not only would this be foolish business practice, leaving a show with little more viewers than those who caught this 'sympathetic' set up Tony Soprano or Walter White, but evidence also suggests it is untrue. Many viewers get hooked on a show midway through its run and appear to have no trouble adopting the intended rooting patterns. If establishing moral sympathy was so crucial to immoral suspense and side-taking, creating *partiality* powerful enough to explain it, latecomers to a show would be completely morally put off by the antihero and determined to root against them. Secondly, in order to test Vaage's claim further, I opted to watch my first ever episode of *Dexter* at random midways through the series, thereby avoiding the set-up she believes makes us stubbornly partial to the evil protagonist. The result was conclusive. I was instantly able to root for Dexter's criminal activity despite no experience of his backstory. The same effect was found in *Breaking Bad*, where Walter White was said to be more evil by the forth season episode I first watched. I found myself *instantly* sympathizing with either antihero, even within seconds of the opening teaser.[69]

But, for the sake of argument, let's assume that this emotional attachment to character is true. Is Raney and Vaage's key assumption that we would feel cognitive dissonance if we failed to morally disengage to excuse our antihero's behavior really warranted?

2.1 Cognitive Dissonance & Selective Perception

'[W]e are willing to go to great lengths to ensure that…[enjoyment] is experienced', claims Raney (2004, p. 364), citing as evidence famous research on audience engagement with bigoted television sitcom character Archie Bunker from *All in the Family* (1971-1979).[70]

Ultra-conservative Archie Bunker (Carroll O'Connor) and his liberal son-in-law, Mike Stivic (Rob Reiner).

On the back of controversy over the show's 'message', Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach (1974) surveyed North American and Canadian viewers to ascertain how they interpreted Archie and the show. Their conclusion was that while 'non-racist' viewers saw Archie as a misguided fool and laughed at his beliefs just as the show's creator, Norman Lear, had intended, 'racist' viewers saw Archie as the smart guy with the right attitudes and believed that opposing characters in the show were misguided (1974). Thus the show was said to reinforce, rather than reduce, existing racial prejudice due to the psychological process of 'selective perception' — our ability to filter out information that conflicts with our own beliefs and values so as to see things the way we want. But is this standard 'media effects' interpretation warranted? And does it highlight a general desire to dismiss contradictory internal representations, as cognitive dissonance theory claims?

A further study of audience reception to *All in the Family* in the Netherlands (Wilhoit & Bock 1976) lends support to the claim that emotional attachment to character does *not* determine our assessment of unfolding dramatic conflict. Although 31% of the 218 responses to the question, 'With whom do you identify most, Archie or Mike?' reported identifying most with Archie (and scored high on the ethnocentrism, lifestyle intolerance, or parental authoritarianism scales), approximately two-thirds of these Archie identifiers failed to blindly follow his argument or adopt his perspective. Instead, they reported that 'Mike was usually right in his disagreements with Archie' (p. 82). Furthermore, contradicting the logic that they should view Archie's nemesis, Mike, from an oppositional stance, the researchers report that 'most of the viewers saw Mike as reasonable and sensible' and that only a 'very small minority, consisting mainly of high authoritarians, tended to see Mike as ignorant and harmful' (p. 82). Nor was this only apparent in a Dutch audience. Vidmar and Rokeach's own data reveals a similar pattern.

'Even among the "high prejudice" viewers, who tended to like and agree with Archie, four times as many thought that Mike made better sense than his father-in-law [Archie]', points out Richard P. Adler of Vidmar and Rokeach's original study (1979, p. xxx). This fails to support Raney and Vaage's claim that viewers are morally biased to excuse and adopt their character's actions or goals. It also flies in the face of their apparent requirement that moral disengagement or selective perception is necessary to dismiss unwanted cognitive dissonance in order to freely enjoy immoral acts onscreen. And there is additional reason to believe that cognitive dissonance is irrelevant to the mostly private act of rooting for narrative outcomes at the movies.

'Although rarely pointed out, there are an extraordinarily large number of cases in which it is transparent that inconsistent representations are maintained with no effort to compensate…', write Robert Kurzban and Athena Aktipis (2007) against cognitive

dissonance theory (see Festinger 1957). 'The most obvious cases are religious ideas, where beliefs thoroughly inconsistent with ontological commitments are deeply held…Visual illusions fall in this category as well' (Kurzban & Aktipis 2007, p. 139). What then accounts for the many examples of cognitive dissonance across the literature? The answer, it appears, is not to maintain *internal* consistency to our self so much as *external* consistency to those around us.

The famous book Leon Festinger co-authored that helped spur his cognitive dissonance theory, *When Prophesy Fails* (Festinger, Riecken & Schachter 1956), demonstrates that dismissing dissonance is dependent upon social forces. When a flying saucer from planet Clarion failed to arrive on December 21, 1954 to save the members of a small Chicago religious group from a flood of biblical proportions as their leader had prophesied, Festinger et al. concluded that it was the 'constant presence of supporting members who can provide for one another the kind of social reality that will make the rationalization of disconfirmation acceptable' (1956, p. 205). In contrast, distance from the religious group was a key factor in belief change *against* their ideas. '[F]rom the beginning, it was apparent that cognitive dissonance per se was not the whole story…', explain Kurzban and Aktipis. '[D]issonance reduction depended on social factors' (2007, p. 139). These public/private effects have also been noted in more recent cognitive dissonance claims (see Aronson 1968, 1999; Steele 1988).

In line with Kurzban and Aktipis' claim that the social self is central to the production of cognitive dissonance, key ingredients in reported dissonance-inducing behavior happen to include the consequences, whether the actions leading to it were coerced or freely committed, and whether they are known to others (see Blanton et al. 1997; Cooper & Fazio 1984; Davis, KE & Jones 1960; Kunda 1990; Sherman 1970). Kurzban and Aktipis also cite dissonance theorists Aronson, Fried, and Stone (1991) as themselves unwittingly suggesting that *external* inconsistency is the true instigator of cognitive dissonance when writing that 'not practicing what they are preaching' (1991, p. 1637) is predicted to lead to belief change.

'Preaching is a social act,', explain Kurzban and Aktipis, and predicting change as a function of this manipulation entails a commitment beyond preserving the *self*-concept' (2007, p. 140, emphasis added). In other words, dissonance may be a response designed to help keep *public* perceptions of our selves consistent. Hence it is not the holding of inconsistent beliefs that is aversive, so much as presenting this inconsistency in public and detecting that this inconsistency may be harmful to one's social self. Kurzban and Aktipis thus propose:

[A]cts that are private and unlikely to become publicly known might…be relatively immune to the kind of reorganization implied by dissonance-related theories. This idea resonates with Tice's 1992 suggestion that it is correct to "question whether internalization occurs reliably under private circumstances" (p. 447) (Kurzban & Aktipis 2007, p. 140).[71]

As rooting for narrative outcomes is a mostly private affair, there is arguably no reason cognitive dissonance would arise when lacking consistency in rooting for an immoral character or abandoning our onscreen 'friends' and sympathizing with our onscreen 'enemies'. Even if one were to query our true sense of privacy in the cinema (though recall Makavejev and Mortimer's 'illegal operations'), dissonance might still be thought irrelevant on the grounds that our behavior is coerced and can therefore be excused as an untrue reflection of our internal beliefs (see Cooper & Fazio 1984; Kunda 1990). Vaage and Raney's moral heuristics and biases theses may even be viewed as further grounds upon which any claimed dissonance-inducing behavior associated with rooting for immoral characters, actions, or outcomes is dismissed, assigning blame to intuitive processes they have no conscious knowledge or control of.

This casts a serious question mark over Raney's claim that moral disengagement is necessary and that it explains our ability to root for immoral characters and outcomes. Moreover, it also raises doubts about Zillmann's initial claim that rooting for antagonists or immoral acts would be noxious to one's moral sense of self and induce dissonance, and that cognitive reappraisal of our automatic excitatory contagion when witnessing such antagonists' emotion onscreen 'brings the responses into better agreement with socially and/or individually sanctioned emotional behaviour' (Zillmann 2006b, p. 166).[72] Without that claim, Zillmann's entire theory proclaiming ongoing affective dispositions that steer anticipatory hopes and fears for characters, and hence the outcomes viewers root for during suspense, would be on unstable ground. If *private* participatory responses did not induce dissonance, our disposition toward a character would not need to define our appraisal of the narrative outcomes they are thought to deserve. In other words, the force that Zillmann claimed explained our desire for moral characters and outcomes in the first place almost four decades ago – that it is socially appropriate to hope for good fortune for our 'friends' and misfortune for our 'enemies', and to fear misfortune for our 'friends' and good fortune for our 'enemies' else we feel dissonance (see Zillmann & Cantor 1976, 1977) – would disappear.

It would arguably also weaken Carroll's moral account, as Zillmann offered his moral disposition theory in support to explain 'how and why' morality induces suspense and euphoric/dysphoric anticipatory emotions (Zillmann 1996/2013, p. 375), which Carroll left undiscussed. Although, in making no concrete claims about the reason for morality's influence upon suspense, Carroll is technically untouched by disputes over Zillmann's

claim, any collapse leaves him without a clear 'how and why' and thus potentially more vulnerable to attack from other solutions willing to offer it or to demonstrate that morality is not so central to suspense and side-taking after all.

Even if my attack on moral disengagement and cognitive dissonance is misguided, one major problem remains with Raney's answer to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. Though every word of it might be true, it still fails to explain our ability to suddenly root for the *antagonist* during Hitchcockian suspense. In other words, how is it that I can unexpectedly root for outcomes *counter* to the characters I am supposedly partial towards? Raney does not acknowledge this problem, let alone offer an answer. Vaage, however, has two possible paths to explain this response. She could claim that my *narrative desire* (Currie 1999) is that Hitchcock's thief escapes, for instance, in order to ensure further entertainment just as Raney suggests. This solution is problematic, however, as it is not obvious how such computations would be made. Why is the thief's escape *more* entertaining than their being caught, confronted, or chased? Alternatively, Vaage could appeal to a third psychological process: automatic, low-level empathy, which is by nature amoral.

3. Embodied Empathy

> [*M*]*oral inversion of suspense* is when the spectator empathizes with characters who are immoral...Empathizing with the character makes the spectator root for this character, wanting him or her to succeed (Vaage 2015a, p. 77).

The empathy Vaage speaks of above is not slow, reflective, *imaginative* empathy, but fast, reflexive, *embodied* empathy (i.e. mirror affects). Whereas slow imaginative empathy is thought to involve moral appraisal, this low-level empathy does not. Low-level embodied empathy is thus often unwittingly immoral, for we may automatically 'mirror the actions and feelings of a person we see' regardless of the moral virtual of their character or action (Vaage 2015a, p. 74). Immediately it might be noted that while this could explain Richard Allen's moral inversion of suspense, it may also theoretically oppose the higher-level *partiality* that Vaage argues we show for select characters. Although evidence shows we are more willing to empathise with our in-group and those we care for (Cheng et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2009), empathising with characters we are supposedly rooting against remains a distinct possibility, particularly if there is no one else better to emphasis with onscreen. This possibility is exactly what Vaage is appealing to in her answer above.

There is also a problem, however, in assuming that embodied empathy automatically leads to rooting for outcomes in benefit of that character. By this logic, viewers exhibiting unconscious mirroring behavior (i.e. mimicking) should also (generally) be hoping that the

person they are mirroring *succeeds* in their action goal. So far as I know, no such test has ever been carried out. The studies that have, and the theory they have generated, instead make other claims: that mirroring facilitates action understanding (Iacoboni et al. 2005; Thioux, Gazzola & Keysers 2008) or enables social bonding (Kulesza et al. 2015; Lakin et al. 2003). Although Vaage cites speculation by film theorist, Daniel Barratt, that 'in the same way some psychologists propose that emotional contagion occurs when we are allowed to witness another person's facial expressions, perhaps something like 'goal contagion' occurs when we are allowed to witness another person's actions' (cited in Vaage 2015a, p. 72), I am unaware of any mention of this kind of 'motivational contagion' in the empathy/mimicry literature.[73]

Of course, Vaage may reply that mirror affects need not automatically happen, they simply need to happen sometimes. If this is so, we must be more specific about when they might occur in order to test this theory and rule out other factors. If there were any *direct* path between witnessing an action and hoping for its completion, there would need to be a way to short-circuit this response, else it would seem to encourage maladaptive behaviour. In witnessing our enemies, we could find ourselves hoping they succeeded in dodging a tackle on the football field or punching us in the face in a bar room brawl. Perhaps the process is different when we are third party witnesses?

Campbell and de Waal (2014) found that so-called contagious yawning was lower when chimpanzees watched videos of outgroup chimpanzees yawning, even though they gave more attention to these than videos of ingroup chimpanzees. Although we cannot draw conclusions about desired goals here, it may speak to good guys and bad guys. Campbell and de Waal argue that '[t]he combination of high interest and low contagion may stem from hostility towards unfamiliar chimpanzees, which may interfere with an empathic response' (p. 1). If a nonconscious response such as contagious yawning can be prevented by 'antipathy' of sorts, we must ask whether movie viewer mirror effects are limited in the same way. Do bad guys need to be minimally charming to ensure our mirroring of their actions?

It is also not entirely obvious that our hope for the success of charming villains such as Bruno, stretching to reach his lighter, does not *precede*, rather than *succeed*, mirroring. Anecdotally, my own recollection of mirroring is that it occurs when I already desperately want a particular outcome. I recently observed a strong mimicked response as I watched James Bond (Roger Moore) in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) carefully attempt to remove the detonator in the core of a nuclear missile. This task is made all the more difficult by the fact that Bond cannot allow the core to touch the outer ring it is housed in, a magnetic 'impulse conductor circuit' that will detonate upon the slightest contact.

As my attention focused on Bond's task, I caught myself making the same motor action, grasping at a phantom centerpiece as if trying to pull out it out steadily without budging a single millimeter sideways. However, I was clearly already siding-with Bond's goal to avert an explosion, and almost certainly would have hoped the action was completed successfully *without* my mirrored hand actions. Sitting at my desk here now, hands laid on the keyboard, I can watch the well-directed scene on my screen and feel the same desire that Bond remove the nuclear detonator without bumping into the magnetic outer ring (Note: whether mirroring *intensifies* my pre-existing desire is another issue altogether).

Experimental evidence also suggests that mirroring does not arise from effortfully or intuitively imagining ourselves in another's shoes, as Vaage would have us believe. Direct evidence against shoe-wearing interpretations of mimicked behavior is found in a study that videotaped an experimenter telling a story about almost being accidentally hit by someone dancing wildly at a party (Bavelas et al. 1987, p. 330). The storyteller ducked to her right as she told of her narrow escape from the dancer's flailing arms. Twelve of the twenty-three participants sitting opposite her looking on also leaned within one second of the storyteller's motion. However, only one leaned right as predicted if witnesses had mentally put-themselves-in-the-shoes-of the storyteller. The other eleven participants leaned left. Whilst this fits the definition of 'mirroring', it does not support claims that people automatically imagine (i.e. simulate) being in other people's shoes. Instead the researchers concluded that the participants' lean had a communicative function, not a role taking or vicarious one. This finding accords with what has more recently been dubbed the 'chameleon effect', which describes nonconscious action mimicry performed to facilitate social inclusion (Lakin, Chartrand & Arkin 2008; Lakin et al. 2003). The difference between such answers and shoe-wearing or emotional contagion claims should not be underestimated. The latter allows for all-too-common claims that particular characters represent the wrong kind of mental 'possession', which may do permanent damage, and that particular viewers are better equipped to perform this function in artworks with characters that 'deserve' to be empathically understood. So whilst I agree that Vaage's appeal to mirror effects is a potentially crucial piece of puzzle in solving the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, I believe her reading of these effects is not quite right and prevents her from providing an adequate (rather than circular) answer as to when these low-level responses will lead to moral inversion.

Conclusion

Margrethe Bruun Vaage makes an important contribution to emerging debate about the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking by recognising what Carroll, Zillmann, and Murray Smith are as yet unwilling to acknowledge — that immoral participatory response is pervasive and poses a problem for their otherwise impressive moral structure. However, Vaage's starting point that 'rationally speaking, cheering for murderous drug dealers and mobsters would be a non-starter, as the antihero is clearly not morally good' (2015a, p. 23) is firmly grounded on the assumption that viewers become so emotionally 'attached' to a character that they are more or less obliged to side with them during dramatic conflicts. If this assumption were unwarranted, cheering murderous drug dealers and mobsters would not necessarily be irrational at all and would not require a moral heuristics and biases explanation to make it rational in the first place. Although Vaage proposes that this assumption holds true because a) our evolved altruistic tendencies favour in-group others, b) our desire to avoid cognitive effort during popular entertainment leads to these emotionally intuitive responses, and c) we are threatened with cognitive dissonance if we associate ourselves with immoral characters and/or lack consistency, I have argued against these claims. Movie viewers in general seem perfectly capable of condemning the actions of their 'preferred' characters, condoning those of their 'non-preferred' characters, and openly hoping for outcomes that ignore *partiality* during suspense and side-taking. If DeScioli and Kurzban are correct that moral *judgment* is dynamically strategic, contextually dependent, and distinct in evolved function from moral *behaviour*, to talk in terms of moral allegiance to character in regards to rooting for impending outcomes as per Carroll, Zillmann, Smith, Plantinga, Raney, and Vaage would seem misguided. Much like the assumed impact of *morality* upon all suspense and side-taking, the proposal that *partiality* is an intense and ongoing power that transcends moral context is intuitively compelling but logistically and empirically weak. Though partiality may play a part in some preferred narrative outcomes (and almost certainly plays a part in our after-the-fact pleas for excuses that allow us to retain *affection* for a character), I believe there are other more important factors at work that warrant investigation.

THE ATTACHMENT FALLACY
ELEVEN LITTLE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Good evening.

You are probably wondering why I am standing in front of this gigantic computer. Recently it has become apparent that the writer of this alleged academic text is what we in The Business call 'written-out'. While he is recuperating at a care facility in Pasadena with full medical and familial support to ensure he comes to terms with never, ever working in this industry again, I have enlisted the services of a more reliable servant of the written word: *Google*. By typing in a series of simple terms, such as 'immoral', 'passionate arousal', 'rooting', 'desire', and 'movies', the entire text for this next episode appeared at my fingertips in an instant. All I needed do was run the fifteen million, seven hundred and sixty-nine search results through the gigantic computer behind me to filter out the pornography and I was left with the eleven remaining hits from which this episode has been effortlessly cut and pasted. While you enjoy the fruits of our computer's labour, I shall inspect some of the forbidden fruits it has set aside.

'Give them some person they can worry about and you've got them', said director Frank Capra of the filmgoing public, reinforcing a widespread belief in the power of emotional attachment to character (cited in Stevens Jr 2006, p. 103). Popular in both folk and scientific claims about movie reception, this presumed psychological process is most widely known as 'identification'. But whether referred to as 'concern', 'affiliation', 'sympathy', 'disposition', 'allegiance', or 'empathy', the logic behind all is that, on screen as in everyday life, when we come to care about other beings, we also come to care about their interests and the fate that befalls them. 'In short', sums up Karl Inglesias in *Writing for emotional impact*, 'suspense is about the potential of bad things happening to a character we care about' (2005, p. 94). Notoriously difficult to pin down in the laboratory and endlessly disputed in the literature, 'identification' and its offshoots are a methodological and ideological quagmire into which one may be justifiably reluctant to venture. However, these attachment assumptions have been the elephant in the room during our discussion of suspense and side-taking so far, and they continue to have a significant and frequently unconsidered impact on the debate. The entire moral heuristics and bias approach that Vaage, Raney, and Plantinga adopt, for instance, is only necessary if one begins with the intuitive assumption that viewers overwhelming root for outcomes in favour of their preferred, morally superior character. Without that presumption in mind, there is no particular enigma present when viewers fleetingly find themselves rooting for the bad guy or seemingly rooting against their beloved hero. What if we were then to consider the possibility that attachment was not the overwhelming influence upon moment-by-moment rooting for narrative outcomes that so many practical, theoretical, critical, and audience discourses on the movies take it to be? Other causal factors might not only explain our mysterious desire for immoral outcomes, but also for moral outcomes we have long presumed result from connection to character. If the assumed influence of 'attachment' upon our ongoing hopes and fears in the cinema is unwarranted then the moral heuristics and bias approach to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, which seeks to explain the failure of moral-empathic attachment, is further undermined. Though space and sanity does not permit me to provide a full critique of attachment claims, I shall offer eleven short arguments against its explanatory power in regards to our predilections for narrative outcomes, ranging from the seemingly obvious to the rarely raised.

Argument #1: Suspense occurs in the absence of identification

That audiences everywhere commonly experience emotional responses that appear to express an apparent empathic concern for characters is beyond doubt. But it is also clear that we can root for outcomes in the absence of such attachments. To deny this possibility would force us to label any character we fleetingly feel concern for, from people caught in the crosshairs of a gun-sight, – –

Left: *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976). Right: *Jack Reacher* (2012).

– – to unseen babies in prams that cross the path of a bus or speeding car, – –

Left: *Speed* (1994). Right: *The French Connection* (1971).

– – as cases of empathic identification. This runs counter to common usage. And yet it is exactly what Denby's explanation that '[o]ur identification overcomes our scruples' (1991, p. 32) demands during a Hitchcock's Thief scenario. Given that the burglar is often unknown and operating in a darkened room, to claim that our desire to warn her is a case of sudden identification is unintuitive. Any fleeting emotional connection we might have with the unknown snooper is surely of a different kind to that we have with the protagonist.

If our desire that an unknown character escape harm can occur in the absence of identification, allegiance, or any other ongoing attachment, the same unknown factor/s that incites this suspense and side-taking (call it X) might also be responsible for such responses in scenes involving characters we are presumed 'attached' to. If X can co-exist *alongside* identification, allegiance, disposition, or affection (and there is no particular reason to believe that it is automatically absent when such supposed psychological attachments to character are present) then we cannot be sure that these attachments are *ever* the cause of our hopes and fears hope for particular narrative outcomes. Moreover, even if they are, these attachments might still be occasionally overwhelmed by X when these factors are at odds, pulling our hopes and fears in opposite directions.

Argument #2: Identification does not guarantee rooting interest

Where the motto 'character is king' is repeated in filmmaking forums and creative writing courses around the world, as theorists and practitioners naturally presume stories tend to stand or fall on our interest in these imaginary agents and their troubles, character is simply a necessary but insufficient condition for empathic concern. If rooting for narrative outcomes were merely a matter of attachment to character, writing the latest installment of a blockbuster franchise would be a piece of cake. Viewers who came pre-attached to charming good guy, James Bond, would root for almost any outcome in his favour.

> Scene #1: Bond spills the milk as he prepares to settle down with a cup of English tea.
> Scene #2: Bond speeds to the Milk Bar in his Aston Martin to get there before closing time.
> Scene #3: Bond encounters an unexpected obstacle when the shop is out of full cream milk.

Blind appeal to character attachment as the source of our preferred narrative outcomes assumes that we cannot be *indifferent* to outcomes that will affect 'cared for' characters. 'Many screenwriting teachers will talk to you about a screenplay and say that it's all about tension and conflict', explains director Tom DiCillo (*Johnny Suede* 1991; *Lost in Oblivion* 1995). 'And, in some ways, that's absolutely true. But if that tension and conflict doesn't arouse enough interest to have people really want to know what's going to happen next, then you're screwed' (cited in Gaspard 2009, p. 8). Clearly it takes more than mere 'care' to get us to take an interest in a character's current situation and root for their goals or welfare. The fact that some incidents, scenes, or episodes arouse interest and concern whilst others do not, and that this appears able to rise and fall independent of characters involved, suggests that moment-by-moment suspense and side-taking is at least partially independent of character attachment and of their long term goals and/or interests.

Media effects literature frequently claims that viewers experience narrative events *through* identified-with characters. '[W]e engage in an "as if" experience in which we imagine ourselves in the role of the character', explains W. James Potter (2004, p. 91). This basic idea enables the argument that viewers are more likely to recall and thus be influenced by this empathic experience outside the cinema, hence the supposed danger of identifying with unscrupulous characters. Upon this very logic, Martin Barker (2005) reasoned that 'if the concept of "identification" is to have any explanatory power, there ought to be *some* consequential connections between preferred character and recalled aspects of the film' (p. 361, emphasis in original). But after analysing data drawn from 25,000 questionnaires from his multinational audience studies project on *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003), Barker found no indication that viewers recalled narrative events through their preferred character, who were frequently absent from recalled scenes and favourite moments, and thus no evidence for the existence of a psychological state of 'identification'.

Argument #3: Viewers often hold competing concerns

'The best stories don't come from "good vs. bad" but from "good vs. good"', reads a quote attributed to Tolstoy all over the Internet.[81] Through the ages, stories about love triangles and friends forced to fight have been a staple of drama, continuing today in soap opera, wrestling, and popular cinema. This begs the question: if *morality* and *partiality* are prime causes of our hopes and fears for impending outcomes is processed, what happens when two or more moral and/or favoured characters come into conflict as Tolstoy was imagined to claim? Commonsense might suggest that we simply root for the character we favour more, but my own experience often implies otherwise.

At the climax of *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), my rooted-for outcome should be clear. The heroine, Francesca (Meryl Streep), is trying to decide whether to open the passenger door and flee her husband to run away with her soul mate, Robert (Clint Eastwood), sitting in his pickup truck ahead, waiting for the traffic lights to change before he drives off forever. I hardly know Francesca's husband or her young children, who have been offscreen for most of the story, and I certainly cannot be said to have the kind of connection with them that I have with the two lovers. Based on the presumed power of attachment and partiality, whether or not to stay beside her honest farmer husband and two children and live a passionless life without Robert is a no-brainer. But my loyalty to character suddenly seems limp. Even my moral radar appears unable to definitively decipher good from bad, and I find myself wavering, fearing one outcome then the next, back and forth, as the film cuts from Robert's waiting silhouette in the car ahead, Francesca's distraught face considering her options, her hand hovering over the car door handle wondering whether to pull it and rush to Robert…

Like Francesca, I am torn and utterly distraught at the thought of choosing. Perhaps it is felt that this need not imply an end to my partiality towards Francesca, simply that I am unsure what the optimal outcome for her would be. Other movie moments, however, make my lack of loyalty more transparent.

During the justly famous sewer chase at the end of *The Third Man* (1949), the characters and outcomes I seem to be siding-with switches every few seconds.

Although I begin the sequence wishing Harry Lime (Orson Welles) is apprehended so he stops selling watered-down penicillin on the Black Market, as the narration adds more and more soldiers, police, and attack dogs to his search, I cannot but help hope he escapes.

When Harry leans up against a wall and pursuers pass below, I hope he avoids detection.

But soon after, as a pursuer peers out from a drain pipe looking for him, – –

– – fails to notice Harry hiding high above, – –

– – and heads off in the wrong direction with two fellow searchers – –

– – I want to cry out, 'Wait. He's back there!'.

Yet when Harry is finally spotted by other searchers moments later, I hope he escapes.

Eventually he is forced to hide in the shadows of a long drainway within shouting distance of his old friend, pursuing protagonist Holly Martins (Joseph Cotton) and Major Calloway (Trevor Howard), who has led the investigation into Harry's criminal activity. As Holly calls for his friend to give himself up, a soldier rushes up to usher him safely back out from the open, warning that Harry is a dangerous man. The escapee calmly takes aim and shoots.

The fatal shot allows Harry to scurry off along the tunnel, intent on escape.

Presuming that he is truly on the verge of disappearing into the distance for good, my inner voice screams, "Quick! Stop him!" and Major Calloway obliges.

Is my lack of loyalty so abnormal?

Argument #4: Empathy is overrated

'[F]olk psychological accounts usually relate the occurrence of empathy to prosocial and altruistic, other-oriented motivations (i.e., a motivation with the goal to increase the other person's well-being or welfare)', explain neuroscientists Tania Singer and Claus Lamm (2009). 'Empathy, though, does not necessarily carry such motivations, and real-life examples of how empathy can "go awry" (from a prosocial point of view) abound' (p. 84). These researchers go on to list examples such as empathic torturers seeking to increase their effectiveness (see also Gaut 2010, p. 140 & 145) and competitors seeking to understand their opponents and the impact of various maneuvers. Vaage could claim that these are examples of slow, imaginative empathy, following Alvin Goldman's dual-pathway theory of empathy as either *imaginative* reflection or *embodied* reflex (see Goldman, A 2011), but quite side from doubts over whether such a strict dichotomy is sustainable (see Vignemont 2009), Singer and Lamm also note that 'too much empathy [of either sort] can lead to an aversive distress response and selfish instead of other-oriented behaviour' (2009, p. 84). We should all be familiar with the notion that some friends and colleagues get burn-out because they 'care too much'. Medical practitioners, for instance, have been found to typically exhibit less empathy for pain than other members of the population (see Decety, Yang & Cheng 2010; Gleichgerrcht & Decety 2013). Although this may seem counterintuitive, in light of Singer and Lamm's observation, it makes perfect sense. These health care professionals could not continue to operate in an environment that presents so many possibilities to witness others in intense physical and emotional pain, and such a need to perform painful procedures, if they were unbridled empathisers.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies of the human brain have also shown selective response in the pain matrix to a victim's suffering based on personal relationship (Cheng et al. 2010), racial out-group (Xu et al. 2009), social stigma (Decety, Echols & Correll 2010), and perceived fairness (Singer et al. 2006). Findings like this have led philosopher, Jesse Prinz, to declare that 'empathy is not all it is cracked up to be' (2011, p. 214). This is not to suggest that empathy plays no role in rooting for narrative outcomes, simply that it should not be taken as a singular and direct causal factor, as Vaage's statement that it 'can – and will – influence our moral evaluation' appears to proclaim (2015a, p. 80). As Ugazio, Majdandžić, and Lamm (2014) put it, 'empathy is but one constituent of morality' and our 'motivated behaviour depends on the context' (p. 155). Moreover, given that many modern Theory of Mind advocates view empathy as the basis of virtually all social cognition — the process by which we are able to understand the actions, intentions, and goals of other beings (see Batson 2009, p. 3) — the argument that empathy instantly leads to rooting might demand we root for *every* character, simply because we 'empathise' with all in order to make sense of their behaviour.[83]

Argument #5: Our ability to empathise also works *against* attachment

'It takes very little cinematic characterization for a viewer to begin to feel partiality toward or against a character on screen', argues Ward E. Jones (2011, p. 103). If this is so, it also suggests it might take very little to begin to feel partiality toward *another* character moments later, ditching the one we are supposedly 'partial' to in the first place. As Ed Tan argues, 'the costs of sympathy during the watching of a film are extremely low' whereas sympathy in everyday life often 'requires an effort to help family and friends when they are in trouble' (1996, p. 192). Tan thus concludes, 'It is quite possible that films offer…the opportunity to be altruistic at a far lower cost than required in everyday life. For next to nothing, the viewers have given their sympathy' (p. 192). And it is for this very reason that I would argue viewers like me so easily enter into and exit from sympathy with others. We can give it at the drop of the hat and withdraw it just as quickly without worry because the commitment is minimal and our loyalty amounts to little. After all, it's only a movie. Zillmann and Raney's claim that cognitive dissonance may result from a lack of consistency or from siding with an 'immoral character' is also arguably rendered irrelevant, as we may flip-flop for outcomes favourable to one character then another because our hopes and fears are rarely under public scrutiny. There is nothing to stop me 'caring for' a character whilst simultaneously advocating an outcome against them. I do this in my own head whenever witness to disputes between real-world family and friends.

When Vaage writes that 'we tend to become partial to those we know the best, and see them as morally preferable over complete strangers' (2015a, p. 61), we must remember that seeing a *character* as morally preferable does not automatically equate with seeing their *actions* and potential *outcomes* as morally preferable. This is to distinguish between *impending* behaviour and *past* behavior, for I have already argued, following Lieberman and Linke's (2007) study, that people are more willing to forgive their in-group of moral transgressions *after the fact*. This does not, however, mean that they do not judge the action to be immoral and hope against it, even if the intensity of this hope varies according to relationship with the characters involved. Raney and Vaage continually collapse the difference between *moral evaluation of character* and *moral evaluation of impending act or outcome*, making it seem as if the two were practically synonymous and that moment-by-moment desire for narrative outcomes were simply a matter of supporting the characters we like and withdrawing support from those we do not. Although Lieberman and Linke observe that 'evolutionary analyses…suggest that, all else equal, the welfare of an out-group member will be less valued than the welfare of an in-group member' (2007, p. 776), the reality is that filmic narration ensures all else is not equal.

Argument #6: Pleas for excuses can be offered for bad guys too

Where Vaage makes constant reference to the pleas for excuses that the narration offers viewers for the antihero's ongoing moral transgressions, these might just as well be offered for any other character we are not yet attached and partial to. When they are, in films such as those of Alfred Hitchcock, the welfare of the out-group member (i.e. the antagonist) is not automatically 'less valued' than the welfare of an in-group member (i.e. the protagonist) during moment-by-moment suspense. Nor does knowing someone onscreen automatically make us 'evaluate his or her behaviour more favourably' (Vaage 2015a, p. 46). Surely it is *what* we know about someone that matters. Knowing that our friend beats his wife or children is unlikely to encourage favour. And thus Vaage's claim that 'alignment' systematically influences 'allegiance' is not entirely correct.[84] What counts is the information that this alignment grants us. Joshua Greene himself points out, '[A]ll [rational moral] judgments are revisable in light of additional details' (2007, p. 64). Given that cinematic narration *continually* provides viewers with such details, simplistic claims about the power of partiality to predict rooted-for outcomes are surely rendered false.

Imagine, for instance, that our earlier cliffhanging scene occurred in a different context. Evil Macaulay Culkin, hanging on for dear life, had in fact been possessed by the devil throughout the entire film. Many viewers might therefore hope that his mother drops him into the ocean deep before he does any more harm.

But if the filmmakers were to cut in to a close-up of his face and show the blood red demon seed draining from his eyes, signaling a return to cute-little-Culkin…?
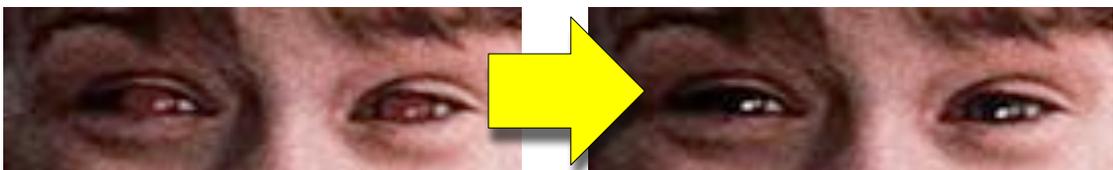
It is hardly a stretch to suggest that upon seeing this, some viewers might suddenly hope he is saved, even after all the evil he has done and all their siding against him.

Further evidence of the influence of ongoing narrational cues may be revealed by reverse engineering scenes in which viewers appear to root for immoral outcomes. 'The Hitchcock suspense sequence, watched on an editola, looks like a piece of machinery, a stripped-down section of an engine', wrote Penelope Houston (1963, p. 181; also cited in Norden 1980, p. 77). Examining scenes of immoral suspense and side-taking inside digital editing software therefore allows us to inspect the individual parts and dissemble the engine in an attempt to work out what function each piece performs. Consider the iconic set-piece in *Dirty Harry* (1971) where renegade cop Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) is disturbed on his lunch break by a bank robbery across the road. Raney (2004, p. 356) presents Callahan as a prime example of our ability to overlook what we would take to be immoral actions in real life and to 'extend moral propriety' because he is the hero and we like him (p. 357). But when Callahan casually walks across the road with a half-eaten hotdog in his mouth, draws his .44 Magnum, and guns down the criminals causing chaos and destruction in the main street, should my lack of outrage at his actions, killing all but one black man involved, be put down to partiality and the automatic adoption and approval of the protagonist's goal?

Upon wondering this, I examined the sequence in the editing suite and discovered things I did not consciously notice during real-time viewing. Two subtle, split-second cues occur before Callahan's key trigger pulls that may influence my willingness to accept his actions.

The first is when Callahan calls out to a robber backing out of the bank, 'Halt'.

The shotgun-wielding man quickly turns and shoots – –

– – prompting Callahan to return fire.

The second is when the escape vehicle speeds off in his direction, making a momentary dovetail in his direction as if planning to run him down, again prompting him to open fire.

Removing these two tiny moments in the editing suite had a significant effect on my own viewing. Suddenly Callahan's heroics seemed cold-blooded, needlessly blowing the bad guys away without good reason. This should hardly come as a surprise, for most are familiar with old cowboy conventions that good guys do not shoot first, do not shoot people in the back, and only kill out of necessity. Though well-trained in these conventions since childhood, we may become blind to their manufacture onscreen, for I was astonished to find the same pattern in scene after scene throughout the *Dirty Harry* movies. In all the excitement I had not noticed that, in spite of Callahan's association with 'shoot first, ask questions later' police work, *the bad guys always shot first*.

It may be argued that these cues function as Vaage's (2015a) 'pleas for excuses', serving to *justify* Callahan's 'excessive force when dealing with criminal suspects' (Raney 2004, p. 356). However, if attachment ensured we were already on Callahan's side, it would also be difficult to explain why the filmmakers behind *Dirty Harry* felt compelled to add this excuse to virtually each and every violent act the hero performs across all films. In other

words, what is more eye-opening than the bad guys shooting first in any *scene* is that the bad guys must each threaten Callahan's life immediately before he is permitted to gun them down? Even after the vile antagonist, Scorpio (Andy Robinson), has been shown time and again to be willing to commit any violent crime for kicks and finally hijacks a bus full of school children and uses a young boy as a human shield ready to blow his brains out if Callahan comes any closer to apprehend him, the storytellers only allow our hero to deliberately shoot him dead when Scorpio 'draws' first, taking the chance that Callahan has fired six shots, not five, grabbing for his gun and aiming ready to fire.

If excuses are required every single time to secure support for a questionable action, even against a loathsome antagonist, this does not lend strong support to ongoing attachment and partiality claims in regards to rooting for narrative outcomes. Instead, the continuing presence of these subtle pleas for excuses to justify Callahan's killing of one-dimensional bad guys each and every time suggests the ongoing importance of contextual information in local suspense and side-taking. Given that narration is able to offer or withdraw these excuses for any character, 'good' or 'bad', at any time, this is hardly equivalent to a natural tendency towards moral bias and partiality for particular characters. At best Vaage could argue that we are more willing to notice or take up onscreen excuses that exempt our preferred characters from moral condemnation. However, the explicitness of narration and our apparent sensitivity to publicly-known moral signals suggests that it may be safer as a third-party witness to moral disputes such as these to momentarily forego our attachments. That is, to disengage from *partiality* rather than from *morality*, condemning our character's impending immoral actions and excusing their moral virtue after-the-fact.[85]

Argument #7: Another interpretation may explain the data

'Once identification has been established', advises old Hollywood screenwriter and craft teacher, Eugene Vale, 'the spectator takes sides' (1998, p. 160). The filmmaking textbook *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* (2013) goes even further, informing budding screen practitioners that:

> Getting us involved, making us *identify* with the characters, makes us buy into the stakes for which they play…Audience members merge with them through empathy and identification (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier 2013, p. 117).

The assumption that viewers empathically attach and subsequently adopt that character's goals and best interests is so deeply intuitive that it remains the most popular off-the-cuff answer as to the origin of our hopes and fears for narrative outcomes, despite Carroll's methodical dismantling of identification (see 1988; 1990, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014; see also Zillmann 1980; 1995, 2007). When David Denby observed that – –

> Narrative art forms like novels and movies are governed by certain mysterious but implacable laws, and one of them is that when people are in danger of being caught—even if they are doing something awful—we root for them to get away.

– – he appealed to this intuitive and ever-popular explanation in his very next sentence:

> …Our *identification* overcomes our scruples (1991, p. 32, emphasis added).

Carroll's failure to fully address the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, applying his superlative critical abilities to offer a comprehensive analysis of this issue, has inadvertently allowed (if not invited) others to intuitively turn back towards identification..

'Hitchcock was tickled by the power of the reaction shot and enjoyed immensely how he could use it to make his audience *identify* with his villains', claims John Fawell. '...We throw our morals out the window when we enter as intimately into someone's consciousness as we do in movies' (Fawell 2008, p. 58, emphasis added). Director Guillermo del Toro also takes this stance during a discussion of the 'Bruno and the Lighter' scene in the Hitchcock documentary, *The Master's Touch: Hitchcock's Signature Style* (2009). 'You are on the edge of your seat because you have been now made to *identify* with the guy you hate the most', del Toro claims (cited at 17:12, emphasis added).[86] And, in a dark echo of Vaage's own argument, Joseph W. Smith III warns:

> We viewers seem to have some deep-seated compulsion that manifests itself uncomfortably in scenes like this…a desire so deep and so strange that it often trumps our reason and our innate sense of right and wrong…Something within us instinctively *identifies* with criminals and killers (2009, p. 93, emphasis added).

However, an empathic identification explanation of viewer *motivation* as essentially 'inherited' from character faces the same objection Carroll raises regarding 'infectious' *emotion*. Where audience emotion may often appear to be causally connected to character, 'caught' directly from them, Carroll noted that it might just as well be 'vectorially convergent', the result of an entirely different cause altogether (2007, p. 115; 2014, p. 324). I contend that the same logic applies equally well to viewer *motivation*, the source of our desire to adopt various goals and to root for particular outcomes. Much of the time, we do happen to want what the hero or anti-hero wants. But this correlation is no evidence of causality. As Carroll argues of emotion, other storytelling strategies and/or psychological processes outside our presumed empathic attachment to character may encourage it. As my *Dirty Harry* (1971) example illustrates, Hollywood goes to great lengths to generate sympathy in favour of one side or the other throughout an unfolding narrative, and conventionally this sympathy is plainly and deliberately weighted in a particular direction rather than left open to continual fluctuation or inversion. This naturally creates the illusion that rooting is most firmly based upon character attachment, usually to the protagonist.

Argument #8: Attachment is at odds with dynamic moral appraisal

Even more ironic than the continual appeal to 'identification' to explain the immoral rooting Carroll has all but denied exists is the fact that his own answer as to what steers our desire for narrative outcomes is practically indistinguishable from these claims. Although Carroll takes issue with the notion of 'infectious identification' on the grounds that our *emotion* frequently fails to match our character's emotion as predicted (i.e. 'asymmetry of affect is rife') (2008, p. 164), when it comes to *motivation*, he is happy to state that 'we tend to accept the projects of characters in suspense films who strike us as virtuous', thereby implying a causal connection between character motivation and viewer motivation (Carroll 2006, p. 231). Despite his inclusion of the qualifier 'tend', Carroll provides no particular guideline as to when this may fail to come to fruition. In recent articles, he has been increasingly explicit about the hold characters have over the narrative outcomes we desire, using terms such as 'allied with', 'affiliation with', and 'overarching pro and/or con attitudes' (2010, pp. 18-19). That Carroll defines this pro-attitude — which he calls *sympathy* — as 'a nonpassing attitude of care or concern' (p. 6) created by 'criterially prefocusing their virtues and vices' (p. 16) makes it clear this sympathetic 'bond' (p. 19), or its antipathetic opposite, is a kind of ongoing emotional/motivational attachment that belongs under the umbrella category 'character attachment' alongside identification.

The same can be said of Zillmann's 'moral disposition' (see 1995, 2007, 2012; 1977) and Murray Smith's 'moral allegiance' (1995a, 1999). Both essentially claim that emotional/motivational attachment to character is formed based upon moral assessment of behavior, and that this 'disposition' or 'allegiance' heavily guides (if not outright steers) the narrative outcomes that viewers root for. Zillmann, Smith, and even Carroll allow for dynamic moral appraisal, and thus shifting attachments, but their explanation of our moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes remains a two-step process of:

1) moral-empathic attachment, followed by

2) rooting for that character's good fortune.

And thus, when it comes to forecasting suspense and side-taking, these explanations are practically indistinguishable from identification claims.

Holding on to attachment assumptions whilst acknowledging dynamic moral appraisal and shifting sympathies soon leads to logistical problems. In recent debates about our ability to root for 'immoral' characters like Tony Soprano, Carroll and Smith have been forced to backpedal. As Carroll writes:

> [O]ur pro-attitude toward Tony is highly circumscribed. Though allied with him on various fronts, our allegiance is not unconditional. We are still repelled by a great many of the things he says and does…[P]unctuating the show with outrageous behavior and views on Tony's part…shake us from our sympathy for him (Carroll 2004/2013, pp. 244-245).

As I argued of Archie Bunker, I fully accept that viewers retain affection for Tony Soprano whilst being disgusted by some of his actions. However, if our 'pro-attitude' to Tony *causes* the outcomes we hope for, every time we fail to root for an outcome in his favour must be explained away as a sudden shake out of sympathetic allegiance, presumably soonafter followed by a return back into this hypothesised attachment.

Murray Smith is also forced to concede that his notion of moral allegiance can be a matter of degree. '[W]e ally ourselves with some of his actions and attitudes and not others', writes Smith, and thereby offer 'partial, ambivalent, and fluctuating sympathy' (2011, p. 86 & p. 87). But Smith would not face this problem in the first place if he dispensed with the assumption that allegiance is an ongoing commitment to a character's welfare that predicts our desire for particular narrative outcomes, rather than contributes to general emotional responses in the mix of our ongoing suspense and side-taking computations. Without that assumption, partial allegiance and sympathy shake-outs are unnecessary, as is any criticism that they fail to explain when these might occur.

Argument #9: Attachment explanations are unfalsifiable

In recounting how feminist theorists who were dissatisfied with Mulvey's (1975/1989) overly mechanical identification claims began to propose that the process was pluralistic, Martin Barker argues: 'The trouble with this solution is that it is no solution. In place of a putative structure, it offers a shapeless "anything is possible"' (Barker & Austin 2000, p. 30). And this description would seem to sum up transitory and/or aspectual identification claims by Berys Gaut (1999, 2010), Gilberto Perez (2000), and Jonathan Cohen (2001, 2006, 2009; Tal-Or & Cohen 2010). For example, although Gaut (1999) expressed doubt about the existence of 'any invariant, law-like principles for linking different aspects of identification together', given the complexities of film art, he nevertheless conceded that there was still 'plenty of space for investigating how one form of identification may tend…to promote another form, or for how certain film techniques may tend to enhance some kinds of identification' (p. 206). And yet, almost two decades since first making this statement, none of the 'substantive theorising' that he called for has been undertaken, even by Gaut himself. Instead all we are left with is the non-committal claims he makes regarding when his 'imaginative identification' might become full-blown 'empathic identification'. As there is no commitment as to when this should happen, the claims cannot be investigated or contested and remain resolutely unfalsifiable.

Although attachment and partiality claims predict that we will root for outcomes in favour of 'our' character, we frequently do not. Rather than view this as a falsification of the core claim, the typical maneuver is to simply stress that the influence of attachment is not absolute and the power of partiality can be overridden by competing factors. Given my appeal to complexity, this seems reasonable enough, and all attachment advocates – both identificationists (Cohen, Gaut, Grodal) and their detractors (Carroll, Plantinga, Raney, Smith, Vaage, Zillmann) – allow for this. However, they all remain strangely silent on when, where, how, or why it might occur.

'If the viewer grants allegiance to a character, and the character has clear goals', claims Carl Plantinga, 'then the viewer is *more likely* to strongly desire that those goals be met' (2009, p. 102, emphasis added). His own language suggests this is not always the case, yet he provides no explanation as to when or why we might fail to do so. Plantinga has been notably willing to challenge Carroll and Smith's narrow view of 'character engagement' by attempting to distinguish between ongoing allegiance and fleeting sympathy, but where this may help clarify the *emotional* connection we hold towards characters, it seems only to provide further grounds for a critique of any kind of attachment explanations for our moment-by-moment preferred narrative outcomes. Plantinga writes:

> Liking and sympathy can be short term and rather shallow. Allegiance, however, is a deeper and more abiding psychological relationship with a character…Allegiance maintains an interest in the fundamental well-being of a character that can survive a momentary loss of sympathy (Plantinga 2010, pp. 21-42).

If short-term sympathy is also able to encourage momentarily 'rooting for' narrative outcomes then this claim would predict that conflicts between these competing desires — short-term sympathy and long–term allegiance — may be relatively common during suspense and side-taking. In such cases, which do we root for: the protagonist we are in allegiance with or the antagonist we are momentarily sympathetic towards? Plantinga does not offer an answer, but goes on to describe how allegiance might withstand the influence of sympathetic emotions.

> As a deeper and more abiding relationship with a character, it can overlook character flaws and unsympathetic actions, *to a degree* (2010, p. 42, emphasis added).

The crucial question then becomes, 'To what degree?' Though he has written papers on complex responses to *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Unforgiven* (1992), and *The Legends of the Fall* (1994), a clear proposal on this matter has yet to be made. In failing to define the limits of loyalty for further testing, we are warranted in questioning the very existence of ongoing attachment to character and its presumed influence on rooting for outcomes.

Martin Barker argues that identification may be 'a concept that *benefits by remaining unclear*' (2005, p. 354, emphasis in original), thus it is important that those who wish to use it recognise the need to clarify their claims and not dismiss critiques like this as mere nitpicking or unrealistic scientific reduction of viewer motivation at the movies In the absence of any concrete predictions about how their own proposals about viewer motivation and its account of moment-by-moment hopes and fears for particular narrative outcomes might actually work, it is little different to Barker's 'shapeless "anything is possible"' (Barker & Austin 2000, p. 30) and no solution at all. Without a compelling reason to cling to claims that distinct psychological states of attachment to character actually exist, and that these directly drive our motivation to root, I suggest we follow the principle of Occam's Razor and cut them away from accounts of suspense and side-taking in popular cinema, erring on the side of fewer theoretical assumptions.

Carroll has already been willing to challenge empathetic identification accounts of the origin of viewer *emotion* on the grounds of 'explanatory parsimony' (2007, p. 116). I would ask that he apply the same principle to our account of viewer *motivation* in regards to the origin of our moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes. If the motivational bond of allegiance, non-passing sympathy, or empathy is so readily broken, why continue to portray this presumed *partiality* as the leading causal factor in rooting (alongside, and often in tandem with, *morality*)?

Argument #10: Identification is an ideological tool

'"Identification' has long been used to offer a picture of how people become involved in films', argues Martin Barker. 'And it includes the notion of audiences' *vulnerability* to a film' (Barker & Austin 2000, p. 13, emphasis in original). Whilst this idea may seem entirely warranted to many, for we would all seem to fear that media must have at least *some* effect, the problem is that this danger is not presumed to truly apply to all. 'Not the "educated" and "cultured" middle classes, who either don't watch such rubbish, or else are fully able to deal with it if they do so', writes Barker elsewhere. 'No, those who are "affected" are the young, and especially the working-class young' (1997, p. 4). And thus *identification* always doubles as an ideological tool — a way of dividing the dangerous from those of us who can diffuse the movie menace that threatens to lead us to harm ourselves and others. Even if not the user's intention, labeling any correlation between character and viewer a case of 'identification' (or any other attachment term, whether disposition, allegiance, or affiliation) has the potential to flame fears about the ill effects of popular narrative. The reason is that it plays into the hands of ongoing paranoia that the 'wrong' kinds of characters might be identified–with by the 'wrong' kinds of viewers.

For example, in looking for an explanation as to how we can manage to root for immoral characters or outcomes, seemingly forgoing our standard moral judgment, Raney writes:

> I would like to argue that at times (perhaps the majority of the time for some) the hedonic pull, the desire for pleasure and enjoyment wins out over the natural inclination to morally contemplate, that at times the *want to feel* eclipses the need to think' (2010, pp. 171-172, emphasis in original).

Whether he realises it or not, one little word in Raney's passage hints at the danger in blindly following this path. The word is 'some', for it sets up a potential dichotomy between pure and contaminated moral deliberation. And moral disengagement theory, which I have already criticised, is thought to allow us to distinguish 'some' viewers from others: the good from the bad, those who disengage less than those prone to disengage more whom we should be wary of.

One might think that if switching off our brain at the movies is a fact, there is no point denying from it. Instead, we should accept it, just as I argued of our ability to laugh at inappropriate jokes or to root for immoral outcomes. After all, as Jonathan Frome (1999) points out, Barker's attack does not actually constitute evidence against the existence of identification. But the debate is not so much about whether we ever identify with characters; it is about what it *means* when we say that we identify with characters. Barker highlights that 'identifying' has been hijacked by theory, and that any reference to this practice by real world viewers is readily taken as evidence for the theories that academics

have proposed – often in the absence of due consideration to the way these viewers actually use the term and what it might truly signify. A recent study by Neelam Sharma (2016) reveals readers claiming to identify with multiple characters whilst openly disagreeing with their actions. I also rarely find myself using 'identification' in reference to a character whose motivation I have adopted, instead using it as *kinship*. Yet theorists tend to take any mention of 'identification' as reference to a uniform psychological state.

Wittgenstein warned that we cannot base theoretical claims on everyday language use; we can only attempt to clarify what we mean when we use such language. As Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (2001) explain:

> The meaning of psychological concepts, like the meaning of all the concepts we use, cannot be hidden awaiting discovery, otherwise language users would not be able to employ them in the first place. Nor can the correct meaning of such concepts be arrived at by unifying them through theoretical reduction. For their meaning is already given by their uses in practice, and there is no reason to assume that these uses have anything in common unless the commonality is manifested in the practice of using them (Allen & Turvey 2001, p. 13).

Unfortunately our everyday use of 'identification' has been taken in media effects studies as license to propose elaborate psychological states light on logic and heavy on ideological assumption (see Barker 1989; Barker & Staiger 2000; Cumberbatch 1994; Cumberbatch & Howitt 1989; Howitt & Cumberbatch 1975). Barker (1997) compares moral panic over media effects to the logic of witch-finders during the middle ages.

> When a 'witch' was denounced, a whole array of evidences and proofs could be adduced; but these could only ever convince because those hearing them were already completely persuaded that these were the only likely explanations (p. 11).

Not only does the analogy also apply to 'identification', one of the key instruments of presumed media effects, but its implications can be extended further. The black magic of identification becomes all but impossible to disprove, for if it is *a priori* true, no matter how many cases fail to reveal its existence, these are always explained away as an instance where the magic was not meant to happen. '[W]e should avoid thinking that we never or rarely identify or empathize with characters just because we often adopt stances toward them in which we do neither', observes Berys Gaut (2010, p. 156). In other words, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Though this is technically true, it also applies to witches, unicorns, and The Culkin Complex.

Argument #11: The science doesn't quite stack up

Whereas providing evidence *against* identification's existence is difficult, because any disconfirming data may always be dismissed as mere evidence that the viewer was simply not identifying at that moment, seeking empirical evidence *for* the influence of identification and other attachments should be a relatively straightforward matter. All that needs to be done is define when identification is active and then gather viewer reports on their emotional and motivational state (i.e. their goals/desires) at numerous points throughout a narrative, comparing this to the character's emotion/motivation at the same points to see if a causal relationship can be established. So far as I know, such a simple test has yet to be performed. Even moral allegiance and disposition theory has not bothered to test its claims regarding rooting for those we are supposedly attached to by comparing *moment-by-moment* character goals/benefit and viewer predilections for narrative outcomes.

Mentioned even less than the lack of coherence and evidence that plagues identification studies is the experimental research that openly conflicts with empathic attachment claims in regards to suspense and side-taking. One fascinating uncited example comes from early British screenwriter, Colden Lore (1922), who reports conducting an informal experiment on suspense in which he individually hooked fourteen participants up to a 'Sphygmo-cardiograph' to monitor pulse changes every fifth of a second as they watched the famous frozen river rescue at the end of D. W Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920).[87]

If emotion and motivation were primarily empathic (i.e. sympathetic/empathic) or contagious (see next episode), we might predict shots of the helpless heroine (Lillian Gish) or her rushing rescuer (Richard Barthelmess) would create the greatest suspense.

Instead, Lore, an ex- assistant professor of psychology, explains that his 'tentative investigation' unexpectedly found

> on *all* sphygmograms [i.e. the pulse fluctuations plotted out on a paper ribbon], the greatest intensity of emotion was registered when glimpses were given of the ice-floes breaking up and plunging into the depths below (Lore 1922, p. 26, emphasis in original).

The increased arousal during shots of breaking ice dropping over the waterfall raise the possibility that the stimulus may have promoted *personal* rather than *empathic* concern, as viewers saw signs of danger that would threaten them if witnessed in the real world.[88]

Dolf Zillmann (1995, p. 38) cites another unpublished study conducted by one of his research students, Barry Sapolsky (1979), who created 'objective' and 'subjective' versions of an erotic movie to test screen theory claims that viewers identify with the

camera (primary identification) and with characters (secondary identification) (see Metz 1975/1982). In the OBJECTIVE version, the camera eventually narrowed its focus on one actor during heterosexual foreplay, and kept the other actor's offscreen presence merely suggested. In the SUBJECTIVE version, the camera eventually adopted the point-of-view of what one character or the other saw (i.e. a view of the sexual partner they were engaged with). Sapolsky's assumption was that the OBJECTIVE version should encourage primary character identification with the singled-out character on screen, whilst the SUBJECTIVE point-of-view version should encourage both primary identification with the camera and secondary identification with the character to whom the point-of-view belonged. The literature on identification also generated the additional expectation that participants would identify more with the point of view shot from a character of their own gender.

Sapolsky measured physiological reactions such as blood pressure during viewing as a presumed symptom of identification-fostered arousal. None of these predictions, popular within cinema studies at the time, found support. The point-of-view camera work was no more arousing than the objectively filmed version, and narrowed focus on a character of the same gender as participants that was expected to increase empathic arousal via identification appeared to do the opposite.

> [M]en who saw another man sexually engaged with a barely visible woman were turned off by the portrayal, showing a marked drop of arousal. Women who saw another woman sexually engaged with a barely visible man were similarly unresponsive, showing a minimal excitatory reaction (Zillmann 1995, p. 38).

Heteronormative issues aside, Zillmann argues that the results may instead be read as support for a 'respondent-as-witness' viewing model because arousal was higher when participants' focus was fixed upon the opposite sex (1995, p. 38).

'[M]any different factors might help explain why particular readers root for particular outcomes', suggest Gerrig, Bagelmann, and Mumper (2016, p. 20). Whilst these authors found experimental support that *morality* and *partiality* (i.e. 'likeability') influenced rooting, their effect upon which particular outcomes audience members rooted for is less clear.

> For both our [written] texts, readers who liked the protagonists more (i.e., the characters for whom our rooting measures were relevant) also rooted *more* for outcomes favorable to those characters …[and] readers' individual assessments of characters' goodness were related to the *extent* they rooted for outcomes favorable to those characters (Gerrig, Bagelmann, and Mumper 2016, p. 21 & p. 24, emphasis added).

Thus results revealed that participants rooted *harder* for moral and likeable characters, not that they rooted for particular outcomes *based upon* these factors. The experiment did not use movie clips (which might encourage more visceral responses that work *against* attachments) and only involved measurement of global rooting for the final outcome of an

entire episode/sequence after the fact, rather than multiple sampling of participant predilections for narrative outcomes approximating the capture of local, moment-by-moment rooting. Earlier research by Bezdek, Foy, and Gerrig (2013) did undertake such an approach by screening suspense scenes immediately after a pre-text manipulation established character motives as either moral or immoral then asking viewers to think-aloud, announcing their running thoughts into a microphone as they watched. Findings suggest that pre-existing sympathy or antipathy may be incapable of setting the direction of our rooted-for outcomes, even when current actions are immoral. The authors noted:

> Contrary to our hypothesis, participants made participatory responses, such as problem-solving thoughts, even in support of unsympathetic characters...[W]e did not find an effect of our external manipulation of character sympathy: Participants made *helpful* participatory responses even when protagonists were engaging in behaviours that our text introductions framed as immoral (2013, p. 4 & p. 6, emphasis added).

'Lliking' and preferred narrative outcomes were not officially measured. However, if we take these *helpful* participatory responses as indication of a desire that the character take the viewer's advice (e.g. 'Look out!' or 'Run for it!') then it seems that hope and fear for particular outcomes can arise regardless of morality or partiality, as many other enigmatic examples of immoral suspense and side-taking illustrated throughout this thesis suggest..

Moral disposition studies offer similar counter evidence. In manipulated news stories manufactured by Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2007), unlikeable protagonists who illegally sold children or weapons (and thus said to encourage a *negative disposition*) still generated suspense, albeit at a significantly lower level as illustrated below.
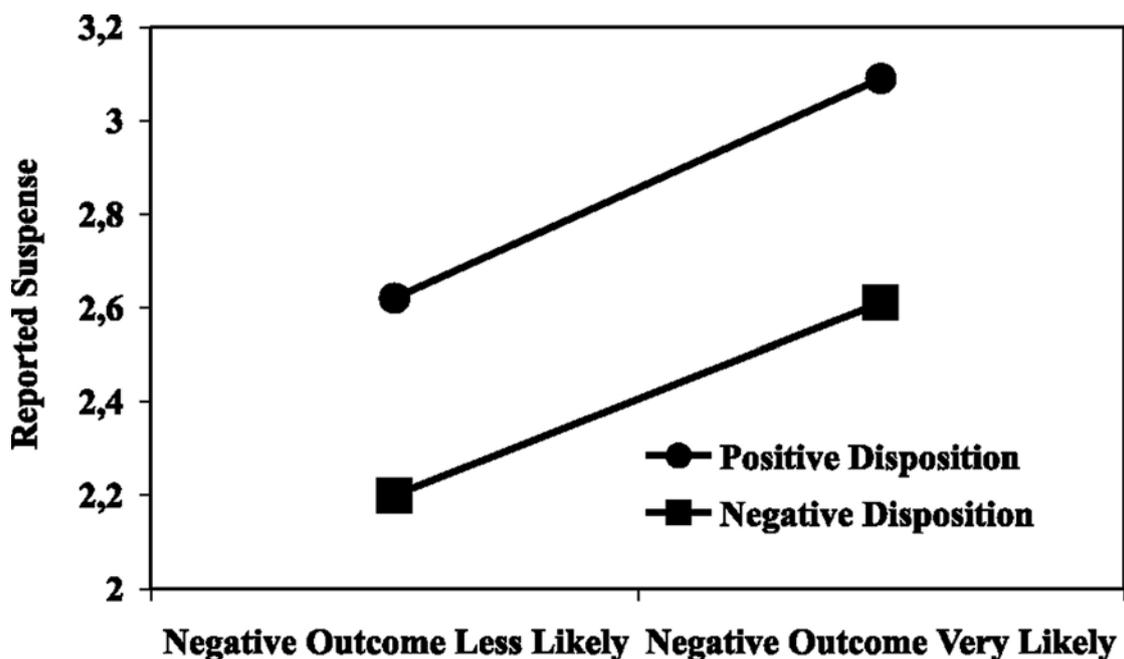
Reprinted from Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2007).

Had suspense in the negative disposition condition simply been the result of automatically rooting *against* the 'evil' character and hoping for their *ill* fortune, the graphed results for positive and negative disposition should have angled in *opposite* directions, as in the red dashed line added below.[89]
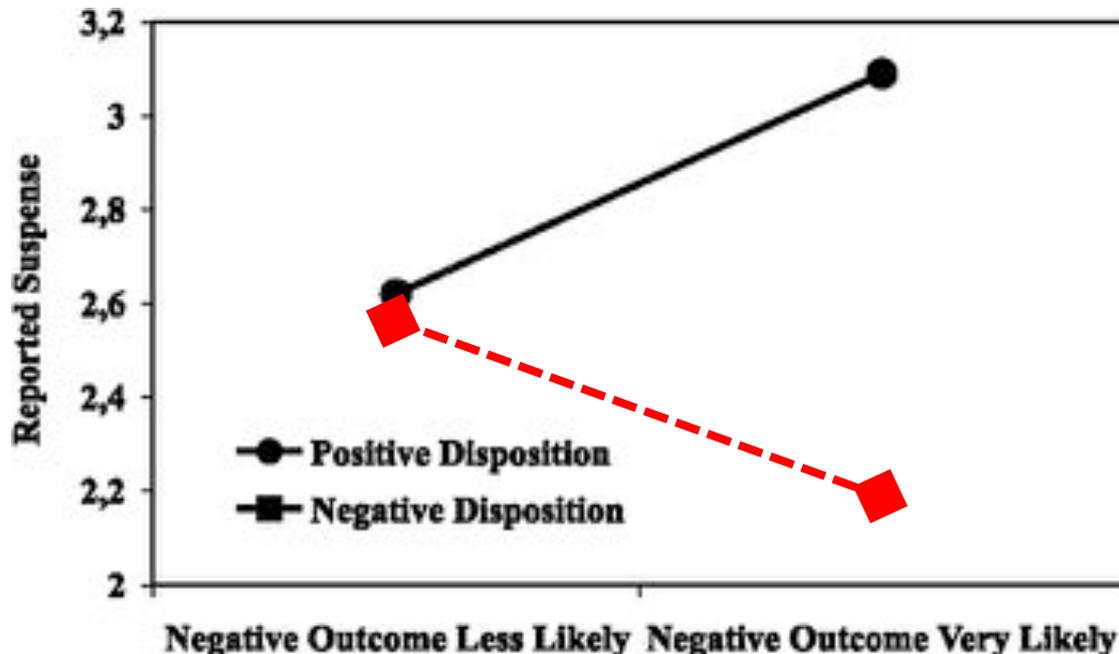
Original graph adjusted by C. McCormack.

That Knoblock-Westerwick and Keplinger's plotted results instead show negative character disposition running *parallel* to positive character disposition indicate that participants in general feared the negative outcome and hoped for a positive outcome for moral *and* immoral protagonists. Based on common moral disposition and moral allegiance claims, one would hardly expect that reading a short news article about someone who sells children or weapons would foster an affection for or affiliation with that leads readers to root for their good fortune. And yet these past immoral behaviours clearly failed to completely kill sympathy and suspense, let alone morally invert rooting so that participants rooted for the immoral protagonists' misfortune as is typically suggested. Nor is Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger's finding an aberration.

Suspense for a disliked protagonist was also present at reduced rates in Jose and Brewer (1984) and Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann (2008). This accords with Hitchcock's claims about character affection's ability to enhance suspense by amplifying our distress.

> The person who is prying need not be a sympathetic figure. The onlooker is still apprehensive. Of course, *if the person prying around is a sympathetic person, then you have double* [the suspense] (cited in Truffaut, Hitchcock & Scott 1962, 27:33, emphasis added).

Hitchcock also made numerous comments about onlookers experiencing more concern for someone they know than someone they do not, and hence the heightened emotional response famous movie stars may generate during suspense scenes (see Hitchcock 1956/2014, p. 223; Late Night Line-Up 1966, 00:42; Samuels 1972; Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 145 & p. 338). Although it may be tempting to take these as support for the existence of Vaage's *partiality*, we must note that this power is clearly limited in its influence upon rooting. Hitchcock does not claim that our familiarity with characters directly sets our rooted-for outcomes, only that it increases our level of hope and fear. As Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger's (2007) graph clearly showed, antipathy towards a character cannot guarantee that audience-members root *against* their good fortune, only that they root *less*.

In making these claims, I am not arguing that viewers do not 'care' about characters or do not openly profess to 'identify' with them. I am not saying that they do not 'like' some characters more than others. I am not even claiming that the moral virtue we might assign a character has no impact on our moral judgment and desired outcomes. My point is that even if it did, this in no way amounts to an argument that, moment-by-moment, we tend to root for outcomes in favour of characters we have pledged some kind of ongoing emotional alliance towards, whether labelled moral allegiance, disposition, side-taking, identification, or another other form of what we might call character attachment. Our 'connection' with or 'feeling' towards a character may certainly be an influence, but it is one influence among many. Attachment does not deserve its reputation as a special psychological state with a powerful ongoing influence upon moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes, as is widely presumed by theorists, practitioners, and industry educators.[90]

Conclusion

In a recent chapter on the challenges facing cognitive media theory, Greg M. Smith wrote, 'One of the distinctive concerns for film cognitivism is the problem of identification/spectatorship: how does the physically "passive" viewer make the imaginative leap to ally himself or herself with the characters they see on screen?' (2014, p. 292). I suggest that this concern also leads to one of the distinct problems for film cognitivism and practice itself — an *a priori* assumption that viewers actually do 'ally' themselves in a way that reliably predicts motivation to root for moment-by-moment narrative outcomes. Whilst *emotional* connection towards characters is remarkably persistent, even in the face of immoral acts as in everyday life, *motivational* connection to goals and outcomes appears utterly fickle and able to begin or end at any moment as

narrative context changes. However, popular cinema helps create the illusion of psychological attachment and sustained favour for specific characters in regards to suspense and side-taking by deliberately encouraging viewers to root for the hero and their goals continually rather than allow their sympathies to bounce around from one side to the other, Whether this conventional (melo)dramatic construction evolved due to its ability to create more intense and enjoyable rooting experiences, or for ideological reasons such as its ability to simplify the world onscreen and imply black and white distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' characters, it has arguably impacted upon our assumptions about audience response and led to the belief that emotional/motivational attachment exists as an actual psychological process. Just as Noël Carroll questioned the supposed causal link between vectorially convergent character and audience *emotion*, we should consider the possibility that any parallel between character and audience *motivation* for goals and outcomes is equally non-causal. And thus, in regards to the origin of our predilections for narrative outcomes during suspense and side-taking, practitioners, theorists, critics, and viewers may have been suffering under an ancient and intuitive assumption that future researchers might one day call 'The Attachment Fallacy'.

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK IN THE MIRROR
THE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE BEHIND 'BASIC' EMOTIONS

Wherein we challenge a fashionable claim within cognitive film theory...

Good evening.

You have no doubt heard the expression 'Take another look in the mirror'. Whether said by an opponent during a heated public debate or by your own wife when you have finished shaving, the implication is that you have seen only what you wanted to see. Taking another look can be an excellent antidote to future error. Consider this mirror beside me. I have recently discovered it to be faulty. The face I see in its reflection is not that of the popular Englishman who has appeared in over twenty-seven Hollywood movies. Having personally sat in the theatre and verified each and every one of these eye-catching performances, I can confidently assure you that the gentleman in this mirror resembles a fat old British bloodhound and bears no similarity whatsoever to Cary Grant. While I send the device back to the store, I suggest you take a closer look at this chapter.

'The represented face has the capacity not only to communicate, but to elicit affects such as mirror responses rooted in affective mimicry, facial feedback, and emotional contagion', writes Carl Plantinga. 'If I mimic a fearful face, it may actually make me fearful or increase my feeling of suspense' (Plantinga 2014a, p. 299 & 1999, p. 244 respectively). Neuroscientist Jeffrey Zacks clearly agrees, noting: 'What is particularly striking is that this seems to work even when you don't particularly like or identify with the character' (2015, p. 7). If Plantinga and Zacks's claims are true, they might help explain many cases of moral inversion of suspense. Indeed, Smith (1995a, p. 106), Hanich (2010, p. 183), and Vaage (2015a, pp. 72-74) have already offered this as a solution to otherwise mysterious moments of suspense that break Carroll's moral framework. As explained earlier, Murray Smith claimed that by 'mirroring Fry's face as he clings to the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur* (1942), we begin to feel the saboteur's fear' (2003, p. 14). This emotion allegedly interferes with our moral evaluation, thereby providing an out-clause for moments of immoral response that would otherwise falsify Smith and Carroll's moral structure of suspense and side-taking. Whether this solution is deemed acceptable, however, depends on where one stands regarding the reputed mechanisms involved.

'Linking faces to emotions may be common sense, but it has turned out to be the single most important idea in the psychology of emotion,' contend psychologists James A. Russell and José-Miguel Fernández-Dols (1997, p. 4). If true, it could provide renewed support for the existence and causal influence of character attachment in rooting for narrative outcomes, offering an overriding-rule that explains its frequent absence and resolves the paradox of partiality. Given how common reference to mirroring and emotional contagion is in cognitive film theory today (see also Bordwell 2007; Grodal 2009; Smith, M 2014b; Tan 2013), many film scholars appear to find the matter all but decided in favour of the universal expression hypothesis and the emotional contagion it purports to explain. Any challenge to these 'evolutionary' claims might even be seen as a throwback to the misguided belief that, as David Bordwell puts it, 'culture goes all the way down' and biology plays no reliable role in our behavior (2011b). But to fail to take another, closer look at these claims is to risk being seduced by another intuitive and ideologically attractive story which overlooks the actual weight of empirical evidence. Although Ed S. Tan (2005) has already investigated some of this territory and concluded (mostly) in favour of universal expression, an abundance of new research over the past decade resulting from the boom in neuroscience warrants another look at the issue. This episode will thus outline what we might call Darwin's dangerous idea about emotion, and the empirical, logistical, and political problems in appealing to hardwired mirroring solutions to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking.

The Face of Fear

'[M]irror reflexes…don't involve appraisals, whereas emotions do necessarily', argues Noël Carroll (2011, p. 179). On this basis, moments of immoral side-taking such as hoping that Bruno's stretching arm reaches the cigarette lighter have been dismissed by Carroll as misinterpretation. Assigning responses to mirroring offers Carroll an out-clause because his appraisals are — as Dan Shaw puts it — 'primarily moral in nature' (Shaw 2016, p. 157). In other words, on Carroll's own definition, immoral sympathy simply cannot exist. While Carroll has relied on this argument to retain his moral structure of suspense, he appears to remain unwilling to concede that mirroring might somehow lead to sympathy for immoral characters and their goals. His cognitive film theory co-founder, David Bordwell, has nevertheless joined Smith (1995a) in this increasingly popular claim:

> Seeing people's facial expressions touches off empathy and emotional contagion, perhaps through mirror neurons. This tendency may explain why we can, momentarily, feel a wisp of empathy for unsympathetic characters. When their expressions show fear, we detect and resonate to that even if we aren't rooting for them to succeed (Bordwell 2007).

I assume here that Bordwell is referring to 'rooting for' in the popular sense, which I have claimed describes an abstract ongoing concern for particular characters that is distinct from the moment-by-moment desire for particular narrative outcomes. If this interpretation is correct, Bordwell seems to be implying that a 'wisp of empathy' can momentarily make us hope for *local* outcomes in favour of 'bad guys' in spite of rooting against them in the popular (global) sense. In other words, the viewer may feel Fry's fear of falling from the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur* (1942) and instantly hope he does not, even though the character is globally unsympathetic and un-sided with in general. Under the common cognitivist view of emotions as leading to 'action tendencies' that encourage pre-packaged behaviour that promotes survival, to 'resonate' Fry's fear implies that the viewer also fears the outcome the character does and may be personally motivated to fear the fall and hope against its occurrence. Thus if Bordwell's claim is that this 'wisp of empathy' often leads to actual hope and fear for narrative *outcomes*, emotional contagion might explain immoral rooting and help Carroll more or less retain his moral theory of suspense and side-taking with the simple addition of this overriding rule.

At first glance, this claim looks promising. Evidence of the importance of faces is apparent in the cinematic convention of the close up, a notable feature of many suspense scenes where characters express overt concern.

As early as 2003, Murray Smith announced to readers of the *Times Literary Supplement*,

> Inspired by Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), there is now a large body of literature on the nature and functions of facial and vocal expression, which discriminates among types of emotion, their degree of cultural variability, their qualities and functions (2003, p. 13).

Smith went on to explain that psychologist Paul Ekman 'provides extensive evidence that a range of basic emotional expressions are easily and quickly recognized cross-culturally (happiness, sadness, disgust, anger, fear and surprise)' (Smith, M 2003, pp. 13-14). Ekman's claims about universal expression, which built upon the work of Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963), famously fused the *facial feedback hypothesis*, a theory which claims that 'proprioceptive feedback from facial expressions is either necessary or sufficient to affect the experience of emotion' (Rives Bogart & Matsumoto 2010, p. 242). In other words, not only do we instantly recognise a small set of so-called 'basic emotions' on other people's faces, but in doing so we also unconsciously mimic them. Following William James' (1890) claims that our emotions *are* our felt bodily sensations, mimicry leads us to actually *feel* the mimicked emotion. This logic informs Smith's argument that the Statue of Liberty

climax of *Saboteur* is 'a striking instance of emotional contagion' (2003, p. 14). And he appears utterly convinced of its truth.
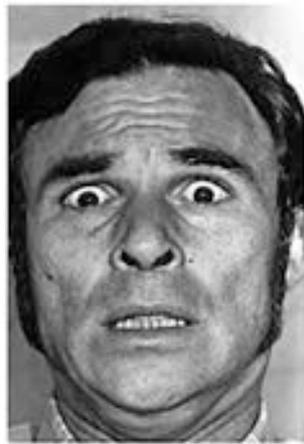
Ekman's Pictures of Facial Affect (Ekman & Friesen 1978) taken from Lawrence, Campbell, and Skuse (2015).

'Contemporary opposition to Darwinian theory', writes Smith, 'can be boiled down to three groups: creationists (of course), humanists (of a certain sort), and many of those on the political Left' (2003, p. 15). However, in terms of opposing reputedly-Darwinian 'basic emotion' claims, Smith has left one important group off his short list: *scientists*. For where Smith embraces Ekman's work as testament to 'the fact that basic emotion expressions are universal' (2003, p. 14), another researcher who has investigated this issue at length, James A. Russell, expresses an entirely different emotion when confronted time and again with the universal expression argument:

> This claim is disheartening…I believe that the claim does not stand up to scrutiny
> (Russell 2012, p. 281).

Russell argues that evidence for the universal expression hypothesis offered by what he calls the 'standard method' of experimental research used by Ekman and his colleagues is highly inflated for at least three reasons.

Firstly, the 'standard method' in the universal expression research uses *posed* expressions, not natural expressions. In a recent review of the literature that extends upon and confirms the findings of Russell's (1994) review, Nelson and Russell (2013) only found two studies that used natural, spontaneous expressions (Ekman 1980; Matsumoto et al. 2009). Both only achieved a mean matching score of approximately 35%, half that of the 70% recognition rate that many standard studies achieve with posed expressions of the kind pictured above. It should also be noted that universal hypothesis advocates, Jonathan Haidt and Dacher Keltner, state that for the theory to hold 'it should elicit very high recognition rates, generally in the 70-90%' (1999, p. 238).

Secondly, frequent *within-subjects* rather than *between-subject*s experimental design means that participants are able to compare different expressions they are presented with. This has been shown to make it easier to form judgments about the 'innate' emotion supposedly expressed in the photos (see Russell 1991). If recognising happiness, sadness, disgust, anger, fear, surprise, and whatever other basic emotion researchers argue are hardwired — and they *do* argue about what is and is not 'basic' — people should not need to compare photos of fear and surprise to accurately detect which is which, particularly in *posed* (that is, *caricatured*) expressions.

Thirdly, the 'standard method' of universal expression research also uses forced-choice questioning, where participants select one emotion from a list. When permitted to select multiple expressions instead of just one definitive answer, participants frequently do. 'In one study [Kayyal & Russell 2012], they selected for each face, on average, four of the eight available emotions', explain Nelson and Russell (2013, p. 12). Other studies, including one conducted by Ekman himself, that have allowed participants to provide their own emotional label for a facial expression rather than choose from a list have resulted in many different labels being assigned to faces (see Haidt & Keltner 1999; Rosenberg & Ekman 1995). And less than one fifth of the studies that confirm the universality thesis include a 'none' option to report that no basic emotion is expressed at all. When Frank and Stennett (2001) added this option, it was selected by 7.8% of participants, who apparently struggled to detect the 'innate' basic emotion being expressed — even with the aid of posed caricatures, comparison across faces, and forced questions.

Across the entire universality thesis literature between 1994 and 2013, even with the aforementioned issues grossly inflating results, Nelson and Russell found that only one emotion reached Haidt and Keltner's 70-90% criterion for universality. This was 'happiness', matched to the predicted expression by 89.6% of participants across languages and cultures. For sadness, anger, fear, and disgust, Western participants reached a mean matching score of 71%, but Haidt and Keltner's *pancultural* stipulation for universality was still not reached because non-Western participants only matched 57% and illiterate non-Westerners 39% (Nelson, NL & Russell 2013, p. 12).

Nelson and Russell also remind readers that psychological experiments not only aim to disconfirm the null hypothesis (i.e. the starting assumption that there is *no* relationship between the measured phenomena, thereby putting the onus on researchers to find 'evidence for'), but also to distinguish it from alternative explanations that may explain the results. Russell (1994) lists eight alternative interpretations that predicted the statistically significant results obtained in universal expression research. Hence reaching 'significance', which is much more readily achieved than Haidt and Keltner's 70%-90% criterion, is no indication of the soundness of Ekman's explanation of his findings.

Although Murray Smith (2003) openly acknowledges the existence of a diverse range of expressions that are shaped by culture and context, he still believes that each of the six (or so) basic emotions have innate facial expressions. 'Evolutionary studies of facial expression', writes Smith, '…give lie to the notion that shots of faces are entirely plastic, and can be molded by contextual shots to suggest any kind of state' (2003, p. 13). This is in reference to the Kuleshov experiment, which purportedly demonstrated that the emotion on an actor's face is read differently depending on whether his gaze is intercut with a bowl of soup, a girl in a coffin, or a reclining woman (see Pudovkin & Montagu 1935, p. 140).[91] Smith claims that the reason Kuleshov's experiment worked is that it utilised a neutral expression that could be 'molded by contextual shots', not one of the basic emotion expressions that are 'plainly and forcefully legible' (2003, p. 13).

But is this true?

What is the human being above feeling? How do we distinguish between anger, pain, grief, or any other experience we might attribute to her? Nelson and Russell (2013) state:

> Evidence does not support the claim that facial expressions are preinterpreted signals for specific basic emotions universally recognized by human beings. But neither are humans clueless when interpreting a face. When asked what emotion a face expresses, humans do not answer randomly; they figure out an answer (2013, p. 13).

In other words, in figuring out what the human being above is feeling, we might first assess the context…

Match point.

The example above from Barrett, Mesquita, and Gendron (2011) highlights how much emotion recognition is influenced by context. Smith might reply that this proves nothing because, 1) Serena Williams is (presumably) expressing 'elation', which is not considered a basic emotion, and 2) Smith does not claim that context has no place in our interpretation of what others are feeling. Rather than argue that her presumed 'happiness' demands that Serena crack a smile, is there an expression both Smith and I might agree upon as 'basic' in order to examine his argument on its own terms?

Smith (2003) presents the above expression as an example of emotion that is 'plainly and forcefully legible' (p. 13). But which emotion? Is this man upset because his mother has died? Or disgusted by what he has witnessed when peering out from behind a pile of potato sacks? Perhaps he is simply straining to hold the weight of the man sitting upon his shoulders, or is rugged up in a blanket shivering with a miserable cold? By removing the context, along with what I took to be all important cues in communicating Fry's 'fear' through cultural convention (highly noticeable beads of sweat on his brow and moisture at the bottom of his eye likely added onset during filming), it is once again difficult to tell. I predict that people who have not seen *Saboteur* (1942) would take several guesses before stumbling across Smith's preferred answer. But in knowing this image and its context so well, is it at all surprising that Smith cannot help but see the face of fear?[92]

One might protest that to Photoshop away the sweat on Fry's brow and the moisture in the corner of his eye from the original face above, as I did with the previous image, is to remove biological cues that are part and parcel of the coordinated bodily state that is basic fear. But this cannot be. Whilst a sweat brow and an exaggerated expression may help communicate what we call fear, it cannot be part of an innate fear expression because it is not always present in everyday states we call fear. 'It is not enough to show that an emotion is associated with any change in the face or body or brain', clarifies Lisa Feldman Barrett of what the basic emotion view must demonstrate. '[T]he changes have to be consistent for and specific to each category, and of a form that can be inherited' (2011, p. 404). Despite the convention, I cannot remember the last time I actually 'broke out in a sweat' when I felt fearful. Can you?

The Basic Problem With Emotion

This leads us to the one big hurdle 'basic emotion' theories face:

> People do not always scowl in anger, heart rate does not always go down in sadness, and people do not always freeze or run in fear. Reviews of the empirical literature have reached this conclusion again and again over the past hundred years (Quigley, Lindquist & Barrett 2014, p. 221).

Basic emotion advocates attempt to deal with this discrepancy by appealing to cultural 'display rules' (see Ekman, Sorenson & Friesen 1969; Matsumoto, Yoo & Fontaine 2008) and other presumed cognitive processes that are able to adjust the innate expression after it has been triggered (see Izard et al. 2000). But this does little to dismiss the fact that, on Wilson–Mendenhall, Barrett, and Barsalou's account (2013), 'Decades of research have revealed substantial variability in the neural, physiological, and behavioral patterns associated with these emotion categories' (2013, p. 1; see also Barrett 2006; Lindquist et al. 2012). Despite seductive stories by researchers like Jaak Panksepp (2005), who posits primitive areas of our mammalian brain which is then cited by cognitive film theorists (see Badt 2015; Grodal & Kramer 2010), no dedicated neural network for any emotion category has been found. On the contrary, brain activity appears across the domain-general network in a variety of ways during emotion elicitation under fMRI scanning (see Touroutoglou et al. 2015, p. 1257; Wilson-Mendenhall, Barrett & Barsalou 2015). Barrett et al. (2007) insist:

> To believe in the existence of architecturally distinct emotion circuits as ''genetically prescribed tools'' (Panksepp, 2007, p. 290) comes close to the sort of preformation theory that Darwin's theory of evolution argued against (for a discussion of the irony of preformation theories in evolutionary biology, see Lewontin, 2000; see also Hodos & Campbell, 1969)...[A] strictly hierarchical view of the brain, such as the triune brain concept adopted by Panksepp, is largely incorrect…The neocortex…is not a crown that sits atop a more ancient and preserved subcortex like icing on an already baked cake (Barrett, LF et al. 2007, pp. 301-302).

More ironic still is Darwin's claim that emotional expressions are automatic was not based on natural selection at all, but on Lamarckian thinking – the evolutionary theory his natural selection sought to challenge (see Cornelius 1996, p. 21; Fridlund 1994, p. 15). This held that characteristics acquired *during* one's own lifetime could be passed down to one's offspring, as opposed to being naturally selected *across* lifetimes.

LAMARCK'S GIRAFFE

Original short-necked ancestor

Keeps stretching neck to reach leaves higher up on tree

and stretching

and stretching until neck becomes progressively longer

Driven by inner "need"
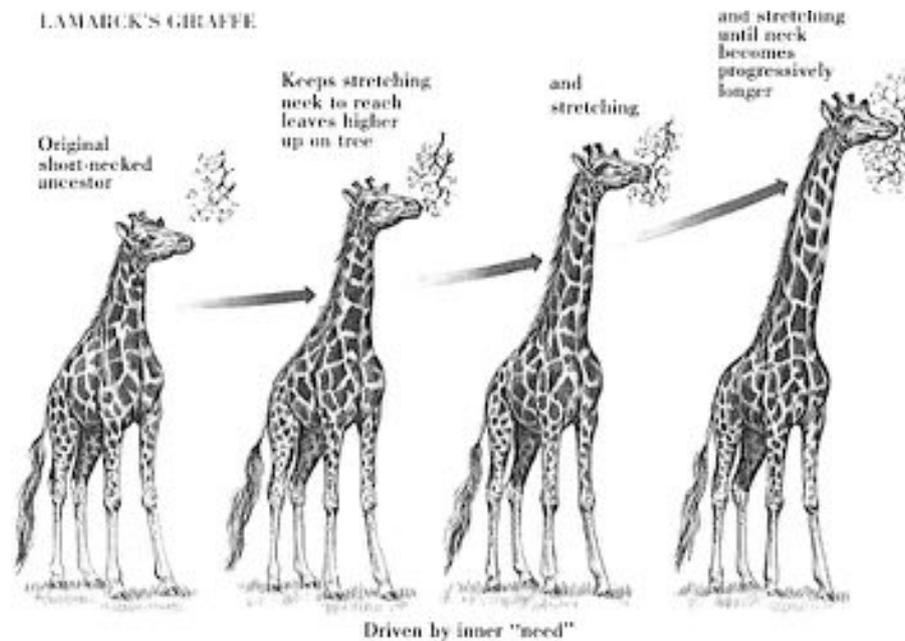
Contrary to popular belief, this example was provided by Charles Lyell ridiculing Lamarck's claims (see Luongo 2010, p. 13).

In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872/2005), Darwin repeatedly claims that emotional expressions are mere vestiges of the past that serve no function in the present (see pp. 25, 27, 30, 32, 39, 46). According to Barrett, the claim that Darwin saw expressions as functional adaptations is 'an example of what Danziger (1997) calls "presentism"–reinterpreting the past so that it comes to look like a catalogue of anticipations of the state of things today' (2011, p. 400). In fact, Floyd Allport (1924) was the first to assume that emotional expression served an *adaptive* function, developing Darwin's ideas (see Barrett, LF 2011, p. 401), which 'cultivated the false assumption that Darwin himself thought of "expressions" as functional' (Gendron & Barrett 2009, p. 331).

Also overlooked is that even Darwin (1872/2005) admits that expressions may be sign of various emotions and that an emotion can be expressed in varying ways (pp. 74-75), contradicting the fundamental basis of the universality thesis in regard to core 'basic' emotions. 'Darwin wrote that humans are active perceivers who do not passively decode expressions', explains Barrett, 'implying that humans might not have preserved, evolved mechanisms for extracting information from expressions' (2011, p. 401).

Not to say there is zero evidence for Plantinga and Zacks's opening claim that our facial muscles subtly respond when witnessing another's facial expression (for evidence, see Niedenthal 2007), however lab studies measuring facial-muscle action find no evidence that the predicted expressions occur during emotional episodes (see Cacioppo et al. 2000; Russell, Bachorowski & Fernández-Dols 2003). And though there is clear evidence that people do report feelings when witness to another's facial expression (see Dimberg

1988), it is also unclear whether the same feeling is produced in the viewer, as predicted by the facial feedback hypothesis. Although Dimberg (1988) found increased activity in the appropriate facial muscles predicted by pictures of smiling and scowling faces, participants reported feeling higher levels of *fear* at the scowling 'angry' face and happiness at the smiling 'happy' face.

Nevertheless, as one of the final examiner's of this thesis, Professor Richard J. Gerrig, shrewdly noted, even if universal expression is a myth and correct response is not guaranteed there is still the possibility that emotional contagion impacts our rooting responses at the movies. Gerrig writes:

> I am not convinced that the lack of universality dooms the idea of emotional contagion...Filmmakers don't need to count on universality if emotional expressions are standard for their intended audiences...Moveover, there are reasons to believe that, even if the responses are not innate, they may become "embrained" (Kitayama & Uskul 2011)...in a way that would allow for emotional contagion (Examiner's Report, November 11 2016).

My response to this suggestion is wholehearted agreement. I fully accept what we call 'emotional contagion' exists and that it may regularly occur in the cinema. I also agree that Gerrig is right that universal expression is not necessary for this process. And I am even willing to accept that, as Kitayama & Uskul (2011) put it, —

> [T]he brain serves as a crucial site that accumulates effects of cultural experience, insofar as neural connectivity is likely modified through sustained engagement in cultural practices. Thus, culture is "embrained," and moreover, this process requires no cognitive mediation (p. 419).

However, if this embraining process were capable of creating some kind of neural pathway between a culturally relative expression and an emotion (whether innate or otherwise), we are still faced with the problem that the weight of evidence suggests there is not any pre-existing emotional state to link to. For emotional contagion to have a reliable influence on the narrative outcomes that viewers root for during suspense, we must assume an 'action tendency' or 'affect program' of some sort that leads to consistent behaviour. And thus, if we follow Russell and Barrett's claim that basic emotion is a myth, the standard explanation for emotional contagion — wherein we mimic a universal expression that feeds back bodily information to create the emotion that unleashes the affect program and encourages particular behaviour — simply *cannot be true*.

One might protest that, in claiming that the 'action tendency' or 'action program' view of emotions demands specific behavioural outcomes, I am distorting the picture. Or that I am ignoring the undeniable fact some that emotions do lead to reliable motivation. Cognitive film theorists, for instance, often stress the benefit that coordinated emotion networks could naturally bring our species. And their prime example is *fear* (see Bordwell 2008, p. 51; Carroll 2010, pp. 2-3; Grodal 2009, p. 148; Hogan 2010; 2014, p. 199; Plantinga

2014b, p. 148; Tan 2014, p. 107; Young 2012, pp. 108-109; Zacks 2015, p. 75; Zillmann 2007, pp. 165-166).

'Whether it's a wild animal or a car suddenly bearing down on us, it is mighty handy that we have an instinctive fear reaction to unexpected loud noises and fast movements', explains Murray Smith (2003, p. 14). Joseph LeDoux's *The Emotional Brain* (1996), which discusses evolved nonconscious 'fear' mechanisms, is then typically cited as irrefutable evidence of a hardwired fear reaction. Considering both the quality and quantity of LeDoux's experimental research on humans and rats with a damaged or severed amygdala — an area of the brain since referred to as 'the seat of fear' by countless articles citing LeDoux's work — Smith and the cognitivists above might appear to have solid example of a discrete emotion with a reliable outcome that gives lie to my entire argument. LeDoux's research not only demonstrates that rapid 'low road' responses triggered by the amygdala bypass conscious appraisal, hence we often cannot help but startle when something leaps out at us, but also that there is flexibility in such 'fear reactions'. That is, the freeze-flight responses to danger that his research has demonstrated also suggest that emotional behaviour need not be singular. The triggered action here (freezing or fleeing) varies, which seems doubly damaging to my position. Given the apparent link between fear and suspense, all my foot stomping against the existence of basic emotions like fear might seem downright deluded. There is, however, one small problem with this thinking: LeDoux's research is not actually about fear.

In August 2015, LeDoux penned an online article for *Psychology Today* (and republished on *The Huffington Post*) in a bid to dispel a persistent misunderstanding about his work.

> [T]here is no fear center out of which effuses the feeling of being afraid. "Fear" is, in my view, better thought of as a cognitively assembled *conscious* experience that is related to threat processing, but that should not be confused with the *non-conscious* processes that detect and control responses to threats [which the amygdala research actually investigated] (LeDoux 2015, emphasis added).

When LeDoux started out doing his research, he assumed it was possible to use the term 'fear system' whilst continually assuring readers that he was really referring to survival circuits — hard-wired *nonconscious* mechanisms that control defensive responses like freezing and physiological changes under threat (see 2012, 2014b; Nair 2014). He has now conceded that this strategy was misguided.

> When one hears the word "fear," the pull of the vernacular meaning is so strong that the mind is compelled to think of the feeling of being afraid. For this reason, I eventually concluded that it is not helpful to talk about conscious and non-conscious aspects of fear. A feeling like "fear" is a conscious experience. To use the word "fear" in any other way only leads to confusion (LeDoux 2015).

The fear viewers speak of in the cinema is of the conscious kind. Whilst nonconscious survival mechanisms may be an ingredient in its making, it is not a necessary component, which is why people with amygdala damage can still report feeling fear (LeDoux 2015). The rooting behaviour of those who *feel* scared in the cinema therefore cannot be explained with direct reference to LeDoux's groundbreaking research because the motivation to freeze or flee, for instance, does not arise from the *felt* emotion 'fear'. In a recent academic paper, LeDoux made his position in the debate over discrete emotions with distinct behavioural outcomes clear.

> [T]heorists assume that some emotional feelings are innately wired in brain circuits and others are psychologically or socially determined (61 [Panksepp], 159 [Damasio], 166 [Ekman], 167 [Izard]). *I do not think of emotions in this dualistic way, where fear is a bottom-up state that is unleashed in a prepackaged pure form of experience stored in a hardwired subcortical circuit, and other feelings are cognitively constructed…*In my view, the feeling of fear occurs in the same way as the feeling of compassion or pride—through cognitive processing of neural raw materials. …Barrett has expressed a related view (LeDoux 2014a, p. 2876; emphasis added).

Given Smith's opening remarks about '[c]ontemporary opposition to Darwinian theory', I must stress that this is not an anti-Darwinist argument in the evolutionary sense. Barrett, Russell, and their constructivist colleagues openly view emotions as *adaptive*; they simply point out that the weight of evidence does not support the claim that a small set of emotions is *hardwired*. The assumption that those emotions must be hardwired implies that non-basic emotions serve no adaptive function. But the ability to emotionally integrate and relate to conspecifics is clearly highly beneficial to the survival of a social animal. Mesquita, Boiger and De Leersnyder (2016) argue that substantial evidence from anthropology and psychology suggests that emotion is a construction that helps people assimilate effectively into their cultural environment. But if Barrett (2017a) is right that 'emotion categories don't have distinct, dedicated neural essences' (p. 13) to which Gerrig's 'embraining' process might connect culturally relative expressions, we must consider the possibility that emotional contagion is the result of another well-established psychological process that Gerrig has attempted to highlight during narrative reception.

'[S]ome subset of the emotional responses to fictions could also be explained as conditioned responses', wrote Gerrig in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (1993, p. 187). Soviet director, Sergei Eisenstein, who worked at the height of Pavlovian conditioning in late 1920s and 1930s USSR, also viewed emotional responses to the cinema as potentially learned reflexes (cited in Bordwell 2013, pp. 34-35). Following this suggestion, seeing faces onscreen or off might simply evoke affective memories that are 'learned' associations, the same way smells, sounds, tastes, places, and tunes do in us every day.

Cognitive scientist, Larry Barsalou, claims that we interact with the world through an ongoing series of *situated conceptualizations* 'allowing a person to interpret what is going on in a situation, and to produce relevant cognitive affective, and bodily processes, and importantly, behavior' (Papies & Barsalou 2015, p. 40). These, he argues, are stored in memory. When we perceive something that appears to fit with a stored situated conceptualization, other elements of that conceptualization may be reactivated via '*pattern completion inferences*' (Papies & Barsalou 2015, p. 38; emphasis in original). To take the movie cliché, a sudden bang in the corner of the café I am sitting in might make me have a flashback to my tour of duty in Vietnam. But Barsalou argues the same thing applies to potato chips. If I enjoyed eating a packet while watching a movie with my friends last month, seeing another packet on the supermarket shelf this afternoon may recall the fun had that night and incite a desire to eat them again more (p. 4). Even words are enough to encourage us to recall thoughts and feelings that can incite a desire to eat (see Papies 2013) or otherwise, as illustrated by the advice in a 1775 book of Korean dining etiquette, *Sasojeol* (士小節, *Elementary Etiquette for Scholar Families*):

> [W]hen you are having a meal with others, do not speak of smelly or dirty things, such as boils or diarrhea…Even when the food is bad, do not compare it to urine, pus, or body dirt (cited in De Bary 2008, p. 398).

The International Affective Picture System, a series of images designed to induce emotion in the lab, have also been used by psychologists for years (see Lang, Bradley & Cuthbert 1997; Lang, Ohman & Vaitl 1988). Moreover, images from this database are not easily found on the Internet precisely to protect the stimulus images from pre-existing association that might contaminate data during experimental use.

Negative, neutral, and positive images (left to right) from the lesser known Nencki Affective Picture System (NAPS). Image sample taken from Marchewka et al. (2014).

The idea that the associations arising as we encounter the world can lead to feelings is capable of explaining many mysteries. There is no paradox of emotion — the mystery of responding to events we know are untrue — if we do not view emotion as a hardwired, predetermined event that demands we automatically (at least begin to) flee the cinema to avoid the green slime approaching onscreen (see Walton 1978). Even the paradox of suspense — the fact that we can re-experience suspense though we have seen the movie over and over before and know perfectly well the heroine will not be swallowed by the slime — might be illuminated by Barsalou's basic idea because anything can potentially create an emotion. Smith and Carroll have already argued that mere thought of either a) gripping the blade of a sharp knife and having it ripped out of your hand (Smith, M 1995b, p. 118), or b) a hand being caught in the gears of some machine and mangled (Carroll 1990, p. 78), can induce emotion.[93] Thus it is hardly a stretch to suggest that faces might too. And if Smith, Plantinga, and Zacks do concede that photos of faces in Affective Picture System databases that are not expressing so-called 'basic emotions' are capable of instilling an emotion in an observer via association, they must explain why the same explanation might not also apply to the basic emotion poses used by Ekman?

For example, an appeal to basic emotion is not the only explanation for the lump in my throat when I watch a clip of actress Bryce Dallas Howard (Ron Howard's daughter) *make* herself cry on cue for fun on the American talk show, *Conan* (see Bell 2015). Just as Harry Wallop (2014) reported about his weeping uncontrollably at the climax of *The Notebook* (2004), simply seeing Howard tear up during her party trick might encourage affective memory in me to rise up which I then struggle to short circuit without distracting myself via another action or thought.[94]

There is no particular need to claim that knowledge of these expressions is hardwired. If any expression can potentially cause an affective association drawn dynamically from our

extensive memory, this would seem a more parsimonious explanation than fusing a facial feedback hypothesis on top to claim the existence of innate emotional expression.

> If a person's face mirrors the facial expression of another agent, the previously established *correlation* between the somatosensory experience and the *associated* affect produce the affect. As a result, the perceiver adopts the same affective state as the agent (Barsalou, Breazeal & Smith 2007, p. 84, emphasis added).

The difference between universal expression and learned association accounts may seem minor in Barsalou et al.'s above quote, for it also appeals to facial feedback. The difference, however, is deeply significant. The universal expression hypothesis remains reductive in its interpretation of viewers' feelings, proposing a distinct emotional effect to a facial expression onscreen. It is also potentially ideologically attractive to argue for the supposed danger of select expressions in select movies made for select audiences, for it is thought to *guarantee* a particular emotional/motivational outcome that might be put to 'dangerous' use. In contrast, Barsalou's position emphasises the influence that personal and shared memory play in our emotional response to movies, thereby discouraging simplistic effects claims based on innate response patterns whilst also highlighting the complex involvement of personal difference and culture.

But perhaps my critique so far has focused too much on the face? After all, cognitive film theorists also stress the embodied nature of emotion and cognition. Furthermore, they are increasingly appealing to a large pool of empirical research that many believe grants further credibility to the idea of emotional contagion (i.e. direct recognition and replication of *character* emotion as distinct from mere *personal* association and pattern completion).

The Mirror Has Two Faces

One of the most significant scientific discoveries in the past thirty years has been the accidental discovery of motor neurons in the brain of macaque monkeys that 'fire' not only when motor action such as reaching for a banana is *performed*, but also when this motor action is *witnessed* (Di Pellegrino et al. 1992; Gallese et al. 1996).

Illustration taken from Simonetti (2014).

Dubbed 'mirror neurons' by these University of Parma researchers, this finding soon captured the scientific and popular imagination, promising to unlock the secret to our intuitive understanding of other beings, our ability to empathise, and many other unsolved mysteries (see Blakeslee 2006; Ramachandran 2000).[95] And they have recently captured the imagination of cognitive film theorists, who note the relevance these neurons may have on our ability to understand and emotionally respond to others onscreen.

'Visual narratives are made possible by the working of mirror neurons…', writes Carl Plantinga. 'Brain processes involving mirror neurons enable us to understand faces and bodies in action and link us to other people's activities and feelings…In part, this accounts for the affective power of the audiovisual media' (2013, p. 101). Though Bordwell (2007) and Carroll (2011) have exercised restraint when raising mirror neurons as a potential explanation for emotional contagion, other cognitive film theorists have freely taken mirror neurons to provide empirical support for, or explanation of, the reality of direct emotional resonance. Torben Grodal (2009) is most explicit in this regard, claiming that 'mirror neurons linked to facial expressions…explains the emotional contagion emanating from close-ups' (p. 67 & p. 187). Vaage (2010, 2014) and Murray Smith (2014b) are equally enthusiastic, if less willing to make such a definitive claim.

Although Smith notes that 'research on mirror neurons in humans is still at an early (and in many ways controversial) stage' (2014b, p. 37), he does not hint at what this controversy might involve, instead going on to emphasise that 'the key point about mirror neurons, and the sensory, motor, and affective mimicry that they implement and enable, is that…they *"wire" us into each other*' (p. 38, emphasis in original). However, Smith's relative confidence in 'mirror neuron' research is potentially as problematic as that of his belief in 'basic emotion', and other cognitivists should not be so eager to utilise these claims without casting another critical eye over them.

Psychologist Christian Jarrett recently described mirror neurons as 'perhaps the most hyped concept in neuroscience' (2015, p. 154). Elsewhere, Jarrett explains:

> The exaggerated and oversimplified story about mirror neurons has been swallowed whole by the media and much of the public…For instance, the [Daily Mail] paper ran an article earlier this year [2013] that claimed the most popular romantic films are distinguished by the fact that they activate our mirror neurons. Another claimed that it's thanks to mirror neurons that hospital patients benefit from having visitors. In fact, there is no scientific research that directly backs either of these claims, both of which represent reductionism gone mad (Jarrett 2013).

This over-enthusiasm for mirror neurons exploded when Vittorio Gallese and Alvin Goldman's highly influential (and highly speculative) collaboration, 'Mirror neurons and the simulation theory of mind-reading' (Gallese & Goldman 1998), merged with Tania

Singer's experimental finding that pain felt *directly* oneself and pain felt *empathically* for another person exhibited overlapping neural activation (Singer et al. 2004). Goldman was a philosopher and Gallese had been influenced by phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Husserl (see Wojciehowski 2011). As empathy researchers Claus Lamm and Jasminka Majdandžić (2015) explain, researchers rushed to connect these two distinct findings — i.e. motor neurons that fire when watching others perform an action *and* neural activity overlapping during self-experienced pain and witnessed pain in others — with little evidence. The assumption that mirror neurons *enable* empathy and that human beings are hard-wired to resonate the emotions of those around them, although seductive, is problematic. '[O]n the one hand, it lacks empirical support or even contradicts it…', point out Lamm and Majdandžić (2015). '[O]n the other, it has broad but misleading implications for our general understanding of empathy' (p. 19). The reason this view is *misleading* is because, as raised in the previous episode, automatic embodied empathy is often incorrectly assumed to be a reliable route to altruistic behavior. The reason this view *lacks empirical support* is that it is simply not clear if mirror neurons are responsible for this neural overlap and, even if they are, whether their function is as Gallese and Goldman (1998) speculated.

A recent review of the literature found that whilst over eight hundred papers had been published on mirror neurons since 1992, most of these referred to a mere twenty-five papers that reported hard evidence of the direct recording of mirror neuron activity in macaque monkeys (Kilner & Lemon 2013). Despite the remainder of the eight hundred plus papers focusing instead on experiments with *human* participants, these studies did not actually record mirror neurons.

Rather than insert electrodes into human heads to do so, both painful and ethically problematic, these hundred of studies took advantage of newly available techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which measures oxygen use in the brain. Unfortunately, in stark contrast to single neuron recording, imaged areas contain hundreds and thousands of neurons (Gopnik 2009). This is one reason why research instead refers to the human 'mirror neuron system'. Whilst fMRI and other equally 'indirect and imprecise measures' provided evidence that was consistent with the potential existence of mirror neurons in humans, it was (and is by its very nature) ultimately inconclusive (Lamm & Majdandžić 2015, p. 19; see also Kilner & Lemon 2013, p. 1060).

Direct evidence of human neurons with 'mirroring' properties was finally offered in a single study of twenty-one epileptic patients in 2010, made possible because participants were already implanted with electrodes to determine the location of future surgery to prevent ongoing seizures (Mukamel et al. 2010). Importantly, however, this study found mirror

neurons not only in the typical motor areas as seen in macaque monkeys, but also in other non-motor areas of the human brain. Therefore we still need to be careful in applying claims from mirror neuron function in macaques (which reside in motor areas) to humans in order to inform our scientific understanding of empathy and mirrored emotion. The issue is not whether humans mirror and mimic, or even whether they have neurons that appear to fire when performing an action and witnessing another perform the same action. The issue is determining what is actually happening during this process and how to interpret the data. It is far from clear-cut in its support of the hardwired action-understanding interpretation pushed by the Parma group and popular understanding.

Consider that although human mirror neuron systems failed to fire when witnessing a dog bark (Buccino et al. 2004), as the action does not map to the human body, participants still presumably 'understood' the action, thus rendering the claim that mirror neurons enable understanding of others suspect. Even more problematically, mirror neurons reputedly for recognising 'grasping' appear to fire in macaques *before* the monkeys witness a hand touching the object to be grasped, not *after* as one might reasonably expect given the possibility of false starts and non-meaningful action if the purpose of these neurons were truly action *understanding* (see Gallese et al. 1996). Human expertise in specific movements such as dancing and piano playing has also revealed increased activity in the mirror neuron system when witnessing such action (Calvo-Merino et al. 2005; Haslinger et al. 2005), suggesting the involvement of learning and memory rather than innate patterns. An experiment demonstrating that macaques could learn to perform novel actions with tools, thereby causing neurons to fire when witnessing another perform the now-familiar action (Ferrari, Rozzi & Fogassi 2005), also supports this point.

All this has led some theorists to criticise the Parma groups' action-understanding hypothesis (see Borg 2013; Cook, R & Bird 2013; Gallagher 2007; Hickok 2009, 2014; Hickok & Hauser 2010; Hutto 2013; Jacob 2008; Saxe 2005; Uithol et al. 2011). The Parma Group has responded that much of this criticism is unwarranted because they did not claim that action understanding is *dependent* upon mirror neurons, is the only path to action understanding, cannot also involve learning, and so on (see Keysers 2015; Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia & Hickok 2015; Sinigaglia 2013a, 2013b). Most mirror neuron advocates now concede that understanding based purely upon visual analysis of movement is possible, but that mirror neurons add an extra layer of understanding to observed actions (see Rizzolatti & Craighero 2004, p. 172; Rizzolatti, Fogassi & Gallese 2001, p. 666). The problem is that, given this concession, it is not exactly clear what mirror neurons add to our understanding of others. Arguably it is very little in comparison to the grand claims continually made of mirror neurons in popular media and cognitive film

theory. Some critics have therefore proposed alternative interpretations that they feel better fits existing mirror neuron data.

According to Gergely Csibra (2008), mirror neurons are the result of action *prediction*, not action understanding, which would explain why they fire in the macaque brain *before* grasping is witnessed. Pierre Jacob (2009) agrees that 'evidence shows that, far from generating it, MN [Mirror Neuron] activity (or action-mirroring) might reflect or derive *from* action-understanding' (p. 234, emphasis added). And Cecelia Heyes claims that mirror neurons are simply standard motor neurons that build up connections to visual neurons via associative learning (Heyes 2010; see also Hickok 2015). Heyes has demonstrated that human participants can be quickly taught to build up 'counter-mirror' neurons by learning novel associations that are initially counterintuitive (see Catmur et al. 2008; Catmur, Walsh & Heyes 2007). Her 'associative hypothesis' also neatly explains the aforementioned evidence that human expertise in dancing and piano playing influences mirror neuron system activity when witnessing such expert actions, and that macaque mirror neurons respond to novel actions involving tools that they have learned to perform.

This interpretation resonates in Larry Barsalou's own account of mirror neurons and mimicry. 'Mirroring is a special case of a basic cognitive process common across species, namely, Pattern Completion Inferences within Situated Conceptualizations (PCIwSC)', argues Barsalou (2013, p. 2951). In other words, when making sense of witnessed actions, learned associations can lead to the retrieval of multimodal representations that directly produce perceptions, movements, and feelings. As a proponent of 'grounded cognition', a moderate form of embodiment (see Barsalou 2008; Prinz & Barsalou 2014), Barsalou claims that internal representations which more radical embodiment theorists wish to dispense with can hold multimodal information that includes *perceptual*, *motor* and *introspective* bodily states (Barsalou 2009). Where mirroring traditionally appeals to shoe-wearing claims about projecting ourselves into someone's shoes and then 'rationally' (if nonconsciously) moving and/or feeling *as if*, Barsalou need not add this cognitively intensive extra step. Merely focusing on a solitary bouncing football without the presence of a player present may make us gesture as if to grab it because we have automatically retrieved and/or pattern completed a *motor* memory associated with such a situation.[96]

Film neuroscientist Jeffrey Zacks dubs this kind of urge 'the success rule'.

> The success rule says that if you experience a stimulus, make a particular response to it, and things work out, then next time you experience that stimulus you should be more prone to making the same response…The success rule builds up habits that drive our behavior. When we go to the movies we cannot just turn these habits off (Zacks 2015, pp. 10-11).

Zacks links the rule (more formally known in psychology as operant conditioning) to situations where one needs to think fast, such as ducking in the cinema as an object looms or having the urge to call out warnings to unaware characters. But, following Barsalou, the same idea could easily apply to any gesture we make upon perceiving a situation. When we see something, we may often automatically find our bodies faintly echoing what has worked for us in that instance before. Where Barsalou dispenses with basic emotion claims, however, Zacks (2015) retains them. Given Barsalou's broader version of Zacks' essential idea about responding according to associated memory, which *includes* affective feeling, Zack's appeal to a separate 'mirror rule' (with the usual reference to mirror neurons) in order to explain our mimicking actions and emotions onscreen is arguably unnecessary (see Zacks 2015, p. 9). Viewers may simply be responding to circumstances using Zacks' learned 'success rule', automatically performing motor actions or even expressions that have been associated with success in similar situations before. Any apparent mirroring of the characters onscreen might therefore be coincidental. Alternatively, such behaviour may be nonconsciously *communicative* (rather than contagiously *reflective*) as per previously cited claims by Bavelas et al. (1987) and Lakin et al. (2003).

If mimicry is 'the social glue that binds and bonds humans together' (Chartrand, Maddux & Lakin 2005, p. 357)[97] or if we enact automatic responses (including facial expressions) that we have during similar circumstances in the past (Barsalou 2013; Zacks 2015, pp. 10-11), either claim could explain Plantinga's apparent *mimicry* of a fearful face. Furthermore, any felt *emotional* response might simply result from the mere association made when witnessing and/or mimicking the face in question.[98] Against this, Plantinga has argued that affective memory traces and learned association are usually 'intensifiers or enablers of emotions' rather than their source (2009, pp. 75-76). However, in light of Barsalou's claim that we navigate our entire existence through ongoing situated conceptualizations, and Heyes' evidence that mirror neurons can be formed or altered through associated learning, Plantinga may take far too narrow a view of the potential meaning of memory and conditioning (see, for example, 'emotional memory' in Hogan 2003, p. 62; LeDoux 1996, p. 182).

'The contagion model of emotional propagation has almost become a dogma in cognitive science', write Dezecache, Jacob, and Grèzes (2015). But we need to distinguish between arguments for the *existence* of what we call emotional contagion and mirroring and the *explanation* we give for these phenomena. Though Plantinga's opening observation that mimicking the face of fear can actually result in fear or enhance suspense may be perfectly valid (1999, p. 244), it may not occur for the reason he, Smith,

or Zacks presumes. The proprioceptive feedback to which the universal expression hypothesis appeals does not demand the existence of basic emotions hardwired in the brain in order to influence our own emotions in the cinema.

Making the same face as the fearful person onscreen is a commonly observed phenomenon, but may result from nonconscious mechanisms designed to communicate and integrate with others (see Bourgeois & Hess 2008; Grèzes et al. 2013). And this mimicking *behaviour*, which itself may be a learned/conditioned response, appears capable of leading to pattern completion which retrieves the actual *feeling* of what we commonly call 'fear' from multimodal memory when sensing cultural symbols of this emotional experience. Thus emotional contagion might be best thought of as 'conceptual contagion' or 'shared situated conceptualization', wherein we interpret affect in a particular situation in a similar way as someone else. In personal correspondence on January 24th, 2017 Lisa Feldman Barrett agreed, writing:

> At face value, "emotional contagion" is a bit of a misnomer. It is affect that is contagious, not emotion. The prosody of a voice can directly affect the nervous system of a listener without any interpretation (just the sounds alone can do it), and these interoceptive changes are felt as affect...But interoceptive changes are categorized using concepts (i.e., a cascade of predictions, in predictive coding, is the same as an ad hoc concept). So this means that "emotion contagion" in the broader sense also includes learned associations from the past, as you suggest, AND what I would call conceptual synchrony (which is akin to what you have called conceptual contagion). Even without "embraining," a brain automatically uses conceptual combination to make sense of expected sensory inputs (including the interoceptive inputs from the body) during the prediction process.

Basic emotion advocates might wish to counter that conceptualizing is just a form of nonconscious appraisal. The difference, however, is that whereas appraisal theories of emotion typically view the *meaning* of a situation as cognitively appraised (though see Clore & Ortony 2008, which aligns with Barrett's thinking), the constructed theory of emotion not only constructs for meaning, but also for appropriate *action* in response. That is, whereas classical appraisal theories argue that if bear in the woods is construed as a threat, this automatically triggers flight (or freezing) via an action program or action tendency we might call 'fear', the constructed theory of emotion argues that it could just as well lead someone to cover their eyes and mumble a safety word over and over. The fact that there appears to be much common response to the bear is no evidence that this response is triggered or that it will necessarily align with approach and avoid patterns. 'Emotions are constructions of the world, not reactions to it', argues Barrett (2017a, p. 16). Just as our appraisals are not innate, neither are our actions in response to these appraisals. There are no situations waiting to trigger discrete adaptive behaviour, save

perhaps LeDoux's limited survival mechanisms — the effects of which we might expect to undergo cognitive appraisal during rooting computations.

Hence the fear we feel when seeing a terrified face onscreen need not be an innate emotion triggered in reverse by mimicking a supposed universal expression. It may simply be that the expression we make when recognising the cultural face of fear, the narrative and participatory context, and the cinematic conventions that go with these situations ensure that a fearful situation is 'on our mind', so to speak, and leads to felt associations we categorise as 'fear'. The same reasoning may apply to mirroring actions, which need not be a sign of emotional shoe-wearing, particularly if 'there are no emotion-specific neurons' (Barrett 2017a, p. 13), simply a trace of the onlooker's own learned response to stimuli. These alternative explanations for emotional contagion and mimicry have major implications for Carroll and Zillmann's moral theory of suspense and Vaage and Raney's moral bias account of immoral side-taking. It suggests that some emotional responses may be unbound by *morality* or *partiality*, the result of recalled personal history, learning, and amoral/impartial association rather than shoe-wearing with select characters.

One may now begin to sense why James A. Russell was so disheartened when confronted time and again with the universal expression argument. 'At a minimum, the surrounding controversy should be cited', insists Russell (2012, p. 281).[99] Although reviews of the literature have regularly concluded that there is no clear biological or behavioral evidence for the existence of discrete emotional states that basic emotion or mirror neuron theory might reliably tap into (see Hunt 1941, Mandler 1975, Ortony & Turner 1990, Russell 2003, Barrett 2006), psychologists 'continue to characterize emotion as a special mental event involving integrated changes in feeling, behavior, and physiology' (Gendron & Barrett 2009, p. 334). The 'controversy' that Russell insists should be cited is more than a simple disagreement over our ability to recognise emotion on the face of others or to even then feel it ourselves via nonconscious mimicry and proprioceptive feedback. It is a dispute over what we believe emotion to be, and this has serious consequences for our private attitudes and public policies in the realm of medicine, education, law, aesthetics and media effects (see Barrett, LF 2016, 2017b; Barrett, LF & Russell 2015; Leys 2010). Thus whilst Gerrig is correct in noting that 'filmmakers don't need to count on universality if emotional expressions are standard for their intended audiences' , there is more at stake in the debate over universality. The account we give of how emotional contagion is achieved not only influences craft education around optimal acting, filming, and editing maneuvers that might encourage particular emotional responses and subsequent predilections for narrative outcomes. It also impacts upon issues far outside the cinema.

One reason Russell, Barrett, Barsalou, and other critics willing to contest the scientific credibility of basic emotion claims (see also Fridlund 1994; Mead 1975)[100] may be fighting an uphill battle is that their view 'introduces a degree of complexity and uncertainty that contrasts to its disadvantage with the reassuring idea that the truth of our emotions is bound to reveal itself' (Leys 2010, p. 89). The idea of basic emotion is intuitive and ideologically attractive in its potential to bolster one's simplistic attitudes towards Others. In a similar vein, the common view of emotional contagion has long been entwined with fear of the masses (see Le Bon 1897), an attitude heavily influenced by assumptions about social class, primitive minds, and passion versus reason. And mirror neuron theory arguably represent the latest in these attractive claims, allowing theorists to frame autism as a case of 'broken mirrors' (see Ramachandran & Oberman 2006; Rizzolatti & Fabbri-Destro 2010; Rizzolatti, Fogassi & Gallese 2006) with little regard for a lack of evidence (see Hamilton 2013) and the real-world consequences in social policy and attitude that emerges from such scientific speculation. Mirror neuron theory may impact upon many more people, as Morton Anne Gernsbacher points out:

> Attributions of MN [Mirror Neuron] efficiency and deficiency have been levied against other minority phenotypes, including persons who are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex (Ponseti et al., 2006), persons who stutter (Saltuklaroglu & Kalinowki, 2005), and persons who smoke cigarettes (Pineda & Oberman, 2006) (cited in Gallese et al. 2011, p. 387).

For these reasons, I contend that cognitive film theorists should recognise not only the potential danger of appealing to 'mesmerising' mirror neurons claims (Heyes 2010) and popular explanations of emotional contagion, but also 'the tension between a belief in discrete emotions with stereotyped outputs and the very real and tremendously large variability in responses that are actually observed' (Gendron & Barrett 2009, p. 331).

Conclusion

If emotion constructivists such as Barrett and Russell are to be believed, Murray Smith's claim that 'facial *expressions* of emotion…[are] visible, physiological manifestations of inner states' (2003, p. 14, emphasis in original) and Jeffrey Zacks's talk of 'an integrated emotion program including emotion-specific brain circuits' (2015, p. 76) is misguided. Casting a critical eye over empirical evidence for the facial feedback hypothesis's proposal that discrete emotion pathways exist, providing reliable pancultural expressions for a small set of so-called 'basic emotions', reveals that this claim is more poorly supported than adherents acknowledge. Equally so is the growing belief that mirror neurons put us in another's shoes or duplicate their affective feeling. Although there is clear evidence for neurons that fire during self-performed action and during observation of

others performing that same action, how to interpret this data is far from clear. Alternative models that view mirror neurons not as hardwired but as the result of associated learning arguably better account for the current evidence. Given the easy and highly 'usable', ideologically attractive answers that hardwired emotion, universal expression, and mirror neurons offer, cognitive film theorists should tread carefully. Retaining a healthy dose of skepticism and recognising that there are influences beyond the inherent reasonableness of theories such as the basic emotion hypothesis and mirror neurons that may encourage their acceptance is paramount. As with Vaage and Raney's moral heuristics and error solution to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, I believe there are other answers that are logically, empirically and ethically superior to facial feedback, simulation, and mirror neurons. I shall attempt to outline four of these in the following, final episode.

"THE MOVIES MADE ME DO IT!"
THE BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS OF IMMORAL SUSPENSE & SIDE-TAKING

Wherein we attempt to explain how movies make me root for 'evil' outcomes...

Good evening.

Before you jump to any conclusions, I wish to assure you that I have not stooped to murder. As a matter of fact, I am here in this graveyard to perform a very important public service. The hole I am about to prepare will house the lead box in which this thesis will be laid to rest, safely buried alongside thousands of other academic efforts that also amounted to nothing. Health regulations demand a depth of ten feet to minimise the threat of the offending material resurfacing, so if you don't mind, I'll start digging while you start reading this final episode. As I'm sure you agree, the document deserves a fitting end.

Safely seated in the cinema, mere witnesses to onscreen troubles and triumphs, audiences show clear signs of holding conscious desires regarding the fate of fictitious characters before them. 'Rooting' for narrative outcomes has thus been framed as a fundamentally sympathetic act. Film theorists have focused on how sympathy might be generated and proposed solutions that emphasise the influence of *morality* and *partiality*. Such a view has also influenced recent approaches to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, which have attempted to explain this response as a sway in sympathies brought on by moral bias or error arising from partial and amoral mechanisms such as embodied empathy and emotional contagion. Although sympathy is undeniably significant in the production of moment-by-moment hopes and fears at the movies, this view has focused on *empathic* concerns at the expense of an equally important influence on rooting for narrative outcomes that may help untangle the enigma less problematically than the above proposals have thus far proven. For whilst viewers are physically removed from onscreen events, mentally they are directly and often deeply affected by them. A host of overlooked amoral and potentially impartial *egocentric* factors must therefore be taken into consideration when explaining moment-by-moment rooting for narrative outcomes during suspense. These include dreadful distress at the prospect of impending pain/shock/disgust/humiliation and a burning desire for knowledge/closure/titillation. Furthermore, filmmakers' ability to trigger or disable individual *egocentric* and *empathic* concerns via changes in dramatic context, cued narrative questions, and competing outcomes on offer may produce sudden and unexpected shifts in our immediate hopes and fears for narrative outcomes. This final episode aims to demonstrate four simple yet largely unacknowledged issues:

1. Egocentric concerns have been overlooked,
2. The human mind is hypocritical,
3. Carroll's either/or questions are forced, and
4. Onscreen information is selective.

Acknowledging and engaging with these claims could provide the key to solving the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, opening the possibility to a more complex view of participatory response in popular cinema.

1. Egocentric Concerns Have Been Overlooked

In 2015, two rugby league players arm-wrestled live on Australian television. The muscular men were so evenly matched in power that it was a case of an unstoppable object meeting an immovable force. The contest ended when one player's arm literally snapped. As he screamed out in excruciating pain, the bewildered audience looked on in disbelief, the 'winner' of the contest jumped back in horror, and the referee was visibly sickened. Video of the incident soon went viral across the Internet and news services, but despite my wife morbidly informing me 'You've gotta see this!', I managed to avoid watching the incident for six months. Why? Because I was so distressed at the prospect of being confronted with a real world version of the arm wrestling scene in David Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly* (1986).[101]

A rarely cited study by de Wied, Hoffman, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (1997) notes that whilst discussion about suspense has focused almost exclusively on our concern for characters, concern for ourselves has been neglected. Although it may seem logical to assume that if we are aware that movies are nothing more than light and sound waves then narrative events and outcomes cannot harm us, this is clearly mistaken.

Sitting in the supposed safety of the cinema, I do not want to see Vince (John Travolta) plunge a huge needle into the chest of Mia (Uma Thurman) in *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

Or to even think about the ear being chopped off with a cut-throat razor by Mr Blonde (Michael Madsen) when the camera pans away from the action in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992).

The belief that onlookers are unable to feel actual pain and pleasure because the events do not occur directly to them fails to take into consideration the power of association to which I drew attention to in the previous episode.

For instance, as I sat at home watching *Johnny Cash: American Rebel* (2015), my wife shuddered and shivered upon hearing an interviewee recount how Johnny's older brother, Jack, was split in two when he fell on a band saw at work.

– – and it opened him up from his belt all through his
chest bone practically to the bottom of his throat.

'I wish I didn't hear that', she remarked and described her toes tingling at the mere thought – a pattern I am by now familiar with from our long viewing history together. Evidence of the affective power of even hearing about past, predestined, and distant events is also plainly evident at the end of Werner Herzog's documentary, *Grizzly Man* (2005). On camera, Herzog listens to the last audio recording made by Timothy Treadwell, a failed Hollywood actor (possibly struggling with his sexuality and/or mental illness) who documented his move to live amongst wild bears on an Alaskan reserve. Sitting across from Treadwell's close friend, Jewel Palovak, who keeps all the recordings, Herzog is clearly disturbed as he listens to a screaming Treadwell torn apart in his tent by a hungry, pre-hibernating bear.

Herzog places the headphones down and looks gravely over to Palovak. 'Jewel, you must never listen to this', he warns, and recommends she destroy the tape. '[I]t's the most terrifying thing I've ever heard in my life', Herzog later said in an interview (cited in Davis, R 2007). Just watching him onscreen listening to the unheard audio is spooky enough.

Carl Plantinga cites a case where audience members even fainted in the cinema when sitting through an infamous scene in *127 Hours* (2005) where adventurer Aron Ralston (James Franco) cuts off his own arm with a penknife to free himself after becoming trapped beneath a boulder in a remote part of Blue John Canyon, Utah (Plantinga 2013, p. 99). Although this may sound suspiciously like an urban myth or publicity stunt, further investigation suggests that numerous viewers did, in fact, faint during this vivid scene.

The real life Aron Ralston, upon whom the film was based, points out that it is 'fairly routine' for someone to faint in their seats when he simply talking to an audience about his arm-chopping experience (cited in metrowebukmetro 2011). Although the function of emotional fainting (i.e. vasovagal syncope) is still in dispute, it appears that the biological response can be brought on by some sort of perceived *personal* threat at anticipated blood loss (see Buodo et al. 2012; Ditto, Gilchrist & Holly 2012; Mosqueda-Garcia 2015).[102] '[S]ometimes your body can't tell the difference between being in danger and watching a fictional traumatic event, which can trigger a strong physical response', writes *Newsweek* reporter Katie Maloney (2010) after consulting the chairman of neurology at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital on the matter.

Empirical evidence for films as anxiety-producing to children, teenagers, and adults is plentiful.[103] Anecdotal evidence is also widespread (see AskReddit, 2014; Blumer 1933; Den of Geek 2009; Stempel 2001). Although personal reports often centre around childhood viewing that left a marked impact, this event can continue to inform our adult viewing practices. As de Wied et al. (1997) contend:

> Realising, from past experiences with films and the film they are watching that some events are too arousing to view, viewers might feel directly threatened while watching a suspenseful film. Accordingly, we propose to make a distinction between viewers' fear for the *protagonist's* safety (i.e. empathic distress), and viewers' fear for *personal* well-being (i.e. nonempathic distress) (p. 482; emphasis in original).

There is the distinct possibility that Carroll, Zillmann, Smith, Plantinga, Raney and Vaage have overlooked an important amoral influence upon suspense and side-taking that I shall hereby refer to as *egocentric distress*.[104]

Consider Brian De Palma's wicked homage to the sinking car scene in *Psycho* (1960).

When first encountering De Palma's remix in *Raising Cain* (1992), I was so distressed seeing Dr. Carter's wife, Jenny (Lolita Davidovich), thrash around inside the car desperately screaming for help as the water level in her sealed airspace rose, – –

– – whilst Carter stood emotionally-paralysed on the side of the lake, – –

– – that I literally hoped she drowned quickly!

For years I assumed that my desire for her quick demise, and my great relief when the car finally sank out of sight, was made on moral sympathetic grounds. Since it seemed inevitable she would die, I told myself it was less painful for her to die quickly rather than gasp for breath. But now, more than two decades later, in light of de Wied et al.'s proposal I suspect that I over-rationalised my response and over-stated my empathic concern. Whilst I accept that empathic distress played an important role in my hope that the car sank, I now believe that much of my rooting response was actually based on egocentric distress. It was less painful for *me* if I did not have to sit and watch her gasp for breath and suffer slowly before my eyes.

Although the distinction between empathic concern for characters and egocentric concern for ourselves has been sadly neglected since de Wied et al.'s (1997) study — Google scholar lists only twelve papers that refer to it, and only two are on the subject of suspense — Julian Hanich has recently made a similar claim (again, without reference to de Wied et al.'s article). In addition to fearing *for* and *with* characters, as argued during sympathetic and empathetic emotional response, Hanich (2014) proposes that we also 'often literally fear for ourselves' (p. 26). This is because we are afraid of our own 'negative affective outcome', whether fear, shock, startle, or whatever the negative emotion we anticipate feeling in the near future may be. '[H]eading in this direction', suggests Hanich, 'might answer the intriguing question why scenes of dread scare us even when neutral or even unpleasant characters are involved' (p. 37).

For instance, my hope that a despicable sex-trafficker is not sliced up before my eyes, – –

– – or a heartless saboteur does not fall to his death from an unnerving height, – –

– – might be better explained by an appeal to *egocentric* rather than *empathic* distress. Amoral concern for myself may overwhelm my empathic concern for characters or outcomes of moral worth, thereby causing these enigmatic instances of immoral suspense and side-taking.[106]

Carl Plantinga's distinction between 'direct emotions' and 'sympathetic emotions' also hints at the possibility of conflict between concern for self and concern for characters when rooting for narrative outcomes (2009, p. 209). Plantinga offers suspense as an example of direct emotion because it 'can occur independent of character engagement' (p. 210). But this idea has been largely overlooked, and even Plantinga has not followed through with the full implications of his proposal by considering that the two types of emotion might easily be at odds. To do so would problematise *morality* and *partiality* claims Plantinga continues to endorse in relation to suspense and side-taking. In particular, the idea that viewers typically root for outcomes favourable to characters they have formed a 'moral allegiance' with (à la Carroll, Zillmann, and Smith) *unless* this is overturned through moral/cognitive error (à la Raney and Vaage). Plantinga's distinction between these two types of emotion points to the possibility that sometimes the outcomes we hope and fear during suspense may not be for a character (i.e. due to 'sympathetic emotion'), but for actual outcomes at a structural level of story that we anticipate facing (i.e. due to 'direct emotion'). This 'direct fear', so to speak, may induce suspense and lead us to hope the dreaded outcome does not unfold despite any benefit it offers a character. As Hitchcock put it, sometimes 'the apprehension of the bomb is more powerful than the feelings of sympathy or dislike for the characters involved' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73).

Gregory Currie (1999) has also failed to consider the full implications upon suspense and side-taking of his own, similar concept, 'narrative desire'. This is understandable given that his real interest lay in the philosophical issue of rooting for 'good' outcomes while simultaneously desiring that 'bad' outcomes occur for the sake of a satisfying story. Although Vaage (2015) applied Currie's idea to immoral suspense and side-taking, she took our desire for entertainment at a narrative level to only serve characters to whom we are presumed partial. That is, Vaage does not appear to consider that 'narrative desire' or 'direct emotions' could just as well work *against* these characters or *for* those we otherwise despise.

Empirical support for the influence of (amoral and impartial) *egocentric distress* during decision-making is to be found in another field of enquiry that bears a remarkable link with Carroll's moral structure of suspense but which has remained virtually untapped by film and narrative theorists.

1. 1 Behavioural Economics

Behavioural Economics seeks to understand how human beings make decisions when given competing options. Although explanatory models as to exactly how this occurs differ, all propose that people 'temporally discount' the value of delayed outcomes, both desirable and undesirable (see Harvey 1994; Laibson 1997; Loewenstein & Prelec 1992; Samuelson 1937). To the reader, this probably seems entirely intuitive and perfectly in line with Carroll's predictions about our predilections for narrative outcomes during suspense. We naturally *hope* that pleasant outcomes will occur sooner and that unpleasant outcomes will be delayed indefinitely. Mysteriously, however, an overwhelming majority of experimental participants have been shown to willingly choose to receive an electric shock immediately instead of delaying it (see Badia, McBane & Suter 1966; Belanger & Sattler 1967; Bertilson & Dengerink 1975; Cook, JO & Barnes Jr 1964; D'Amato & Gumenik 1960; Hare 1966; Hare et al. 1966). What might explain this bizarre behaviour?

'[W]aiting for consumption to occur can often be pleasurable or painful', argues George Loewenstein, echoing Hitchcock's observation that the terror is not in the bang but its anticipation.[107] 'When anticipation is a source of utility, the effect of delay on the value of an object can diverge from the predictions of existing [economic] theories' (Loewenstein 1987, pp. 679-680).[108] This has clear parallels with Hanich's (2014) aforementioned claims about the influence of anticipatory emotion, particularly as Loewenstein also happens to dub this anticipatory pain 'dread' (1987, p. 667). Loewenstein argues that the dread participants have about the future electric shock adds to the overall distress of waiting, explaining why many have even been found to opt for a significantly higher voltage (see Berns et al. 2006; Harris 2012; Loewenstein 1987), much longer duration (see Bertilson & Dengerink 1975), or greater number of shocks (see Story et al. 2013) rather than wait for a lesser, shorter, or smaller number of shocks.

Support for Loewenstein's claim is offered by numerous studies showing a general preference to fast-track a range of unpleasant events, from consuming bad tasting food or drink (Mischel, Grusec & Masters 1969), sitting exams and giving public presentations (Sun et al. 2015), feeling embarrassed and socially rejected (Harris 2012), and undergoing dental and medical procedures (Story et al. 2013; Sun et al. 2015). Although far from universal and subject to individual difference, when it comes to waiting for vivid and imminent outcomes akin to those commonly encountered during cinematic suspense, this preference pattern is relatively robust, suggesting that biocultural beings may be willing to experience harm in order to escape intense and/or ongoing anticipal pain (i.e. 'dread'). Hitchcock offers anecdotal evidence for one such a scenario at the cinema.

Describing a drawn-out scene from *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) in which a charming cockney assassin (Edmund Gwenn) leads the hero (Joel McCrea) up Westminster Cathedral tower with the sole purpose of pushing him off, Hitchcock writes:

> Out of inability to take it, the audience began to want the bad thing to happen. It was as if they said, "If he is to be pushed off, please get it over with. We can't bear the waiting" (Hitchcock 1947/2014, p. 39).

Loewenstein argues that dread exhibits greatest influence upon outcomes that are inevitable, easily imagined, and not permanent or prolonged. 'Thus we should expect that the tendency to get unpleasant outcomes over with quickly will be greatest for outcomes that are fleeting and vivid', he concludes (1987, p. 674; see also the notion of 'affect-rich', 'hot', and 'visceral' outcomes in Rottenstreich 2001, Metcalfe 1999, and Loewenstein 1996 respectively). Such a description seems perfectly apt for many feared outcomes during cinematic suspense, which strike hard and quickly pass by.

Dread is also said to rise in temporal proximity to an undesirable event. This aligns with a well-known experiment by Richard Lazarus and colleagues which screened an impending sawmill accident scene from the Canadian wood-working safety film, *It Didn't Have to Happen* (1954). The researchers found that anxiety (measured through physiological changes, which we have already noted are subjected to interpretation issues) increased , up until the point of impact, but then rapidly receded during the actual gruesome event (see Nomikos et al. 1968). Dread is also purportedly influenced by *temporal proximity*,

probability, *magnitude*, *vividness*, and even *prior experience* of the threatened unpleasant event — which may help account for the resilience of suspense during repeat viewing[109] (see Bertilson & Dengerink 1975; Cook, JO & Barnes Jr 1964; Hare 1966; Harris 2012; Loewenstein 1987; Loewenstein et al. 2001, p. 275; Mischel, Grusec & Masters 1969). Accordingly, we might expect that if cinematic dread were to reach a certain level during viewing via an increase in these or other factors, a 'preference reversal' (see Berns, Laibson & Loewenstein 2007, p. 484) could occur wherein an undesirable outcome initially hoped *against* is suddenly hoped *for*. The reason for this behaviour is quite simply because, as Hitchcock said of his Westminster Cathedral tower scene audience, we can't bear the waiting. In order to get the unpleasant ordeal over with and rid ourselves of dread, we might reverse our preferred outcome because 'accelerating bad things decreases the period of dread' (Frederick & Loewenstein 2008, p. 223). This scenario would seem to fit my response to the impending drowning in *Raising Cain* (1992) where, faced with a vivid, prolonged, and seemingly inevitable drowning as Cartner stood staring, catatonic on the water's edge, I essentially told myself (to paraphrase Hitchcock's above explanation): 'If she is to drown, please get it over with. I can't bear the waiting'. If Hitchcock or I are justified in making either of these claims, they present an important challenge to the moral-partial model of suspense and side-taking currently adopted by Carroll, Zillmann, Smith, Plantinga, Raney, and Vaage.

1.2 Curiosity Kills

Loewenstein has also argued that *curiosity* is an aversive state arising when attention is drawn to a gap in one's knowledge (Loewenstein 1994; see also Golman & Loewenstein 2015). 'The curious individual is motivated to obtain the missing information to reduce or eliminate the feeling of [cognitively induced] deprivation', he writes (1994, p. 87). Hence we often feel strangely compelled find out 'information that…confers no extrinsic benefit' (p. 75) such as what is inside the box someone is conspicuously carrying, which number will come up next on the roulette spin even though we haven't bet, or what word will be…

…next.

Loewenstein argues that the distress from such salient knowledge gaps encourages information-seeking beings like us to close it, even if this often leaves us empty and disappointed (p. 86).[110] Loewenstein's claims about the influence of curiosity upon our behaviour may help account for the intense attention I unexpectedly find myself giving to *Baggage Battles* (2012–present), a cheap 'reality tv' show in which participants buy unclaimed airport luggage in the hope of making a profit on the unknown contents inside.

It might also explain the immense 'Is-that-all-there-is?' disappointment I feel after watching each episode. No matter how underwhelmed I am in the outcome, however, or how aware I am of the familiar and unfulfilling pattern *Baggage Battles* follows, I cannot seem to change channels when another closed suitcase is dangled before me.

Empirical support for Loewenstein's knowledge-gap theory of curiosity is offered by research showing activity in reward area regions of the brain during the arousal of curious states (Kang, MJ et al. 2009). Increases in pupil dilation — a known measure of attention (see Hoeks & Levelt 1993; Kang, OE, Huffer & Wheatley 2014) — also suggests that curiosity involves attention to an information gap (Kang, MJ et al. 2009). Aversion to uncertainty has also been shown to produce particular patterns in the brain (see Hirsh & Inzlicht 2008; Sarinopoulos et al. 2010; Schienle et al. 2010), negative mood (see Grupe & Nitschke 2011), and physiological responses associated with anxiety, such as increased heart rate, breathing, and skin conductance (see Arntz, Van Eck & de Jong 1992; Grupe & Nitschke 2013).[111]

Carroll (1984/1996), Zillmann (1980), Sternberg (1978), Bordwell (1985), and Derry (1988) have been careful to separate suspense from curiosity, just as Hitchcock did in his constant contrast with whodunnits. In light of Loewenstein's claims, however, such a distinction does not mean that curiosity is unable to still make a significant impact upon *suspense* and *side-taking*. In some cases, a viewer may prefer to place moral characters they are supposedly partial to in great danger, even at the risk of increased levels of empathic distress in the future, simply to resolve her own unbearable curiosity.

For instance, when watching *The Vanishing* [orig. Dutch title, *Spoorloos*] (1988), I am made aware of the identity of the man who abducted Saskia (Johanna ter Steege) almost immediately after she vanishes early in the movie. However, I am not told what has happened to her. The only way I can fill this noticeable gap in my knowledge at the end of

the story is if her boyfriend, Rex (Gene Bervoets), agrees to drink a cup of drugged coffee poured out from a thermos by the perpetrator (Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu) in exchange for learning the truth about Saskia's whereabouts.

But the only way to tell you is to make you share the exact same experience.

Although I already assume that Saskia is long deceased (for her disappearance occurred three years ago), an obsessive desire to know what happened, combined with the realisation that this is the only path to resolve my curiosity, arguably encourages me to sacrifice Rex's welfare to rid myself of this aversive state. After all, the perpetrator has already confessed that he is a cold-blooded psychopath and despite believing her will honour his promise to reveal the truth about Saskia's whereabouts, I fear it will not end well for Rex.

The film's French title, *L'homme qui voulait savoir* [*The Man Who Wanted to Know*], emphasises the intense curiosity at the narrative's core, though the fact that Rex is as obsessed as the ideal viewer with learning the full answer to Saskia's mysterious disappearance may mask the realisation that rooting for such an outcome arises predominantly from *egocentric* rather than *empathic* concern. If I truly cared for Rex, I should see his goal as misguided and root against it, just as I do in romantic comedies when the heroine pursues the wrong man to her own detriment. But I, too, have an undying desire to know and, unlike Rex, I am not at risk of death if he drinks the drugged cup. Thus I may well choose to sacrifice his welfare to satisfy my own need to know. Thankfully, after Rex works through much anguished deliberation where I, too, find myself torn between a desire for knowledge and a desire for his (and perhaps my own) safety, he gulps down the coffee. This decision arguably allows viewers like me to retain an illusion

of empathic concern and inherited motivation, satiating our curiosity without necessarily noticing our own self-interest at work. Imagine instead if Rex refused to drink and the film ended without resolving our knowledge gap. How many viewers might then realise they would rather Rex risk his life for their benefit? A similar offer occurs in *The Matrix* (1999).

When the mentor figure, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), offers the hero, Neo (Keanu Reeves), a 'Call to Adventure' from which there is no turning back (Campbell 1949) it might seem perfectly obvious that viewers hope Neo's choice is to swallow the red pill.

Morpheus: 'You take the blue pill, the story ends and you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland and I show you just how deep the rabbit hole goes'.

The film's adventure is entirely dependent on it, and the story would dwindle if Neo returned to his dreary life as an anonymous office worker. In line with Currie's notion of 'narrative desire' (1999), the narration thus has Neo satisfy our desire for a good story by choosing the red pill with little hesitation. But what if he instead reached for the blue pill that would politely decline Morpheus' call to adventure? As Neo moved to pick it up and place it in his mouth, mightn't some viewers hope he changes his mind or fumbles the pill, putting their own concerns for entertainment and the alleviation of their curiosity about what lies beyond the Matrix (the simulacrum that human beings have mistaken for the real world) above those for the hero just as I appear to have done with Rex?

Distress arising from an awareness of a knowledge gap that viewers are compelled to close may be so strong as to set the direction of their desired narrative outcomes, as François Truffaut admitted when he watched *Psycho* (1960). After initially being scared that Norman's part in the disposal of Marion Crane's corpse will be uncovered, Truffaut

confessed that upon learning Norman Bates had a secret 'one hopes he will be caught just in order to get the full story!' (Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 272).[112]

1.3 A Cognitive Need For Closure Or Convention?

A potentially related source of egocentric distress is associated with cognitive 'closure', the apparent desire for pattern completion. The more this desire is frustrated and anticipated resolution is delayed, the more we may desire closure in order to be rid of rising 'discomfort'. Consider Moritz Lehne and Stefan Koelsch's neat illustration of tension via (seemingly insignificant) delayed closure:

> In a written text, for example, a single sentence which is very long, and in which subject and verb are separated by various subordinate clauses or parenthetical statements (e.g., by making ample use of relative clauses, brackets, dashes, etc.), thus taxing the working memory load of the reader—longer sentences usually require more elements to be kept active in memory—and delaying syntactic integration necessary for understanding the sentence, can create tension (Lehne & Koelsch 2015, p. 6).

Film theorists have also proposed a desire for closure of schemas and gestalts during suspense (see Mellmann 2002, 2007; Ohler & Nieding 1996). This raises the possibility that if an unresolved event is sufficiently distressful, the viewer may abandon moral or partial concerns and opt for the most immediate prospect of closure for its own sake.

Consider the story trope of a car that will not start at the least convenient time. This staple in many a thriller or horror film usually appears to follow a moral-partial framework. Typically the hero or some other morally sympathetic character desperately turns the key in the ignition trying to make the engine fire as danger draws closer and closer. But is our desire that the car start so the character/s can speed away from the approaching train, truck, monster, or prying policeman really based on moral-partial concerns?

A passing moment in *Octopussy* (1983) suggests that this may not be the case. Towards the end of the film, an exiled Afghan prince with world-damaging plans (Louis Jourdan), whom James Bond (Roger Moore) is out to stop, activates a nuclear time-bomb at a US army event and politely excuses himself. He and his bodyguard (Kabir Bedi) move swiftly to their Mercedes Benz saloon and take a seat ready to escape the twenty-mile radius that will be destroyed in the eventual explosion. The prince checks his watch and seems confident. But as his bodyguard turns the key in ignition, we hear the familiar strain of a car that does not want to start: *Err-err-err-err-err-err-err-click*.

I immediately gasp and then let out a chuckle as the bad guys glance at one another for a moment in disbelief. Alas, the moment is only played as a joke, for the car starts on the next attempt and the pair drives off. I suspect that the likes of Carroll would not be convinced that my response was a clear sign that I held hope the car would start at either rate. But as I heard that familiar sound of the engine struggling to turn over – *Err-err-err-err-err-err-err-click* – it certainly felt like I wanted the car to start. Rather than argue, we might also test this possibility by presenting a re-edited version of the scene in which the key is turned *multiple* times without success as per the convention when morally sympathetic characters are stuck in this situation. [113] Although this would still not necessarily be evidence that a desire for *closure* of this act (i.e. starting a car) is the cause of such a response —— for it might as well be due to learned conditioning associated with these cinematic cues —— either explanation flies in the face of Carroll's claim that moral-partial concerns guide our ongoing hopes and fears for narrative outcomes.

Perhaps a more insightful example of the influence of an amoral, impartial desire for closure comes from another scene that may also have escaped academic scrutiny because it, too, is played for laughs rather than for suspense. In *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988), small-time hustler, Freddy Benson (Steve Martin), is arrested and held in a French Riviera police station cell after the latest rich woman he has been sponging off discovers him canoodling with younger women on the beach. Freddy insists that he did not steal anything because everything the rich woman gave him was a gift. The police inspect asks if he knows anyone in town who might vouch for him out. What follows is a painfully comic scene in which Freddy struggles to recall the name of a rich man he had briefly met earlier (played by co-star Michael Caine). He goes to mouth the main's surname, wracking his brain to remember.

His name is...His name is...James... No. His name is...James Josephson. No, no!...James Lawrence. Lawrence...Lawrence Fells...Lawrence Fings...Forrest Lawrenceton...

Freddy grows more and more frustrated, desperately pacing around the cell trying to recall the name of the one man who might secure his release. And even though I could not recall the rich man's name either, I too felt frustrated sitting witness to Freddy's attempt to spit it out. I longed for him to say the name successfully. Although the scene is played for laughs and adheres to the moral-partial framework proposed by Carroll, Zillmann, Smith, Plantinga, Raney, and Vaage, it need not on both counts.

Imagine that first-time viewers were told that Freddy was a cold-blooded psychopath who plans to murder the rich woman in revenge when he is released. They are then presented with a colour-drained, darkened version of that scene that cues thriller, rather than comedy, conventions. Would viewers so easily dismiss any felt discomfort in seeing someone with a word on the tip of their tongue, like watching a stutterer struggling to finish a sentence? Mightn't some desire that Freddy spit out the correct name just to free them from this egocentric distress, even if doing so may enable his release and gruesome act of revenge? Once again, there remains the possibility that the origin of such a response is not a need for closure, but simply a driving curiosity to know the name: *Lawrence Jamieson*. At any rate, I am not sure there need be a clear line between the two explanations. Both appear to involve an information gap and to operate independently of moral-partial concerns.

1.4 Desire and Disgust

The possibility that egocentric interests may overturn our moral judgment and empathic concern need not be limited to *distress*. The same logic might also apply to *desire*. If the prospect of seeing someone naked onscreen is sufficiently tantalising, it could lead us to hope for its occurrence, even though such an outcome is not the most moral or most favourable for the characters we supposedly care for. In *Basic Instinct* (1992), for example, I appear to willingly trade the hero's safety just for the chance of seeing him sleep with a potential psychopath who brutally stabs her victims with an ice-pick during sexual climax. I am perfectly aware of this possibility from the opening scene of the film, in which an unidentified woman performs such an act that both titillates and terrifies.

From that moment on, the sex scenes between investigating cop Nick Curran (Michael Douglas) and prime suspect Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) that the film seem designed to make me *desire* automatically come bundled with the threat of *distress*. Sleeping-with-a-psychopath thrillers like this therefore highlight the pull of competing concerns often at work during narrative reception, as the manner of death that I am willing to gamble the hero's life for is almost as aversive as the sex scenes are arousing. What

may tip the scales in favour of my desire to see what Nick later describes as 'the fuck of the century' is not only the reliable pull (so to speak) of my male libido, but also the fact that it is more immediately achieved than Nick's potential death upon orgasm. In other words, I may temporarily discount the distress of an imagined ice-pick piercing Nick's body in favour of the immediate prospect of audio-visual sexual gratification.[114]

Other films manage to instill in me an overwhelming desire that the protagonist pursue a femme fatale figure though I am also conscious that this is not in his best long-term interests. In *Body Heat* (1981) this is achieved through the lure of sex with sultry star Kathleen Turner, a prospect I can't seem to resist any more than the protagonist, Ned Racine (William Hurt).

My disregard for the protagonist's welfare, however, does not depend on outright titillation. Traditional film noir trades on my simple desire to see the hero kiss and 'couple with' the femme fatale figure, even though I know it will lead to his demise and therefore often find myself simultaneously hoping he ends up with the girl next door.

Egocentric desire therefore has a legitimate claim to be taken seriously as an important factor in the generation of rooting responses. Much of what we desire during at the movies, however, is the avoidance of negative outcomes rather than the achievement of positive outcomes (see also Zillmann 1980). The tendency toward fear of unwanted outcomes rather than hope for wanted outcomes during suspense construction and consumption may be because human beings often exhibit a 'negativity bias' (see Ito et al. 1998; Rozin & Royzman 2001) and 'loss aversion' (see Kahneman & Tversky 1984), which could make fear of an undesirable outcome easier to induce than hope for a desirable outcome (see also Gerrig, Bagelmann & Mumper 2016, p. 5). It might also be

another instance of the smoke-detector principle in aid of survival, where we are built to be particularly conservative when facing the prospect of threat rather than reward (see Nesse 2001). Whatever the reason for the emphasis on negative outcomes in suspense, even if the different forms of *desire* for positive outcomes (such as sexual gratification) is limited, when one realises how many different sources have the capacity to create *distress* that viewers with to avoid, the implications of egocentric concern becomes even greater. The threat of pain and violence are not the only factors that may overturn our moral and partial interests. Another factor that could cause the viewer distress and encourage desire for outcomes that alleviate it might be (non-moral) disgust.

Consider a parody of the familiar 'poisoned drink' trope, where a character repeatedly raises a poisoned glass to their lips but is interrupted each time before sipping, thereby teasing the audience into a frenzy of suspense. In *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999), the clueless hero raises a piping hot cup of fecal matter that he has mistaken for brewed coffee bubbling away in the crime laboratory. As there is no obvious physical threat to Austin (Mike Meyers) here, any desire a viewer has that the hero not sip the thick brown liquid born of a boiling stool sample belonging to, Fat Bastard (Mike Meyers), a grotesque bad guy, would seem heavily influenced by disgust.

Although empathic concern for Austin may still be involved in my hope that he does not manage to take a sip, it seems reasonable to assume that egocentric concern plays and equal, if not greater, part. Despite being warned that the coffee 'is shit', when the ignorant hero finally sips and announces, 'It's a little bit nutty', I feel no particular concern or

sympathy for him as empathic concern might predict. Whilst Austin wears a shit-eating grin, oblivious to his error, it is *I* who am disgusted and distressed by the event.

One might still protest that hoping the hero does not sip the stool sample is already covered by Carroll's moral structure of suspense. If we take any kind of harm to a relatively morally virtuous hero as immoral, we may not need to appeal to disgust to explain the response. I find this claim hard to swallow, however, particularly as disgust also appears capable of exerting an influence when it is an antagonist, not simply the hero, who is under threat.

In *Spy* (2015), frumpy cat-loving spinster and CIA analyst, Susan Cooper (Melissa McCarthy), works behind the scenes with little credit for her superior analytical skills. She spends her days in the control room feeding live instructions to make Bradley Fine (Jude Law) — the James Bond-like secret agent she pines after — look like a hero in the field. But when the identity of all undercover agents is leaked, Susan's anonymity forces her out into the field for the first time. After fending off an attack from a knife-wielding terrorist dilapidated Parisian apartment building, the generic bad guy tumbles over the edge of a balcony, falling several stories into the rubble below.

Susan looks down over the railing and sees the antagonist, – –

– – innards oozing from a metal pipe protruding through his limp body, – –

– – and is visibly sickened.

When I saw this scene in a crowded cinema, there was a chorus of horrified laughter as Susan's stream of vomit descended in slow motion. 'Oh God. Not on him. Not on him', she prays aloud, her voice gargling on a mouthful of bile.
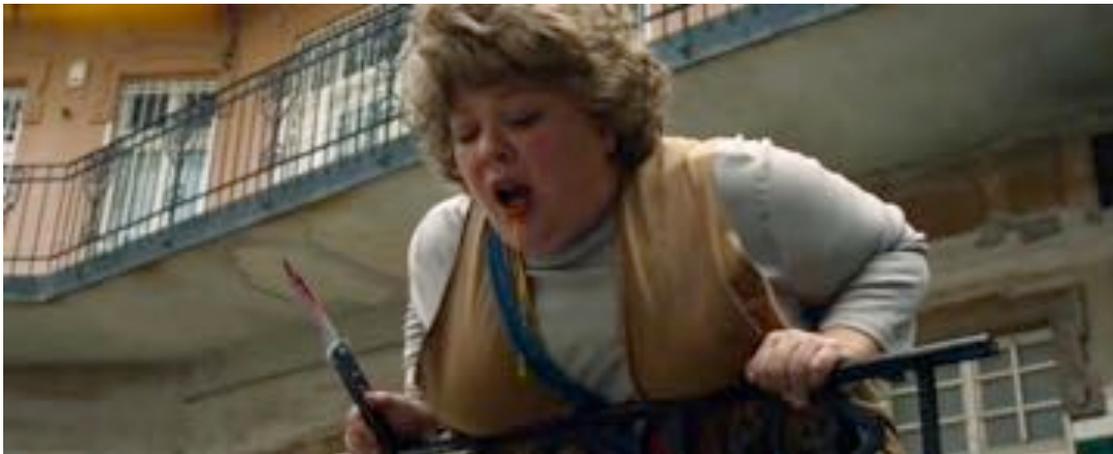
As I watched myself watching in this moment, I was quite conscious of my inner voice saying, 'Oh no…', despite laughing hysterically in anticipation and as a result of her bodily fluid splattering all over the antagonist's corpse below.

Vaage (2015b) and Plantinga (2006b, 2009) might be inclined to appeal to the power of *moral* disgust triggered by the violation of a corpse to explain my reaction, but I am not certain that morality need enter into the equation. Even ordinary *non-moral* disgust at witnessing bodily fluid fall on a face seems quite capable of explaining my apparent egocentric distress and subsequent hope that the vomit miss the target. Plantinga has, in fact, already proposed that erotic desire and disgust are further examples of 'direct emotions…which can occur independent of character engagement' (Plantinga, p. 210), but again has not fully considered how this might problematize claims that the moment-by-moment narrative outcomes viewers root for is typically steered by *morality* and *partiality*. In the absence of explicit, testable claims about when our own direct sexual desire or disgust might influence hopes and fears for narrative outcomes, a more conservative starting point in relation to suspense and side-taking would be to assume that the influence of morality and partiality is one among many. Even interpersonal conflict itself, a cornerstone of western drama, appears capable of inducing egocentric distress which might influence our moment-to-moment hopes and fears for narrative outcomes.

1.5 Interpersonal Conflict

Halfway through *Gone Girl* (2014) I am incensed to learn that Amy Dunne (Rosamund Pike) has gone to elaborate lengths to frame her husband, Nick (Ben Affleck), for her disappearance and presumed murder. In line with the moral-partial framework, I hope Amy is discovered alive and Nick is cleared of the crime.

And yet two scenes when the 'well-bred' Amy is hiding out in disguise at a campground cabin produce a sudden moral inversion of suspense and side-taking.

The first is when Amy plays mini golf with a young couple who have befriended her. As she literally jumps for joy after putting a hole-in-one, the 'bum bag' (i.e. 'fanny pack') Amy has been hiding under her shirt full of cash falls to the ground. She scurries to pick it up.

The young couple stares curiously.

Although I want Amy to be discovered alive and well so that Nick will be cleared of murder, and though this is a clear opportunity to achieve that desired end, my inner voice instantly gasps, 'Oh no!'. Instead of hoping the young couple realise something is amiss, I find myself hoping Amy covers up any trace of the thick wad of cash — which clashes with her working-class charade — before they become suspicious.

My response to the second scene, when the young couple unexpectedly storm into Amy's cabin soon after and search for the money, is even more revealing. Whilst empathic fear for Amy's safety and loss of property as they demand to know where her money is hidden in order to steal it may help account for my suspense, – –

– – what disturbs me most is when Amy glances nervously over at a calendar pinned on the wall which outlines her entire evil plan to frame Nick.
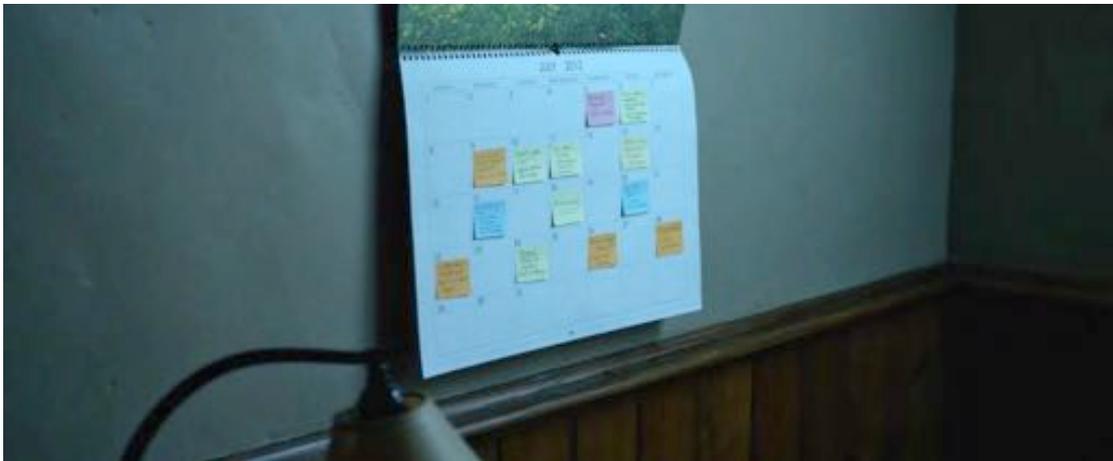
Rationally (and in perfect accordance with the moral-partial framework) I should hope the couple discovers this evidence, as it could lead directly to completion of my global goal: Nick's release from charges threatening life imprisonment for a crime he did not commit. Amy's split second glance should therefore fill me with hope.

Instead, it fills me with fear. And when the young boyfriend spots Amy's darting eyes and follows her gaze to the wall, I panic. Mysteriously, and immorally from almost every angle, I pray that he does not discover the calendar.

Although Carroll (1984/1996) claims that suspense is made possible by what he calls 'erotetic narration', the question prompting nature of popular narrative which encourages the viewer to form predictions and adopt predilections, he does not consider what may happen when one of his so-called *micro* questions underlying suspense a local suspense scene clash with one of his *macro* question which concern more global story matters. Such a situation is clearly at work here when my preferred answer to the local question concerning Amy's discovery is at odds with my preferred answer over the global question of Nick's release from murder changes upon which the story hinges. It is also present in many of the examples I have offered throughout this thesis such as Bruno and the Lighter, The Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck, and Hitchcock's Thief where preferred answers to a micro question unfolding onscreen are given despite blatantly clashing with the preferred answer that has the viewer previously hoped for (and *still* claims to hope for!).[115]

Where Carroll has overlooked this issue, Vaage has recently highlighted the significance that an intense focus on a local goal such as Amy's need to avoid detection appears to play in the moral inversion of suspense. Extending upon Murray Smith's (1995a) comments that 'the creation of a *local* situation in which an otherwise undesirable character is herself victimized, or placed in a dreadful situation' (pp. 217-218, emphasis added) may lead to sympathy for the devil, Vaage attributes inversion of suspense to

> local, low-level empathic responses that should be analysed separately from the spectator's fully blown moral evaluation of the character's actions, as captured by the notion of sympathetic allegiance (Vaage 2015a, p. 73).

I have already pointed out my misgivings about the reliability of empathy as a predictor of rooting and as a facilitator of judgmental attitudes to films, filmmakers, and viewers. However, I can accept that empathy leads to affective response when witnessing a person struggle to attain a local goal. Nonetheless, I see this built not upon traditional 'simulation' claims, wherein we mentally put ourselves in others' shoes (see Gallese & Goldman 1998; Goldman, A 2006), but simply upon learned associations. Barsalou's version of 'simulation' as ongoing conceptualization of the world around us involves multimodal memory retrieval and pattern completion (see Barsalou 2009, 2013) and is much messier than the shoe-wearing model, which presumes a level of attachment that appears unsustainable. The assumption that we are in another's shoes has arguably often been taken for granted based upon the analogy it begins with. But if we take 'shoe-wearing' it to be a case of reacting in a similar way to similar cues as the character, we might see that empathy guarantees nothing in relation to rooting for narrative outcomes because it cannot be guaranteed itself. That is, we cannot ensure that the cues will lead a viewer to *think* and *feel* what the immoral character wants. And even if they do, that is no guarantee they will *want* what the character wants. Vaage continues:

> The close-ups make the spectator latch onto the character's feelings, as Smith argues – but even more importantly, feeling this desperation makes the spectator simulate the character's action alternatives…The amoral nature of empathic responses can make me feel with – and because of this also root for – immoral characters (Vaage 2015a, pp. 73-74).

Vaage's stress upon the amoral nature of fast, 'low-level' empathy assumes it will automatically lead to a particular preferred narrative outcome, and it seems to retain the assumption that our rooted for outcomes are empathic: the result of sympathetic/empathetic concern for the character rather than concern for ourselves.

Consider, once more, my response to the sinking car in *Raising Cain* (1992). The scene is a prime candidate for a person 'in a tight spot' (Vaage 2015a, p. 73). Although at first I may 'simulate the character's action alternatives', I still appear to make the executive decision (consciously or otherwise) to override this in favour of my own self-preservation in the cinema. Thus where shoe-wearing views continue to stress that 'empathy' is responsible for our predilections for narrative outcomes in moments, and that my distress and concern over the potential discovery Amy's calendar in *Gone Girl* (2014) is *empathic,* the result of shoe-wearing empathy or misguided sympathy, I believe we should consider the possibility that it is *egocentric* in nature.

'Drama is conflict' is a central motif in popular screenwriting manuals (Raskin 2017, p. 28).[116] Although interpersonal conflict certainly serves to attract audience interest, this arousal may be (at one level, at least) inherently unpleasant, and its enjoyment might

even arise in hindsight out of excitation transfer and relief (Zillmann 1983). Empirical evidence suggests that witnessing interpersonal conflict in everyday life is frequently aversive and anxiety-inducing, whether in the home (Dutton, Webb & Ryan 1994), neighbourhood (Clark, C et al. 2007), or workplace (De Dreu & Beersma 2005; De Dreu, Van Dierendonck & Dijkstra 2004; Totterdell et al. 2012). Often we simply cannot stand the tension in the air as a dispute plays out before us. Even if the incident is not animated, violent, or loud, we may squirm as interpersonal conflict unfolds and long to escape it. Thus while suspense when witness to Hitchcock's Thief scenarios may be the result of the mere thought of 'getting caught', the learned association to which the Eleventh Commandment refers, it could also be due to egocentric distress at the prospect of witnessing impending interpersonal conflict.

'Suspense is fundamentally an unpleasant feeling from which the spectator would like to escape', claims Eugene Vale (1998, p. 122). Dolf Zillmann describes the experience as a 'noxious affective reaction' (1996/2013, p. 208). And Sarah Brookes points out that 'distress is only acceptable to a certain degree before it ceases to be pleasurable' (2013, p. 91; see also Brewer 1996 p. 215). One reason that viewers may not want Hitchcock's Thief or Amy to be caught right now could be due to the current level of egocentric distress that must be withstood in order to achieve a moral outcome. As per behavioural economic theory, we might temporally discount the distress that the down-the-track outcome will cause, thus favouring dismissal of the more immediate and more intense distress we currently face. When the suspense is killing us too much, we may be willing to take the most immediate and probable path in order to escape it. This possibility is also suggested by Martin Rubin's contention regarding the moral inversion of suspense during the 'Bruno and the Lighter' scene in *Strangers on a Train* (1951):

> Even though the audience should be rooting against Bruno, because he is the villain and is trying to frame the hero, the scene evokes a strong desire to see Bruno pick up that !@#$%&* lighter – just to get it over with, to resolve the suspense (Rubin 1999, p. 220).

The frustration in watching Bruno, his fingers so near yet so far from the lighter, may encourage us to desire closure for our *own* sake.

The same might be said of witnessing Rusk's attempts to retrieve his tie-pin in the face of continual problems across the entire ten-minute 'Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' sequence in *Frenzy* (1972), the object all but within his grasp. And a similar thing may be at work in my response to previously cited scenes from *Martin* (1977), *Dial M For Murder* (1954), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), and *Raising Cain* (1992), where a desperate desire to avoid witnessing impending interpersonal conflict could be behind my bizarre hope that criminals are not discovered in the middle of clearly immoral and undesirable acts.

The explanation could even account for my momentary desire that eleven-year-old Johnny Grasso, the target victim in *Happiness* (1998), eat the damn sandwich wanna-be-rapist Bill Maplewood has prepared him.

The socially awkward tension I feel as Bill sits waiting is so uncomfortable to watch that I begin to wish for an immediate end to my *egocentric* distress. In other words, when egocentric distress reaches sufficient levels, viewers would seem capable of hoping for relief from outcomes they would otherwise hope against. Alternatively, explaining my swaying predilections for narrative outcomes in terms of *morality* and *partiality* not only seems unnecessarily reductive, but also requires unnecessary hoop jumping. One moment I am in moral allegiance with Bill, the next with Johnny, etc. Moreover, to see side-taking in such singular terms is to ignore the most perplexing part of the enigma. As thriller author, Andrew Klavan, points out, '[Viewers] don't want the bad guy to get away exactly; they just don't want him to be caught right now' (1994). My own ability to hold two seemingly irrational, opposing goals (e.g. that Amy not be discovered *and* that she is eventually discovered so that the charges against Nick are dropped) accords with Klavan's comment. Where Vaage and Raney might attempt to explain this via the viewer's 'narrative desire' for optimal entertainment (Currie 1999), this would only seem to explain our *desire* for the antagonist's escape, not our *distress* if they do not. Furthermore, there may be a perfectly valid biological explanation for 'illogical' behaviour such as this.

2. The Human Mind is Hypocritical

Media theorist, Jonathan Frome, argues that most theories of emotional response to narrative 'implicity characterize the mind as monolithic and discuss only the conscious mind in their explanations' (2008, p. 11). Evolutionary psychologist, Robert Kurzban, goes even further, arguing that 'hypocrisy is the natural state of the human mind' (2010, p. 219), a position which may help account for my ability to hold seemingly contradictory hopes and fears during suspense and side-taking. Following Steven Pinker (1997), Dan Sperber (1994, 2001), Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (1987), Kurzban argues that the mind is the activity of the evolved brain, a vast collection of distinct biological mechanisms that evolved because each provided a particular advantage to the replication of our genetic population, even if only by virtue of representing 'the least bad' option out of available mutations (see Buunk & Park 2008, p. 23). Though the claim that our mind might be full of adaptive mechanisms clashes with 'deep intuitions surrounding the unitary self' (Kurzban & Aktipis 2007, p. 142) if we are willing to accept that human beings evolved through Darwinian adaptation like all organisms and organs then we should be perfectly willing to accept that the brain evolved the same way — through millions of random mutations (i.e. 'errors') that were non-randomly (i.e. 'naturally') selected (see also Carruthers 2006; Kurzban 2010).[117]

Source: Evolution's Voyage (2004). Image cropped.

Although some have been critical of the notion of 'mass modularity' of the human brain (see, for instance, Buller 2005; Grossi 2014; Rose & Rose 2000), Kurzban stresses that such criticism is directed at a 'straw man' version of the idea that mistakes it for Fodorian modularity (see Kurzban 2002; Kurzban & Haselton 2006). In 1983, cognitive scientist, Jerry Fodor, famously proposed a strict set of properties stressing automaticity and impenetrability which led him to conclude that modularity can only be present in low-level sensory systems rather than high-level reasoning systems.

In contrast, Kurzban defines modularity as *functional specialisation*, which naturally entails (but does not demand) a level of informational encapsulation as mechanisms naturally process specific information for their particular task whilst ignoring irrelevant data (Kurzban & Aktipis 2007, p. 132). Unlike Fodor, Kurzban also applies this concept to high-level processes such reasoning and decision-making, arguing that critics have mistakenly associated 'evolved' with 'automatic'.

> [T]here is nothing in the theory of evolution by natural selection that implies that adaptations need to be narrow, inflexible, automatic, encapsulated, or innately specified (in the sense of present at birth) and/or unshapeable by learning or experience…If our brains are designed such that some processes are "automatic" and others not, and if there exist mechanisms whose function is to "override" or in other ways inhibit or modulate the activity of the automatic systems, then those "executive" systems are also the products of natural selection. They evolved because of their beneficial fitness effects, and possess design features that produce those effects (Barrett, HC & Kurzban 2012, p. 684-685).[118]

Debate over what modules/mechanisms may or may not exist and how modular the mind may or may not be does not undermine the overall concept behind Kurzban's evolved computational mind. Assumptions that simple triggering mechanisms are unable to account for complex human behaviour traditionally put down to conscious deliberation, or that they must lead to overly reductive behaviourist claims, are also challenged by research in robotics and e-cognition — that is, 'embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended' (Barrett, L 2014, p. 1293).

For instance, Barbara Webb successfully built robot crickets that emulate the real world behaviour of female crickets seeking mating partners (see Webb 1995). These animals navigate to male partners who 'sing' the loudest, which might lead to the assumption that a series of mental representations and subsequent 'decisions' are made about the volume or the direction of origin or even about the need for sexual reproduction itself (see Barrett, L 2011, pp. 50-56). Instead, Webb showed that robot crickets could find appropriate partners based purely on the interaction of a particular body with particular *perceptual* rules in a particular environment. A similar illusion of consciousness emerging from inflexible embodied rules may also be glimpsed in cheap domestic robots that clean the floor or swimming pool. These devices do not detect dust or dirt, have no concept of cleanliness, and are completely ignorant as to where they have been or where they are heading. They are simply enacting a simple rule when they hit an obstacle, changing direction and hence bouncing around a specific environment to produce behaviour that looks remarkably like intentional cleaning.

A more complex example of 'triggered' human behaviour is also seen in the ability to catch a baseball in the outfield. An intuitive assumption is that catchers make predictions

about where the ball will land then move to that spot (see Saxberg 1987). The fact that players do not move in a straight line to their final catching point, however, renders this suspect. Evidence instead suggests that catching is dependent upon the relationship between the ball and the perceiver, with either a) the catcher moving forward to make the oncoming ball seem to move at a constant velocity (optical acceleration cancelation) (McBeath, Shaffer & Kaiser 1995), or b) moving sideways to make the ball seem to follow a straight line (linear optical trajectory) (Fink, Foo & Warren 2009). As Andrew D. Wilson and Sabrina Golonka (2013) sum up:

> The affordance property "catchableness" is therefore continuously and directly specified by the visual information, with no internal simulation or prediction required...The most important lesson here is that the relation between perceptual information (about the motion of the ball) and an organism (the outfielder) *replaces* the need for internal simulation of the physics of projectile motion (Wilson & Golonka 2013, p. 6; emphasis in original).

Thus biological mechanisms may well be capable of explaining behaviour as seemingly complex as judgment and decision-making. This is not to argue that human beings are incapable of also making conscious decisions, merely that this may be viewed as existence of nonconscious decisions and multiple motivating mechanisms often working in isolation may need to be acknowledged.

Rather than reduce the complexity of human behaviour, Kurzban's mass modularity claim arguably helps capture it, highlighting the competing concerns at our core. Though evolved mechanisms in isolation may 'trigger' *motivation* to act, their existence alongside a mass of competing mechanisms in the human brain computing thoughts, beliefs, and desires based on ongoing environmental information that are then integrated by higher level mechanisms means that our *actions* would rarely, if ever, be exclusively triggered in all situations by a single mechanism.[119] Kurzban is thus able to neatly explain much puzzling human behavior that monolithic models of the mind governed by a unified self cannot. His framework also arguably combats our aforementioned 'deep intuitions surrounding the unitary self' (Kurzban & Aktipis 2007, p. 142) and encourages an enhanced understanding of ourselves and our own actions by highlighting the competing concerns that coexist in our hypocritical minds.

Within film theory, David Bordwell (2007) has already proposed that modularity may be behind the paradox of suspense, with our prior knowledge of a rewatched scene effectively 'firewalled' off from the module that enables suspense, but he did not extend the idea to rooting for narrative outcomes. Doing so would provide a potential alternative to his previously quoted suggestion in the same article that viewers may 'feel a wisp of empathy for unsympathetic characters' via emotional contagion and – 'perhaps' – mirror neurons.[120] Modularity allows the possibility that a character can be globally disliked and

locally sympathetic, or globally liked and locally antipathetic, as I have claimed of Archie Bunker audience data and highlighted in many autobiographical responses reported throughout this thesis.

In contrast, much of Carroll's theorising has arguably implied a belief in a rational, unified self. The assumption that there simply must be an executive-in-charge overseeing our actions has been challenged by the late Daniel Wegner, who argued that conscious will is a construction which often bears no link to the actual cause of our behaviour (Wegner 2002, 2003, 2004; Wegner & Wheatley 1999). Thus the perceived need for a unified self that makes deliberate executive decisions may be an unnecessary assumption.

If Kurzban's modular mind argument proves misguided and suffers from the same charges I made of Basic emotion, Mirror Neurons, and dual-process morality earlier, the underlying notion of a fragmented self might still stand. Glenn Geher, an evolutionary psychologist who takes issue with his mass modularity thesis, suggests that Kurzban's hypocritical mind 'works just as well by talking about broader processes' (2012, p. 513). Thus whether many dedicated mechanisms are responsible for this or not, we might accept that humans frequently house competing concerns and need not always be aware of their motives. As Jonathan Frome puts it, 'Our non-unified minds…can result in strange combinations of feelings and behaviour' (2008, p. 15). The enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking may be an example of this, arising from amoral and impartial interests that out-weigh these concerns during dynamic decision-making under particular contexts.

For example, at the climax of *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), a military plane sent out to drop a nuclear bomb on the Soviet Union encounters a last minute malfunction in opening the doors to release it. Although US authorities have been attempting to cancel the mission, Sven Lütticken notes that 'viewers find themselves perversely rooting for the plane's crew [to fix the malfunctioning door], in spite of the fact that it is patently clear the successful accomplishment of their mission will result in a nuclear apocalypse' (2006, p. 106).

Indeed, my hope that Major Kong (Slim Pickens) manages to rewire the bomb door circuitry before the plane reaches the designated drop zone would seem in clear breach of Carroll's claims about the moral structure of suspense. The only way that successfully releasing the bomb could be framed as relatively 'good' is based purely on the crew's personal success and not on the ultimate result of that success. Carroll has yet to address the clash between local and global goals, or propose which might take precedence over the other: a 'relatively' moral local outcome or a 'clearly' immoral global outcome?

The viewer's apparent ability to make local moral judgment in some level of isolation from global moral judgment might be explained by the causal path that they focus on. Moral psychologists Michael Waldmann and Jörn Dieterich (2007) appeal to causal-model theory to claim that during moral dilemmas 'people tend to focus on the causal paths of agents or patients targeted by an intervention, and neglect other causal processes occurring outside this focus, in the background' (p. 249). The authors show that where experimental participants are unwilling to throw a person on a bomb to save others, they are quite willing to (indirectly, though knowingly) throw a bomb on a person to achieve the exact same ends simply because their intervention is directed at the *agent* of moral harm rather than the *victim*.

For instance, Waldmann and Dieterich found that although pushing people in front of an out-of-control train to save others on the track was viewed as morally unjustified, switching the train to another track where a parked bus containing two people will be crushed but manage to block the train from looping back to the main track and killing ten

rail workers originally under threat was reported as morally acceptable. Waldmann and Dieterich dub this 'intervention myopia', where due to 'attentional focus on the effects of interventions, people give victims in the background less weight than victims in the attentional spotlight' (2007, p. 249). Thus the causal path viewers focus on may give heavier weight to *local* outcomes at the expense of *global* outcomes 'further down the track' (see Waldmann & Wiegmann 2010).[121]

Although the above claims might allow Carroll to argue that rooting for Major Kong's success in opening the bomb door is not technically an expression of hope for immoral nuclear destruction, it still does not guarantee that local goals will fit Carroll's definition of moral or his assumptions about allegiance. Instead, it offers further evidence for the dynamic nature of our side-taking and the need to acknowledge the influence of moment-by-moment egocentric distress arising from dread, curiosity, closure, and conflict.

In *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), for example, my ongoing concern for Joe Clay (Jack Lemmon) in his struggle for sobriety, and my hope that he *fails* in his drunken quest to find a liquor bottle he hid in his father-in-law's greenhouse many years before, – –

– – undergoes a complete reversal when it is clear he will pull up every pot plant to find it.

Faced with the competing concern that Joe's search and its destruction will be obvious, causing interpersonal conflict and irreparable damage to his relationships with his co-dependent alcoholic wife, Kirsten (Lee Remick), and his disapproving father-in-law, Ellis (Charles Bickford), I experience a sudden preference inversion and hope that Joe finds the liquor bottle as soon as possible. My *empathic* concern for his sobriety is completely overpowered by a more pressing, competing concern that I would argue is largely *egocentric*. Right now, given the circumstances, the distress of Joe falling back into booze again is less distressful to me than seeing him destroy the entire greenhouse. Hence I opt to end my immediate distress, even though I still do not want Joe to drink again. I can see no other solution. (Note: None of this is to suggest my calculations need be conscious).

This parallels Gerrig's claims about problem-solving participatory responses in which the viewer searches for potential solutions to a dramatic problem (Polichak & Gerrig 2002, p. 78; see also Bezdek, Foy & Gerrig 2013, p. 2).

> By generating a range of possibilities–"Maybe he could…"–and then rejecting some or all of those possibilities, readers[/viewers] thereby contribute greatly to their own sense of how distant a desired outcome might be. As a consequence, readers' p-responses can rapidly increase their own feelings of distress and helplessness (Polichak & Gerrig 2002, p. 82).[122]

More importantly for our current investigation, if we compute an escape route from an impending undesirable outcome (see Gerrig & Bernardo 1994), we might hope for that outcome in a bid to alleviate our onlooker distress, even if it transgresses our own *morality* or *partiality*. And, to the extent that narration is able to 'prompt an inference' of available escape routes and their closure (Polichak & Gerrig 2002, p. 84; see also Bordwell 1985), it may grant filmmakers unrecognised power over the outcomes viewers root for and help solve the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking.

3. Carroll's Either/Or Questions Are Forced

Over thirty years ago, my brother told me of an amazing mind trick a schoolmate had performed on him that day. The trick involved selecting a playing card from a deck, handing it over to the budding mesmerist sight unseen, then answering a series of questions about the numbers, colours and suits my brother had an intuitive preference for. During this process, the mesmerist attempted to telepathically project the contents of the card deep into my brother's brain so that he would ultimately choose the exact same number, colour, and suit of the card which the magician now held safely covered against his own head to aid transmission of its content. When this exact outcome eventuated, my brother was bemused. All the while he had retained the illusion of complete control, utterly unaware of the mental manipulation occurring. Of course, the magician's telepathic powers were pure fantasy, but so too was my brother's presumed control.

The basis of this trick is known as *magician's choice*. 'You are asked to make a free choice among items but, no matter what you choose, the magician calls the shots by how he [sic] verbally responds to your choices', explain the authors of *Slights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our everyday deceptions* (Macknik, Martinez-Conde & Blakeslee 2010, p. 170). For instance, if a participant is asked to choose between hearts or diamonds, an answer of hearts may be interpreted aloud by the magician as if the participant has chosen to *rule out* hearts, whilst an answer of diamonds may be interpreted as if one has chosen to *rule in* diamonds. Thus the participant does not truly have a choice at all, for they do not know the meaning of their choice. The magician ensures the responses ultimately arrive at a single card via an ongoing series of *forced choices* between piles of cards, suits, and numbers in combination with flexible interpretation of what those choices actually mean. Whichever choice my brother made was thus made on the magician's terms, twisted to serve his master plan. The game had been rigged, the outcome predestined, his control merely an illusion. And a similar kind of strategy is hiding in plain sight in popular narrative.

Carroll's either/or 'erotetic' narrative questions underlying suspense, which present a moral outcome against an immoral outcome, are essentially *forced-choice* questions. They are not *open-answer* questions, where one is permitted to root for ideal outcomes that are not already suggested by the narration, such as 'I hope Superman flies down from the sky to save *The Titanic*' or 'I hope Dexter suddenly decides to put the scalpel down and turns this serial killer over to the police'. There is no outcome C or 'None of the above' option on offer. Audience members may have the illusion of free will, but like my

mesmerised brother participating in that telepathic card trick years ago they are often at the mercy of the moviemaking magician when it comes to rooting for narrative outcomes.

'Cinema audiences and readers of novels, while they remain in the theatre or continue to read, have no alternative but to accept what is set before them', claimed Hitchcock (1968a). I contend that this fact has a major influence on suspense and side-taking. In *Outbreak* (1995), for instance, a Californian town has been placed under quarantine by military troops as experts attempt to contain the spread of a highly contagious airborne virus that threatens humankind. As citizens become restless with their lack of freedom, two carloads of people defy military rule and attempt to escape the town border.

The characters in these vehicles are virtually unknown, mere pawns of the plot introduced abruptly in the scene. Nevertheless, I instantly sympathise with their desire to be free, whilst simultaneously fearing they might get out and spread the virus to the wider world. When a military helicopter warns the drivers to stop, I hope they see reason and obey.

However, when a passenger in the leading vehicle fires at the helicopter as they speed on towards the woods, it becomes clear the escapees have no intention of stopping.

And so, given the stakes, my inner voice announces, 'Ok. Kill 'em'. And the pilots oblige.

But if not for the either/or narrative outcomes on offer, I would not have 'desired' these escapees' deaths. In closing off all other potential escape paths, the narration has forced me into hoping for the lesser of two 'evils'.

Moral philosophers Shaun Nichols and Ron Mallon (2006) suggest that presenting people with a double-option outcome (à la classical suspense) leads to 'all things considered' moral judgments that do not accurately reflect the conflicting beliefs behind an answer. The authors present evidence that participants agree behavior is 'all-in permissible' *despite* breaking a moral rule. A key example is their 'catastrophe' scenario, which parallels the *Outbreak* (1995) scenario above. Participants were asked whether it is permissible to push a large stranger onto the tracks to stop a train that is 'transporting an extremely dangerous artificially produced virus to a safe disposal site' from hitting a bomb on the tracks ahead, thereby saving billions of lives (Nichols & Mallon 2006, p. 538). Whereas many researchers have reported up to 90% of participants state that pushing a large man onto the tracks to save five lives is immoral (for an excellent overview, see Waldmann, Nagel & Wiegmann 2012), 76% of participants in Nichols and Mallon's experimental study agreed that, all things considered, pushing was warranted to prevent mass catastrophe in this virus scenario. 'When the consequences are overwhelmingly bad', concluded Nichols and Mallon, 'the consequences can trump the moral rules' (2006, p. 540). That 68% of participants in this study still reported that the action broke a moral rule suggests the rule remained part of their consideration and that influence did not disappear, rather it was simply outweighed by competing concerns. Participants' ability to permit an action *and* to concede that it broke a moral rule once again suggests that cognitive dissonance and moral disengagement to reinterpret our immoral behaviour as moral are unnecessary assumptions.

Empirical evidence for the power of forced-choice questions upon moral judgment has been shown in several Trolley Problem experiments. Kurzban, DeScioli and Fein (2012), Tassy, Deruelle, et al. (2013), Tassy, Oullier, et al. (2013) also found that, given the option, many participants reported that the outcome they chose *against* (i.e. pushing the large man; pulling the switch) was actually the *right* thing to do, effectively highlighting a resistance to *both* options (i.e. killing one to save five, or saving one by letting five die). This should hardly be surprising given that the very definition of moral dilemma is when one must decide between two *undesirable* outcomes. Attachment advocates may insist that these experiments leave out the power of partiality, which may be 'stubbornly' biased. But another example shows that narrative can essentially force audiences to 'choose' particular preferred narrative outcomes that break our bonds with particular characters simply by the bimodal options they cue.

In what might appear a model instance of Vaage and Raney's moral bias argument, I feel suspense on behalf of a trio of criminals planning a robbery on a small town bank in *Violent Saturday* (1955), a formative film in Tarantino's evolution. However, I also have an

equally abrupt and equally heartless rooting reversal against them as I did for the escapees in *Outbreak* explained above. After the heist, the antihero trio (Stephen McNally, Lee Marvin, J. Carrol Naish) drive to an Amish farm as meticulously planned to swap getaway vehicles. On arrival they discover a glitch. Their getaway driver has been killed by one of the hostages, Shelley Martin (Victor Mature), whom they had tied up in the barn alongside the peaceful Amish farming family. My bank robbers must now try to negotiate with Shelley, who is holed up in the barn with the driver's shotgun and the keys to the hay truck they wish to escape in. They announce that they do not want any trouble and ask only that Shelley throw the keys outside so they can leave, otherwise they will be forced to burn the barn down.

As Shelley considers his options, I pray he tosses the keys outside.

But when Shelley moves to concede to their demands, the father of the Amish family (Ernest Borgnine) steps forward and advises, 'Thou must not heed the threat of evil men'.

Shelley agrees not to surrender the keys. The criminals respond as promised by ramming their car into the barn door with a lit handkerchief hanging from its fuel tank.

As the professional criminals approach, guns at the ready, – –

– – the voice in my head sighs and, without a hint of sentiment for the supposed attachment I have had to these men for the last two hours, once again utters 'Ok. Kill 'em'.

Partiality can thus be powerless in the face of forced-choice.

Consider perhaps the ultimate forced choice question: when a mother is asked to choose between her children. This dramatic scenario occurs onscreen in *Sophie's Choice* (1982) when a SS Nazi doctor (Karlheinz Hackl) gives Sophie Zawistowski (Meryl Streep) the 'privilege' of choosing which of her two children will be spared the gas chamber and sent to the labor camp.

Choose! Or I'll send them both over there!
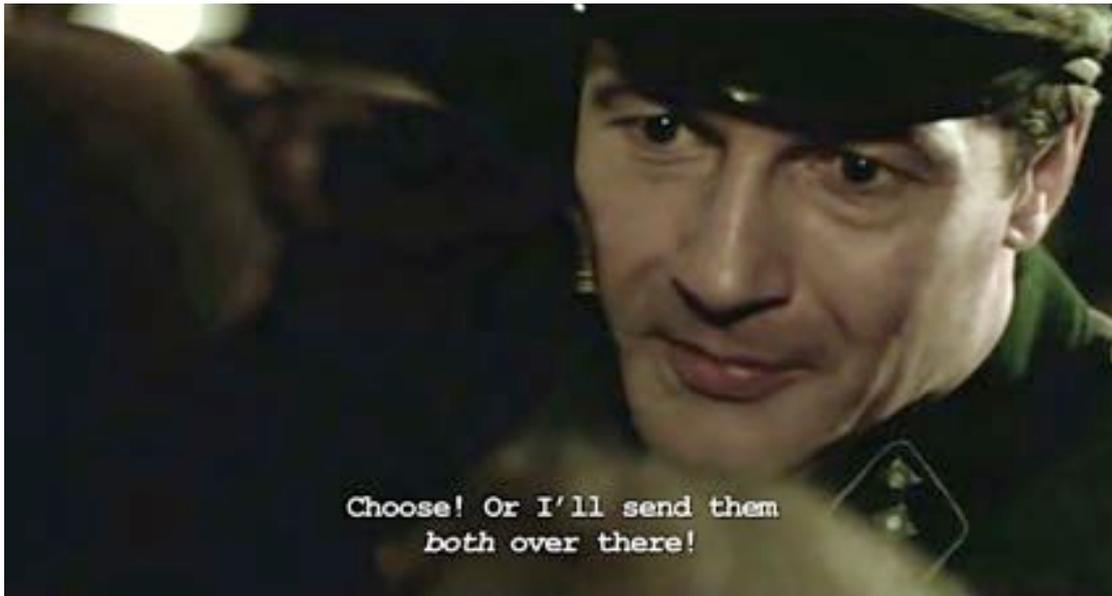
To take Sophie's willingness to hand over either child as evidence of a *moral* or *partial* preference for the other is clearly absurd. If she does not choose, both will be taken.

Lieberman and Linke's (2007) previously cited experiment showed children were willing to 'sell out' their parents' wrongdoing when it became a clear choice between taking the blame themselves or giving away their parents' guilt. Another experiment demonstrates that the choice need not involve harm to oneself. DeScioli and Kurzban (2012) conducted a variation on The Trolley Problem which revealed that participants showed *more* willingness to push a family member or friend from the footbridge to stop the train than a stranger simply by making the five potential victims on the track ahead family members. Like Nichols and Mallon's catastrophe scenario, when the consequences are great enough, they can not only trump *morality* but also trump *partiality*.[123]

Narrative drama often places its participants in the same kind of position as Sophie, forcing them to make all things considered choices to root for, whether dropping one's son into the ocean to save the other, or leaving one's husband and children to run off with the love of one's life. Even the peace-loving Amish father in *Violent Saturday* (1955) proves capable of an 'immoral' act when placed in such a position.

Faced with the moral dilemma as to intervene or not before the last criminal walks up on a wounded Shelley and shoots him at point blank range, limited options leads him to act.

The forced nature of Carroll's bimodal narrative questions alone is arguably enough to often render attachment claims in regards to rooting for outcomes during suspense impotent. To refuse to choose is no choice at all, for it is to cease participating. And thus we are often cajoled into desiring an outcome simply because the other outcome is less desirable (or more aversive) on both moral and broader behavioural economic grounds.

3. 1 Answers cannot be given if questions are not asked

It is not only the answers offered that may influence our response to implicitly posed erotetic narrative questions. The mere framing of a question or not in the first place may also enable considerable influence upon suspense and side-taking. For example, the contrast between typical responses to the 'good guys' caught in an action movie shoot-out versus the anonymous henchmen falling like flies around them.

James Bond guns down more nameless henchmen in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977).

Whilst I fret about the former, I seem to show little empathic concern for the latter. This difference would typically be put down to *morality* and *partiality*. However, a large part of my indifference to the henchmen's deaths might not be due to their 'bad guy' status and my subsequent lack of empathic distress at their fate, or even their opposition to my global goal bravely pursued by the good guys. It might simply be because their mass deaths are not presented as bimodal narrative questions. That is, a henchman's demise is usually portrayed so quickly that it fails to 'prompt people to encode outcomes [sic] preferences in the moment' and thus does not encourage construction of a hope or fear situation at all (Gerrig, Bagelmann & Mumper 2016). One scene that helps bring this possibility to light comes from a parody of these action conventions.

In the final act of *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), Austin (Mike Myers) and Vanessa (Elizabeth Hurley) hijack an escape vehicle inside the underground lair of Dr Evil (Mike Myers). As they 'speed off' in a steamroller, Austin repeatedly signals for two henchmen to move out of their path.

One dedicated henchman (Michael McDonald) refuses to move. He stands and shoots.

Out of bullets as the vehicle is apparently looming, he raises a hand and screams 'Stop!'.

A comic cut to an extreme wide side shot reveals that the steamroller is actually a considerable distance away from the henchman and approaching at a virtual snail's pace.

Rather than simply step out of the way, the henchman stays true to convention and stands his ground, screaming 'Noooooooooooooooooo!' twice more before being flattened.
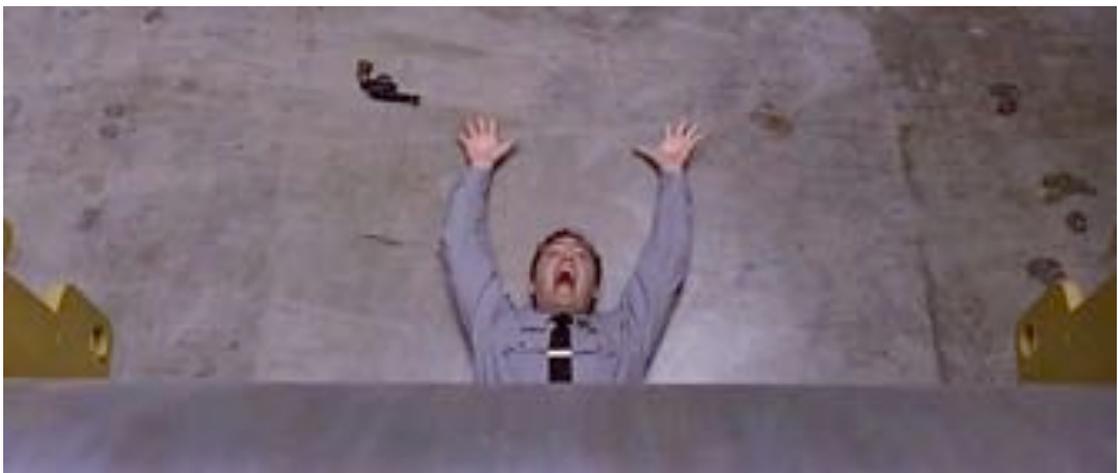
Austin pulls up and the duo exit the vehicle and rush off, further emphasising the utter pointlessness of the henchman's death.

In a standard action film, when a no-name henchman is about to be run down the moment rarely generates suspense and side-taking on the victim's behalf. Driving down henchmen during escape is usually portrayed so rapidly and/or inevitably that there is either no question cued or little time to hope or fear for these victims one way or the other. The above scene differs by delaying the outcome and clearly prompting an either/or outcome in the viewer's mind. Even though it is played for laughs, generating humor at the thought of a benign transgression (benign because its absurdity signals 'It's only a joke!'), viewers like me are still able to find themselves hoping the henchman is not flattened. Thus simply granting the audience an opportunity to hope against an impending outcome involving 'evil' background characters appears to enable the possibility of feeling suspense on their behalf and rooting for outcomes in their favour (even if the origin of this desire is *egocentric* concern). In contrast, withholding such an opportunity denies participatory responses that may take their side.

Further support for the ability to enable and disable suspense and side-taking opportunities simply by when and where Carroll's suspense questions are framed (or not) might be gleaned in my response to another scene from *Spy* (2015). In a scene inspired by post-Jackie Chan martial arts movies, Susan (Melissa McCarthy in another undercover disguise) fights an assassin (Morena Baccarin) with pots, pans, and other kitchen utensils. Although I found the scene broadly exciting, I observed myself engaging in little, if any, moment-by-moment rooting. The fight was unfolding so fast in what Bordwell (2002) has called 'intensified continuity' style that whilst I could comprehend the general action I found it difficult to hope and fear for specific actions or outcomes beyond a broad 'I hope Susan survives'. Towards the end of the fight, however, when the film switched to slow motion again as Susan thrust out a kitchen knife, this response pattern was noticeably reversed.

Suddenly I was clearly presented with an either/or outcome I had a strong preference for.

As the steel blade headed towards the assassin's conspicuously open palm, I picked up the cue, inferred an imminent stabbing, and fretted.

I desperately hoped the knife missed the assassin's hand, even though such an outcome would be favourable to Susan's survival and her mission's overall success that I had been rooting for globally. The impact of egocentric distress upon my preferred narrative outcome at this moment thus became transparent as I experienced sudden preference reversal at the local level, swapping my 'side-taking' to save myself from harm. And when the knife finally squelched straight through the assassin's palm in ultra-vivid slow motion, I writhed in embodied pain.

The same local preference reversal, prompted by the explicit and drawn out struggle over its ugly occurrence, would seem able to account for my fleeting fear that the sex trafficker's face will be sliced in half by the hero in *Taken* (2008).

As their arms wrestle for control of the blade in distressing close up, the either/or outcome is obvious, allowing for a mental preference to be made. In contrast, the bad guy's eventual demise just minutes later (a brutal stabbing to the stomach with his own knife) occurs in such a burst of short shots and unclear action that, like much of the kitchen fight above in *Spy*, it fails to present a clear narrative question allowing me to hope and fear for one outcome or the other. Hence the anxiety and concern I apparently held for the sex trafficker evaporates again, as I am denied the opportunity to even express a predilection regarding his eventual demise.

Forced-choice questions are arguably one of the movie magician's most powerful tools, granting the ability to frame in and out moments the audience can 'care' about. Effectively filmmakers can deliberately or inadvertently force viewers' rooting choices through the either/or narrative questions they encourage and the answers they offer (and conversely those questions they discourage and answers they deny). This may help to explain my enigmatic response to 'Bruno and the Lighter' in *Strangers on a Train* (1951).

In another instance of 'researcher-as-subject *self*-experimentation' (Corti et al. 2015, p. 289, emphasis in original), I re-edited the scene to appear as if Bruno was attempting to retrieve the lighter *at* the carnival moments before planning to plant it there, and *as* Guy was arriving to stop him. Bruno enters the carnival at night then drops the lighter *inside*.

He struggles to retrieve it…

Meanwhile, Guy arrives and looks around the carnival in search of Bruno.

By removing the physical distance between Bruno and Guy (which, in the original is completely different cities) and the temporal distance until Bruno intends to plant the lighter, this version arguably implies a much clearer either/or choice between Bruno's imminent framing of Guy or the protagonist's ability to stop him. My response noticeably changed from the overt desire that Bruno retrieve the lighter in Hitchcock's original scene to a desire that Guy will find Bruno in time in the above edit. Even if attachment advocates insist this is because I have adopted Guy's goal, it again demonstrates that desired narrative outcomes are dependent on the questions we are prompted with and the options we are given. These factors may invert suspense and side-taking.

4. Onscreen Information Is Selective

Framing effects also extend the information included or omitted beyond the erotetic questions cued to influence our moment-by-moment hopes and fears for narrative outcomes. Consider the international release of *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), which included a scene deleted from the North American version. As the henchman is flattened under the Austin's steamroller as described earlier, the movie dissolves into a matched shot of a rolling pin.

A clichéd suburban housewife, played by former 'Bond girl' Lois Chiles, is rolling out dough in her kitchen.

The telephone rings.

'Hello? Yes. This is Mrs. Harwin. Yes. My husband is a henchman in Dr. Evil's private army'.

She listens intently, undistracted as her son wanders in and searches the fridge.

'…What? Oh my God!'.

She hangs up in a daze. Turns to her son.

'Sit down, Billy. I've got some bad news. …Your stepfather was run over by a steamroller.'

'But Mom, since Dad left, Steve's been like a father to me.'

She comforts him with a warm embrace and some words of wisdom:

'People never think how things affect the family of a henchman.'

This lack of thought for henchmen and their family is primarily the result of narration, where framing information out can be as influential as framing it in. '[P]ersonal information makes the crime that much more horrible', claimed Hitchcock in direct reference to the sharp rise of movie violence in the 1970s that arrived without an associated rise in suspense, 'because you…can relate to the effects the murder will have on their relatives and the lives of others' (cited in Allen Leider 1978/2015, p. 358). Where Vaage argues that access to such narrative information aids construction of pleas for excuses on behalf of *favoured* characters, allowing us to 'morally disengage' and explain away their transgressions (2015a, p. 47), the same process might also apply equally to *unfavoured* characters but simply go unnoticed because it is typically avoided in popular drama. That is, by deliberately framing out evidence of a henchman's family, his generosity to fellow workers, or his misgivings about his criminal career, mainstream movies ensure viewers are simply unable to take this information into consideration when computing moral judgment and empathic concern during suspense and side-taking.

Vaage and Raney may protest that our attention to such information is selective, slanted in favour of characters with which we hand an emotional bond.[125] They might also insist that Bandura's moral disengagement techniques are tailor-made for moviegoers to forego moral deliberation to stay loyal to a character. Whenever 'ordinary people' participate in atrocities, techniques such as dehumanization, euphemistic labeling, moral justification and more (Bandura 1990) are typically offered to explain this unexpected immoral behaviour. Thus we might be inclined to apply this same explanation when ordinary viewers participate in immoral suspense and side-taking at the movies. Moral disengagement is thought to be achieved through 'cognitive restructuring of inhuman conduct into a benign or worthy one' via these techniques (Bandura 1999, p. 193). The prime reason that perpetrators are assumed to do this, rather than simply take Raney's cognitive miser route and keep an immoral act a secret, is the purported dissonance that

arises between the desire to see oneself as a moral person and the reality of one's inhumane conduct (Hindriks 2015, p. 242; see also Aquino et al. 2005, p. 386).[126] Given my earlier claim that cognitive dissonance theory is incorrect in assuming that the human mind cannot hold contradictory beliefs without causing crippling psychological distress (see Kurzban & Apktipis 2007), moral disengagement theory must be questioned.

This is not to argue that Bandura's listed techniques aren't widely used in everyday life, simply that they need not mark a special instance of 'psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct' (Bandura 1999, p. 193). To claim that some instances are morally legitimate and some are not is to set up simplistic distinctions between good and evil. Moreover, if moral disengagement theory is favoured for its ability to explain why people engage in behaviour they usually condemn, this is dependent on the view that holding contradictory beliefs causes cognitive dissonance, which compels people to resolve it by reinterpreting their actions as moral. But if cognitive dissonance theory is mistaken, moral disengagement is unnecessary and there may be another perfectly reasonable explanation for this behaviour.

The egocentric benefit of following immoral orders, stealing something when no one will ever find out, or betraying a friend or family member when not doing so will cost us, would seem sufficient motivation in many instances. What may prevent us from accepting this explanation is both its presumed cynicism and the comfort that retaining an intuitive belief in 'moral character' grants us about our conspecifics. But our reluctance to engage in immoral activity may not arise from altruistic impulses or a deep commitment to moral principles; it might often be the mere result of egocentric interests and a fear of moral condemnation. Where moral disengagement is seen as a special process that explains away unexpected immoral behaviour, I contend that Bandura's techniques are involved in *all* moral debate, even that which is said to lead to 'humane' outcomes. We are always arguing about which rules to apply, where the transgression lies, whether it was intentional, accidental, minor, significant, or even warranted, and framing these arguments automatically involve dehumanization, euphemistic labeling, moral justification and so on (Bandura 1990). Such techniques may be often in service of our biases towards particular people (including ourselves), but our ability to achieve this successfully is dependent on the evidence before us.

For instance, if our friend gets caught red-handed engaging in 'inhumane' conduct, we would not typically attempt to deny their involvement in the face of hard evidence. Instead, we might seek to justify their actions after the fact with statements such as, 'He deserved it anyway' or 'At least she didn't...'. This helps account for Lieberman and Linke's (2007) finding that family and friends were adjudged as guilty of theft as were strangers, but also

claimed to be more remorseful and therefore worthy of less punishment. In other words, where evidence of the immoral act was inescapable, the intensions behind the act, the nature of their perpetrator's character, and how remorseful they were was open to debate and to biased speculation driven by other concerns. Thus whilst there is room for argument over the interpretation of the action and any punishment it may warrant, which is where partiality and Vaage's 'pleas for excuses' may come into play, we are often at the mercy of the information before us and the clarity of signals it presents for moral computation. And as cinematic narration often grants us clear-cut evidence of 'immoral' action, we may frequently feel like the participants in Lieberman and Linke's study, forced to condemn indisputably immoral acts by characters we have affection for and instead excuse them after the fact based on biased speculation about their intention and remorse.

This is no minor point, for rooting is thought to be influenced by the moral value we assign to *impending* outcomes, not completed outcomes. That is, rooting for narrative outcomes is about future events. If our immediate impulse is to condemn inescapably immoral events we infer will unfold — by which I mean those acts or events which we are well aware most of our community will typically adjudge as immoral — this would automatically encourage us to root against our beloved characters when they pursue such acts, rather than root for their successful completion as Vaage suggests.[127] Our ability to excuse Archie Bunker or Tony Soprano after the fact may smack of bias, but this does not necessarily impact moral intuitions influencing our hopes and fears for future narrative outcomes they pursue. It does, however, suggest that our willingness to indulge in immoral suspense and side-taking, which Vaage and Raney view (at least in part) as the result of moral disengagement techniques, might depend on the quality of evidence we are presented with. Moreover, our willingness to remain loyal to onscreen characters we like and to offer biased judgment of their imminent acts may often prove impotent in the face of such evidence.

'I don't deserve this. To die like this…', pleads sheriff Little Bill (Gene Hackman), bleeding at the feet of antihero cowboy, William Munny (Clint Eastwood), in *Unforgiven* (1992).

'Deserve's got nothin' to do with it', growls Munny, raising his shotgun – –

– – and blowing the helpless lawman's head off. But for viewers taken aback by Munny's cold-blooded act, quite contrary to his claim, 'deserve' appears to have plenty to do with it.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle noted that 'pity is aroused by *unmerited* misfortune' (Butcher 1911, p. 45, emphasis added). This implies that where undeserved misfortune will induce sympathy, deserved misfortune will be welcomed as just desserts. Many centuries later, Zillmann and Cantor (1977) made just this claim:

> Observers…develop notions of "deservingness" based on a protagonist's behaviour: Thus, a viewer may be expected to respond positively when a protagonist receives the treatment he [sic] is seen to deserve, but to respond negatively when the outcome seems unjustified and unfair (cf. Heider, 1958) (Zillmann & Cantor 1977, pp. 156-157).[128]

Heider's notion of *deservingness*, to which Zillmann and Cantor appeal above, may be crucial to the computation of hope and fear for narrative outcomes. In the above scene from *Unforgiven*, viewers may well sense that the punishment does not fit the crime. Little Bill is an amiable man who desperately wishes to preserve law and order preserved in his little hometown. Despite torturing fellow killer-for-hire, Ned (Morgan Freeman), to an unexpected death trying to learn of Munny's identity, I strongly suspect that few viewers

feel the wounded sheriff *deserves* to die like that. This feeling, presumably born of moral judgment, may influence the outcome we root for as Munny raises his shotgun, so much so that it outweighs any supposed partiality we have towards the hero and his goals.[129]

Audience desire for equitable retribution is suggested by empirical research. Zillmann and Bryant (1975) found that seven-year-old to eight-year-old children reported significantly decreased enjoyment when the 'good' prince protagonist in an audio-visual fairytale either under- or over-punished the 'bad' prince antagonist for his deeds. Four-year-old children did not demonstrate the same pattern, preferring greater punishment to the bad prince without regard to appropriate levels for the crime committed, implying that this sense of equitable retribution is socially learned. Zillmann and Bryant (1974) also found support for the influence of 'retaliatory equity' in the appreciation of humorous vignettes amongst adult audiences, whilst Raney (2002, 2005) offers evidence that adult enjoyment is impaired when a perpetrator is over or under-punished on a television crime show.

It is also not hard to spot *deservingness* cues in Hitchcock's own descriptions of scenarios that typically induce suspense across moviegoers. 'If you see a man with a club coming up behind an innocent person', explained the director in 1968, 'you know more than the innocent person does, and suspense is created' (cited in Thomas 1973, p. 31). The inclusion of 'innocent' is hardly accidental in his brief illustration. Imagine if Hitchcock had instead said, 'If you see a man with a club coming up behind a *guilty* person' or 'If you see an innocent man with a club coming up behind an *evil* person'. Intuitively, the effect seems entirely different. Closer inspection of his 1976 retelling of the 'Hitchcock's Thief' tale also reveals it to be peppered with such qualifiers, suggesting that deservingness appraisal is a common process influencing participatory response during suspense.

> Audiences are very strange. For example, if you see a burglar in the bedroom of *a well-to-do-woman* and he's stealing her *jewelry*, and you cut to the front door of her coming in…They want him to get away. "Quick, you're going to get caught." They don't sympathize with the victim at all (cited in Macklin 1976/2014, p. 51, emphasis added).

The inclusion of a *well-to-do-woman* does not seem incidental to the effect Hitchcock aims to convey. 'Rich Woman Loses Jewelry' is hardly a headline likely to garner much sympathy from the general public, hence his set-up appears deliberately designed to enhance the point that an ideal audience can feel strangely indifferent to a woman's misfortune and anxious instead about a burglar's escape.

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Consider how viewers/listeners might react differently if the bedroom belonged to a *poor* woman, or if the jewelry was a *cherished gift* from her deceased husband. All this aligns with Zillmann and Raney's empirical findings above and serves to suggest that 'An eye for an eye' is more than a mere motto. One part of our hypocritical mind may feel compelled to root for outcomes we deem morally deserved, even if this flies in the face of our emotional 'attachment' to characters onscreen.

'We are led to care about the characters and to hope they will get what's coming to them', wrote Bruce F. Kawin during his brief account of 'rooting interest' in *How Movies Work* quoted at the beginning of our investigation (1992, p. 63). However, Kawin fails to fully consider how 'what's coming to them' operates in competition with other deserved outcomes for other characters. The hero may deserve to win the tournament...but not if it means another competitor is unable to play for his child's kidney transplant. What a character deserves changes dynamically based on current information, and what we believe they deserve globally in the long run may not be the same thing we believe they deserve locally right now. These issues potentially put deservingness at odds with our dispositional biases towards characters.

Norman Feather has spent the past two decades expanding on Heider's (1958) notion of deservingness and its influence on moral judgment and emotional attitude to other people's actions. Feather has consistently found experimental support for the moderating effect of 'like' and 'dislike' for an agent upon the deservingness appraisal for potential

outcomes during hypothetical moral scenarios (see, for instance, Feather 1992, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2014). However, Feather makes clear that *partiality* is but one of a several moderating factors upon the more central variable of *deservingness* that predicts our moral judgment of others' transgressions. Moreover, partiality is not the singular nor most powerful influence upon deservingness. Additional factors include 'perceived responsibility for the action' (which aligns with *intention*) and 'perceived social identity (in-group/out-group membership)' (Feather 2014, p. 40). 'Dislike' is not a switch that instantly inverts our hoped for outcomes during rooting. Although disposition towards characters (i.e. *partiality*) is clearly capable of mediating deservingness to some extent as Zillmann claimed in 1977, it certainly does not guarantee the direction of our preferred narrative outcomes.[130] And Hitchcock's Thief makes this perfectly clear.

> The person who is prying need not be a sympathetic figure. The onlooker is still apprehensive. Of course, *if the person prying around is a sympathetic person, then you have double* [the suspense] (Hitchcock cited in Truffaut, Hitchcock & Scott 1962, 27:33, emphasis added).

In other words, while the thought of someone somewhat undeserving of impending suffering is somewhat distressing, the thought of someone utterly undeserving of impending suffering is utterly distressing. Witnessing a man clubbed to death is distressing, but witnessing an innocent man clubbing is even *more* distressing. This fact led Hitchcock to lament a great mistake in the dramatic construction of the State of Liberty climax in *Saboteur* (1942). 'If we'd had the hero instead of the villain hanging in mid-air', he told Truffaut and Scott, 'the audience's anguish would have been much greater' (1967/1984, p. 147; see also Bogdanovich 1963). And thus the limited moral latitude that disposition is able to apply to deservingness may explain Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger's (2007) finding that readers of a news story still reported feeling suspense for outcomes favourable to overtly unlikeable protagonists who illegally sold children or weapons — but *at a reduced rate*.

Despite Zillmann's long-term interest in the psychology of suspense, like Carroll he has somehow managed to avoid analysing any of Hitchcock's counterclaims about immoral suspense and side-taking, let alone any movie scenes that would seem to achieve this. Moral disposition studies by Zillmann and his colleagues have tended to focus instead upon scenarios that contain what Murray Smith (1995a) refers to as 'Manichean' moral structures rather than 'graduated' tales with less black and white characters and conflicts. Doing so has arguably collapsed the difference between *deservingness* and *disposition*. Just as Zillmann and Smith claim that our moral disposition/allegiance is dynamically processed across the narrative (see Smith 1995a, p. 189; Zillmann 1991, p. 154), the level of our deservingness appears to be dynamically (re)assessed for each and every

impending outcome and often appears limited to the local event itself in isolation from global concerns.

Moral sanction, 'a readiness to accept, in moral terms, observed outcomes' (Zillmann 2007, pp. 175-176), does not appear open to abuse. We cannot instantly adjudge our enemy deserving of a beating simply because we do not like her or have an allegiance with her enemy. For example, in *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) the closeted cowboy hero, Ennis (Heath Ledger) sits on the grass with his baby and young daughter enjoying the fourth of July fireworks with other families. Two drunken Hells Angel-types sit down behind them, speaking loudly and lewdly. Ennis tells them to watch their language. At first I feel fearful. The bikers are big and burly; much bigger than Ennis. There are also two of them. Yet when the hero rises I sense an opportunity and feel the familiar desire to see these insensitive arseholes taught a lesson. I hope Ennis, with the aid of Hollywood convention, may somehow achieve this. When he obliges, shoving one man aside and swiftly kicking the another in the face with his cowboy boots, I am shocked, sickened, and hope to hell he stops. This effect is certainly aided by the lack of action music or cheering crowd around him, Ennis' wife cowering, and the wounded biker pleading on the ground.

Comeuppance cannot be too far over- or under-stepped without inciting outrage, disgust, and a potential preference reversal — a fact also demonstrated in Raney's aforementioned research on criminal retribution on television (2002; 2005). We might speculate that our ability to feel reduced suspense for lewd bikers, saboteurs, and illegal traders of children and weapons, rather than outright hope that they come to any potential harm, is in part due to onlookers' need for evidence to justify their moral judgments. Whether these are habitual and nonconscious processes that protect them in case of

attack by those side-take with these disreputable agents (DeScioli & Kurzban 2013) or whether they are conscious processes in rational moral deliberation triggered when there is mental conflict (Greene 2013), the impact upon moral-partial models of suspense and side-taking should be clear. Although a pre-existing emotional disposition might soften condemnation to one's friend or hasten it to one's foe, it may ultimately be insufficient to overcome the weight of evidence against that judgment, such as when a preferred character is poised to kill in cold blood, or a despised character is about to be brutally tortured.[131] It is also subject to rapid reevaluation at any moment. Hence ongoing statements in the disposition literature, such as

> [L]iking invites overly favorable, forgiving assessments, whereas disliking biases in the opposite direction (Zillmann 2006a, p. 230).

should not be taken to imply that these biases are powerful enough to invert our moral judgment and influence suspense and side-taking. Zillmann himself makes this clear elsewhere in the same chapter:

> Within this good-versus-evil dichotomy, the *strength* of these affective dispositions is expected to determine the *depth* of empathy and counter-empathy [i.e. antipathy], of the anticipatory emotions of hope or fear [i.e. suspense], and of joyous emotions as hoped for outcomes materialize versus distressing emotions as feared outcomes do (2006a, pp. 234-235, emphasis added).

Disposition towards a character is therefore not strictly a cause of suspense and rooting but an *intensifier*, as Hitchcock implied. Statements within disposition theory may therefore be accused of continually sending the wrong message about the strength of dispositional partiality's influence upon suspense and side-taking that help reinforce simplistic assumptions about the causal power of character attachment and inadvertently serve to mask the influence of competing motives during moment-by-moment rooting for narrative outcomes at the movies.[132]

Conclusion

Witnessing events may produce intense anxiety in onlookers despite their physical and social safely from all outcomes. Traditionally this paradoxical behaviour has been explained through the lens of *empathic concern*, where sympathy and/or empathy for those involved encourages a desire for particular outcomes. This in turn has led to a search for factors that may activate and deactivate these processes, resulting in theories that stress the importance of *morality* and *partiality*. The enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking is therefore explained as the result of either moral relativity (Carroll, Zillmann, Smith) that renders it all but non-existent, or moral bias or error (Raney, Vaage, Plantinga, Smith) which retains the presumed central position of morality during moment-by-moment

rooting for narrative outcomes. Regardless of the veracity of these accounts, both of which I have already questioned at length, there is another line of investigation that arguably offers an improved answer to the enigma and poses further challenge to the strength and exclusivity of these claims. Vivid mental 'associations' are capable of stirring strong witness emotions that are pleasant or unpleasant in and of themselves, even in the absence of character. And thus the mysterious rooting responses in Hitchcock's discussions and in my own viewing history may not be cases of moral bias or sudden shifts in attachment, but merely moments where concern for character and concern for oneself are at odds and moral sympathy is overwhelmed by amoral self-interest. Moreover, this egocentric concern may extend beyond harm, encompassing a desire for knowledge, closure, titillation, and more. Competing motives such as these, which may be individually present and encourage unique preferences at any time, might help make sense of strange and sudden shifts in suspense and side-taking. By controlling cues that encourage these responses, so-called immoral suspense and side-taking can be switched on and off through the moment-by-moment information presented onscreen, the local narrative questions viewers are cued to ask, and the unfolding answers they are reasonably permitted to forecast. Although narrative participants tend to think of themselves as in complete and conscious control of what they wish and hope for, they are very much at the mercy of the movie magician and her pre-planned appeal to the viewer's many competing *empathic* and often amoral *egocentric* concerns.

Conclusion

Aim

This study sought to investigate the origin of viewer preferences for particular narrative outcomes in popular cinema under the belief that understanding this magical movie effect might provide grounds for its enhanced construction and enjoyment alongside its improved aesthetic and ideological critique. As 'rooting' occurs across genres and throughout individual films, my main focus confined itself to those moments where this participatory response is most explicitly given voice: *scenes of suspense*.

Noël Carroll's influential theory of suspense proposes that (relative) *moral good* is the overriding factor that makes common response in the cinema possible, thereby making clear predictions about the kind of outcomes viewers will root for at the movies. Alongside the notions of 'moral disposition' (Zillmann 1991, 2000) and 'moral allegiance' (Smith, M 1995a, 1999, 2010a) which claim viewers emotionally attach to (relatively) virtuous characters and root for outcomes in their favour, Carroll's intuitive theory has strong explanatory power given the strong melodramatic undertones in popular cinema. However, its emphasis on *morality* and *partiality* means that moments where viewers root for immoral outcomes and/or characters are considered impossible, and the mere existence of these moments would falsify the entire foundation of, and demand immediate revision to, Carroll's theory. And there is good reason to believe that immoral suspense and side-taking is a reality.

The most famous filmmaker in history frequently made claims about the ease of manipulating audiences into rooting for immoral outcomes, though he remained baffled by the psychological processes behind this response. 'I've studied audiences all my life', admitted Alfred Hitchcock, 'But I still don't know why it is that when a man is burglarizing a house, stealing a woman's jewelry, and we see her coming in, the audience is rooting for him — "Hurry up, get out, she's coming"' (cited in Morehouse 1972, p. 26). Film critics and theorists have also pointed to this effect in many scenes throughout Hitchcock's career. With reference to Carroll's theory, the following research question was thus posed:

> What combination of aesthetic maneuvers and psychological mechanisms might help us understand *the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking* – those mysterious moments where viewers find themselves rooting for immoral outcomes and/or characters?

In seeking answers to this question, my 'pilot study' on rooting for narrative outcomes aimed to map out uncharted territory, collect preliminary data and contest current claims, develop questions for future research, and convince film theorists, critics, practitioners, craft teachers, and audience members of the importance of this neglected topic.

Method

Frustrated by the division between theory and practice, my research sought to take an inclusive stance to its subject matter. This involved consideration of the phenomenon under investigation from four key perspectives: **theory**, **film**, **craft**, and **viewer**. It was felt that bringing all viewpoints to the table might help avoid mutilating the reality behind our seemingly complex motives to root for moment-by-moment narrative outcomes. This belief was built upon the nature of this participatory response, its central place in movie reception and production, its striking theoretical neglect, and the many intuitive and ideologically-convenient claims made about it in the absence of adequate research.

The same philosophy of inclusion was applied to the theory surveyed. Rather than focus on film studies or adopt an interdisciplinary approach that allows for the introduction of new theories within pre-set boundaries, the investigation embraced transdisciplinarity by ignoring artificial distinctions and incorporating any information that might enhance our understanding of the topic at hand. Although this has resulted in an emphasis on psychology, the nature of these was in no way systematically sought or preordained. There were, however, two notable exceptions to this philosophy of inclusion throughout this study. The increased emphasis placed upon Alfred Hitchcock and I, the viewer, were justified on purely pragmatic grounds given the access these avenues offered to a large body of relevant data. Hitchcock's claims about mass emotional response at the movies also lent added relevance to my own self-reports, suggesting that they may not be entirely idiosyncratic and could well generalise to other viewers.

The study sought to put Carroll's theory of suspense to the test against autoethographic data drawn from a variety of personal 'rooting' responses recorded over the last two decades, in combination with pre-existing viewer reports scattered across the literature and craft claims made by film practitioners led by the Master of Suspense, Alfred Hitchcock. Rather than raise examples that fit the theory, which may well constitute the vast majority of cases, the primary focus was on contrary responses that might lend insight into how Carroll's claims could be improved upon. This follows his own adherence to fallibilism, an approach that does not view its 'theories as infallibly true, but only as better justified, at this point in the debate, than their competitors' (Carroll 1992, p. 201).

Previous attempts to extend Carroll's theory by proposing solutions to the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking, such as Raney and Vaage's moral bias and error account (Raney 2004, 2010, 2011; Vaage 2015a), and Murray Smith's 'amoral' mirroring and emotional contagion claims (2003/2010), were also critically considered in an effort to unearth a more adequate answer to the research question.

Findings

'The purpose of this paper is to develop an adequate theory of film suspense', wrote Noël Carroll at the outset of his seminal 1984 essay outlining his moral structure of suspense (p. 95). Whilst Carroll achieved this aim in the short-term, producing a stunningly simple and intuitive theory capable of being put to actual practical use by filmmakers in the prediction of specific audience effects, the lack of further development to fully acknowledge and explain immoral suspense and side-taking in the three decades since leads me to the unfortunate conclusion that his theory must be now considered inadequate. Numerous rooting responses reported throughout this investigation in tandem with practitioner claims about the manipulation of audience response suggest that immoral suspense and side-taking is possible. Although Carroll has never explicitly claimed that morality is the sole reason behind the narrative outcomes viewers root for during cinematic suspense, this is implicit within his theory and the lengths to which he has gone to dismiss counterexamples to it. Carroll has made no reference to the limitations of his theory outside of the initial troublesome Hitchcock scenes he raised in the footnote of his original article, nor has he ever openly considered the existence of other potential (amoral) causes of suspense.

Even if Carroll is correct that moral virtue applies to most, or indeed all, cases of suspense, there is no reason to assume it is the *only* influence. And if we are willing to accept that there may be other influences, and that these might operate independently of morality, then there is also no particular reason to believe they cannot co-exist alongside, pull against, and occasionally outweigh it to induce these mysterious moral inversions of suspense that Carroll struggles to accept and explain.

In contrast to this view, the few and fleeting explanations so far offered for immoral suspense and side-taking have tended to reinforce, rather than challenge, the dominance of *morality* and *partiality* by attempting to explain we may either misstep through moral bias and error (Plantinga, Raney, Vaage) or are temporarily overcome in our character preferences by emotional contagion (Smith, Vaage). A number of potential problems with both solutions have been outlined in this inquiry, including questionable claims about hardwired moral emotions, mirroring, cognitive dissonance, and the evolved nature of moral judgment itself. Whether or not these explanations are viable rests on complex and unresolved biocultural debates. More problematic than their proposed part in suspense and side-taking, however, is that their assumed importance arguably allows and even encourages film theorists to continually overlook additional motives for our moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes and to thus overestimate the influence of *morality* and *partiality* in this process.

In the absence of *a priori* assumptions that viewers instinctively root for outcomes favouring particular moral values and/or characters, we might consider the possibility that Carroll's cued erotetic narrative questions (e.g. Will the bomb go off or not?), which enable the anticipatory emotions of hope and fear that fuel suspense and side-taking in the first place, involve many of the same psychological processes as any other decision-making situations. The field of behavioural economics dedicated to the study of how human beings make real life decisions, and all but ignored by suspense theorists, stresses the existence of multiple motives and contextually sensitive triggers. This links neatly with DeScioli and Kurzban's modular approach to mind, which permits a state of mental hypocrisy, competing concerns and co-existing beliefs. Thus *morality* and *partiality* can conceivably be thought of as influencing factors without being 'The Source' of rooting for narrative outcomes so often implied across the literature.

Where Vaage (2015a) emphasises partiality as a major influence upon moral judgment, she arguably underplays personal concern. Given that self-interest often appears to be more important than either the interest of others to whom we are partial or to our dedication to moral values in our real life behaviour and decision-making, this would seem problematic. Although Vaage and Raney (2004) both touch on self-interest when raising viewer desire to be entertained, they fail to break down the overly broad concept of 'entertainment' and 'narrative desire' (Currie 1999) into more specific, testable claimed motives such as curiosity, desire for closure, titillation, and laughter. Furthermore, their focus on pleasure completely overlooks the influence of personal distress such as dread of, and aversion to, impending outcomes during moment-by-moment rooting responses. Similarly, though Plantinga (2009) made the crucial distinction between *sympathetic* and *direct* emotions, and even recognised that suspense, curiosity, erotic desire, and disgust could be felt independent of empathic concern for character (p. 72 & p. 209), the significance of this claim upon continuing suspense and side-taking assumptions, and *morality* and *partiality* explanations in particular, was not fully considered.

Recognising the co-existence of competing concerns may be an important step in unlocking the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. At any moment we might theoretically abandon *morality* or *partiality* because the ultimate determining factor is the calculation of our *own* costs and benefits. Amoral factors such as egocentric distress and egocentric desire may compete with moral judgment. When the costs become too high, we may be quite willing to abandon both our preferred characters and our moral proclaimed moral values. Hence where previous accounts of suspense and side-taking have focused almost exclusively on *empathic* concern, simply acknowledging the existence of multiple independent *egocentric* concerns allows that viewers may feel any

number of seemingly contradictory emotions and motivations which encourage competing hopes and fears for narrative outcomes.

Furthermore, changes in dramatic context, cued narrative questions and competing outcomes offered to the viewer may trigger or permit particular concerns to momentarily take precedence, producing strange and sudden shifts in rooted-for outcomes that could solve the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking. Thus whilst Vaage's contention that 'narratives hardly force anyone to do anything' may be technically true, practically it is not (2015a, p. 71). The forced-choice nature of Carroll's bimodal narrative questions alone is enough to coerce viewers into hoping for the less undesirable outcome *all things considered*, thereby threatening to trump their own proclaimed moral judgment and character preferences. Where Carroll might insist this does not break his moral structure of suspense, as the outcome is still moral *relative* to the other option, forced-choice is clearly capable of breaking partiality claims to which he has turned when 'moral good' is not self-evident in a rooted-for outcome. The either/or narrative questions underlying his theory of suspense provide the grounds to falsify claims that rooting is reliably steered by his moral allegiance or non-passing pro-attitude (i.e. *partiality*), whenever equally favoured characters come into conflict (call it 'Sophie's Choice suspense'). Thus even if *morality* is a key component of suspense and side-taking, Carroll would seem to require another backup other than character to turn to whenever the 'moral good' of a rooted-for outcome is not self-evident, or to at least accept that there may be influences beyond it that may come into play.[146]

Stated most simply, if Kurzban is right about the hypocritical make-up of the human mind (see Barrett, HC & Kurzban 2006; Kurzban & Aktipis 2007), we might predict that when the personal cost of the 'standard' moral answer in a particular situation is too great, viewers may experience a preference inversion and abandon it in favour of the benefits offered by the opposite outcome.[147] Likewise, whilst partiality serves an obvious benefit to us, if it comes at too great a cost, we may also reach a tipping point where its influence is outweighed, leading us to abandon our family and friends. Given that the events are 'only a movie' and our relationship with onscreen characters during a feature-length film is infinitely less social than everyday life, aside Zillmann's (2010) and Vaage's (2015a) claim that we relate to characters as friends, *empathic* concerns such as morality and partiality may often be impotent in the face of *egocentric* influences.

Controlling narrational cues can also prevent Carroll's either/or erotetic questions from ever being asked, or deny the temporal space to compute a participatory response before a narrative question is resolved (as in battle sequences that stress spectacle over local suspense). And thus I propose that the scarcity of rooting for immoral characters or outcomes typically taken as evidence of the centrality of moral judgment, the power of partiality, and their subsequent influence on empathic concern is due in large part to popular narrative's deliberate framing out of cues that would enable and encourage immoral suspense and side-taking. This involves the omission of opportunities for viewers to forecast misfortune facing these characters, escape routes from its seemingly inevitable occurrence, information that might lead to the appraisal that they are undeserving of the impending outcome (regardless of our general antipathy or indifference towards them), and alternative outcomes the viewer might otherwise favour.

In sum, the following findings contest existing film suspense and side-taking literature:

- Not all rooted-for narrative outcomes or characters viewers favour are (relatively) 'moral'.

- Emotional bonds to character are frequently, if temporarily, broken.

- Facial feedback and moral bias is suspect and, regardless, an insufficient answer to the enigma at hand.

- The human mind is perfectly capable of housing competing concerns and beliefs.

- Moral deservingness for impending outcomes is distinct from, and influenced by, affective disposition.

- Moral sympathetic concern has been emphasised at the expense of amoral egocentric concerns.

- Moral judgment may be more strategic, impartial, and 'amoral' than assumed.

- Narrative framing can withhold escape routes or moral sympathetic information that may prevent or dissuade viewers from hoping for outcomes in favour of particular characters.

- Forced-choice narrative questions during suspense enhance the illusion of attachment and a deep commitment to certain goals and outcomes which may be mere momentary preference over the other outcome on offer at this particular context *all things considered*.

Practical Implications

'[T]he spectator's concern for a character within an evolving narrative situation is typically seen as the backbone of spectator emotion', observed Carl Plantinga a decade ago (2006a, p. 219). Although Plantinga has worked tirelessly since to extend the accepted taxonomy of emotional response at the movies, the implications for suspense and side-taking have yet to be fully explored. The findings in this thesis suggest that filmmaking practitioners have been encouraged to believe an 'attachment fallacy' regarding the origin of ongoing audience hopes and fears for narrative outcomes. This has only served to mask the many other forces at work when computing our predilections for narrative outcomes. By seeing our suspense and subsequent rooting for narrative outcomes as arising from more than moral or empathic concerns, we can begin to understand how complex moment–by–moment participatory responses may result from a mixture of differing sources of egocentric distress and desire during movie reception.

It is also important to stress that whether mere-exposure effect, moral disengagement, cognitive dissonance, mirror neurons, universal expression hypothesis, or dual-process moral judgment claims of which I have raised concerns are valid is no particular argument against the expanded account of suspense and side-taking I am advocating. Disputing this conclusion would instead require a counter-argument that:

a)   denies human beings are able to hold competing concerns, or

b)   claims the influence of egocentric concerns is too weak to overpower empathic and/or moral concerns during moment-by-moment viewing, and

c)   argues that Carroll's narrative questions do not function to offer either/or alternatives during suspense that effectively 'force' viewers to hope and fear for outcomes *all things considered*, or

d)   proposes that immoral suspense and side-taking effects fall into a completely different category to classical suspense that has its unique origins, just as Bordwell (2007) suggested of a distinction between suspense (which involves uncertainty) and dread (which involves certainty).

Rather than adopt an overly simplistic model of the ideal viewer with clear-cut loyalties or moral values in regards to suspense and side-taking, we require a renewed approach which recognises that flesh and blood human beings hold an array of complex and dynamic *competing concerns*. 'Film works on our embodied minds, and the "embodied" part includes a wondrous number of fast, involuntary brain activities', writes Bordwell (2007). But this also suggests that the practical implications of this investigation might extend beyond the production, consumption, and criticism of narrative art and entertainment. Desire for particular outcomes occurs not only during stories on the silver screen, but also during those off, and the same kind of unrecognised factors may

influence our response in important ways when responding to real world tales, which may lead directly to harmful attitudes and actions on a particular event or issue.

All stories are designed to do something to their biocultural human audience, even if this is accidental, unintentional, or ultimately incompetent. Where we are often willing to question the 'facts' of the real world stories we are told, we do not typically question our response to a story or how it might be crafted because we do not tend to think of everyday narrative as a construction like fiction. And therefore we are arguably prone to overestimate our own executive control during response to real world tales and to underestimate narration's fundamental ability to cue and control our emotional and evaluative response. In spite of all the discourse discrediting emotion in favour of reason, we seem to trust our own emotions most, and the result may be to (mis)take our immediate response to real world story as warranted. Seeing the craft on the cinema screen is thus potential practice for seeing the craft behind the stories that matter most: the real world ones told and retold that cause untold suffering to others.

Whether we realise that the moustache twirling antagonist was not shown at home doting on his mother or being bullied in school is not a world changer. After all, it's only a movie. But applying those same techniques to the stories that surround us in our everyday lives, deconstructing the tricks that make us turn against one another, could be crucial in catching ourselves being spun by the web of story for 'evil' ends. 'All artists manipulate their material and thereby, to an extent, their audiences…', writes Stanley J. Solomon. 'But audiences have a responsibility to themselves of intellectual awareness, a need to evaluate not only the effects of the art experience but the procedures and techniques that the artist uses to achieve his [sic] purposes' (1972, p. 5, also cited in Norden 1977). Understanding what happens to each and every one of us when we are confronted with forced choice side-taking scenarios that mix empathic and egocentric interests, activate moral (strategy?) systems, and omit significant information in the appraisal of deservingness may make a positive contribution to a living, breathing victim of these storytelling mechanisms somewhere someday.

Limitations

My findings are limited in several ways. Most obvious are those resulting from sample size. Whilst this study was made possible by adopting the view that common response at the movies is a reality – a claim made by both Carroll and Hitchcock – this in no way equates to the claim that response is universal. More importantly, it overlooks the potentially large array of differences behind this shared suspense and side-taking response that actually led individual viewers to root for that particular outcome at that particular moment. Without the benefit of comparison to data from other viewers responding to the scenes I have reported on throughout this thesis, my autoethnographic data is unable to allow comment on (let alone control for) the impact that differences in gender, culture, sex, age, personal history, political values, and movie preference may or may not play in moment-by-moment rooting for narrative outcomes. Although Carroll and Hitchcock's claims imply that any such differences are overwhelmed by shared psychological concerns, even minimal influences may theoretically be sufficient to turn the scales when other factors lack intensity.

My data also has nothing to say about the influence of viewing environment – including variables such as screen size, audio quality, comfort, and ambiance – upon suspense and side-taking. All may potentially contribute to the intensity of the rooting experience by aiding attention to, and immersion in, unfolding events. An even more important limitation is the impact of social environment in which a movie is viewed, which could conceivably push rooting responses in an entirely different direction. Watching *Star Wars* (1977) with a room full of hardcore fans, for instance, may encourage viewers to take an active interest in outcomes they otherwise would not, just as watching *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) with a Harlem audience might lead some to pervert the film's intended response by shouting at the screen in protest and rooting *against* the portrayed heroics of the Ku Klux Klan.

A final limitation is theoretical. Debates about the nature of morality, emotion, empathy, evolved mechanisms, mental computation, and the modular mind are far from decided. The options I have highlighted also stand in opposition to more mainstream views. Although this is in large part to challenge ideas that I believe hold sway for reasons other than their own explanatory power (i.e., what other ideological benefits their adoption offers), my findings are not entirely dependent on any of the novel psychological theories from DeScioli, Kurzban, Russell, Barrett, and Loewenstein presented here. With or without them, I suggest that my data overwhelmingly indicates that: immoral suspense and side-taking is possible; *egocentric* concerns are often at play in rooting 'choices' and may compete with one another or with *empathic* concerns; and forced-choice and informational framing can greatly influence the outcomes that viewers root for.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to the factors this study is unable to comment upon, such as culture, gender, sex, personal history, audience dynamic, and viewing environment, there are many more lines of investigation that may increase our understanding of rooting for narrative outcomes. We might consider whether genre, fandom, or personality influences rooting patterns, and turn to other storytelling mediums to ask if different techniques are used more or less effectively in text, radio drama, comic books, and theatre to encourage these responses. Following Smith (1995a) and Vaage's (2015a) comments that fiction gives us leave of our standard moral convictions, we may also wonder whether rooting responses somehow differ when witness to live non-fiction events such as sport or other conflicts.

There are also numerous other amoral psychological influences upon suspense and side-taking that might be studied, such as star power, mood, underdog status, or beauty proposed by Plantinga (2009, p. 108; 2010). The so-called 'underdog effect' is especially worthy of pursuit given it is deeply engrained in Hollywood folklore. Audience's apparent love of rooting for an underdog is naturally entwined with attachment claims, but may also relate to increased deservingness appraisal through fewer resources and perceived greater effort (Vandello, Goldschmied & Richards 2007), egocentric concern for enjoyment via enhanced self-image (Kim et al. 2008) or via euphoric emotion upon victory (Zillmann 1983, 2007), or to evolved attention to struggle (Eitzen 2012) or 'the vulnerable' in immediate need that may have served to benefit our genetic population by encouraging protection of unrelated others (Dijker 2014).

David Bordwell (2007) also raises the possibility that 'prototypes of impending danger' such as hanging from a great height, speeding towards an obstacle, and being stalked or pounced upon 'may in themselves trigger a minimal feeling of suspense'. Whether the product of adaptive mechanisms and/or associated learning, more could be done to clarify these claims given the pervasiveness of such imagery in cinematic suspense.

Another fascinating suggestion for further research from Peter DeScioli, who wonders what influence rooting responses at the movies may have on our agreed upon moral rules in the real world. DeScioli writes:

> People might discuss a movie to determine, for instance, whether a friend is obligated to lend money in difficult times. When actual difficult times occur, their discussion could influence their decisions. So, movies can be a basis for policy setting within groups and so some moral judgment around even fictional events could have strategic importance (Personal communication, 2nd July 2014).

Longitudinal studies of the impact of debating movie morality might thus prove valuable.

However, by far the most pressing future research to be undertaken on the issue of immoral suspense and side-taking at the movies involves qualifying the claimed existence of the findings in this thesis via empirical testing, attempting to clarify their workings and quantify their influence. Failing to proceed with such a step would leave these mostly theoretical claims as little more than unsubstantiated hypotheses that happen to provide a convenient excuse for immoral response at the movies. Given the ease with which modern human scientists can now – –

- access diverse participants through affordable online sources like Mechanical Turk

- re-edit existing movie scenes to create manipulated versions of cinematic stimuli

- create online audio-visual surveys with a mixture of quali-quantitative questions

- record talk-aloud protocols during real-time viewing and film follow-up interviews

- gather potentially meaningful eye tracking and heart rate data with low cost technology

– – there is little excuse for failing to submit one's theoretical proposals about audience reception patterns to the test with real viewers. Although appropriate experimental design requires both time and expertise beyond my current resources at this late stage, I offer the following three suggestions as examples of experimental research that might be performed in the future to test some of the findings in this study empirically.

Example 1: Dread

In *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), charming psychopath Vic Vega (Michael Madsen) is left alone with a cop (Kirk Baltz) captured during the jewel-heist-gone-wrong. Vega announces that he is about to torture the cop, not for information but for his own amusement. There is little reason for the audience to doubt Vega, and he proves sickeningly true to his word. 'All you can do is pray for a quick death', says the sadist, 'Which you ain't gonna get.' He points his pistol and smiles from ear to ear as the cop instinctively writhes in his seat.

Rather than pull the trigger, Vega takes his time as promised. He removes a razor, – –

– – slices his helpless victim and hacks off his ear, – –

– – douses him with gasoline – –

– – and opens his – –

– – Zippo lighter in preparation for a showstopping finale.

This increasingly gruesome series of events has clearly been constructed to build in dramatic intensity. But what if we were to re-arrange the sequence so that Vega doused the cop in petrol and opened his lighter *first*, then said 'All you can do is pray for a quick death. Which you ain't gonna get…', before moving onto his razor play and finally pointing his gun directly at the writhing cop, following his movements like a carnival shooter? Following Hitchcock's advice to give the audience as much information as possible, the immediate inference would be that the gasoline covering the cop head-to-toe is a ticking time bomb that will go off when this sicko has finally finished his fun and games. Given the incredible distress that the thought of immolation brings, might some viewers wish to escape this dreadful thought and find themselves actively hoping Vega would just hurry up and pull the trigger so as not to sit through the human barbeque he has promised?

Example 2: Deservingness

In final scene in *Frenzy* (1972), the innocent hero jailed for Rusk's hideous sex crimes, Richard Blaney (Jon Finch), has escaped from a self-induced hospital stay to turn up to Rusk's apartment to bludgeon him – his supposed 'friend' – to death with a steel wrench.

The slow, silent scene encouraging a high level of suspense and uncertainty arguably culminates in an 'instinctive' aversion to Blaney's impending revenge as he raises the heavy instrument high above his head ready to swing down upon the sleeping victim.

As the actor and outcome involved in this brief climactic scene are all-but-unknown to general viewers, the truncated sequence presents a prime opportunity to experimentally manipulate a range of variables that may impact upon moral *deservingness*. Through the simple addition of an opening intertitle (or voiceover montage), these include:

➢ The **crime** previously committed for which the hero seeks revenge:
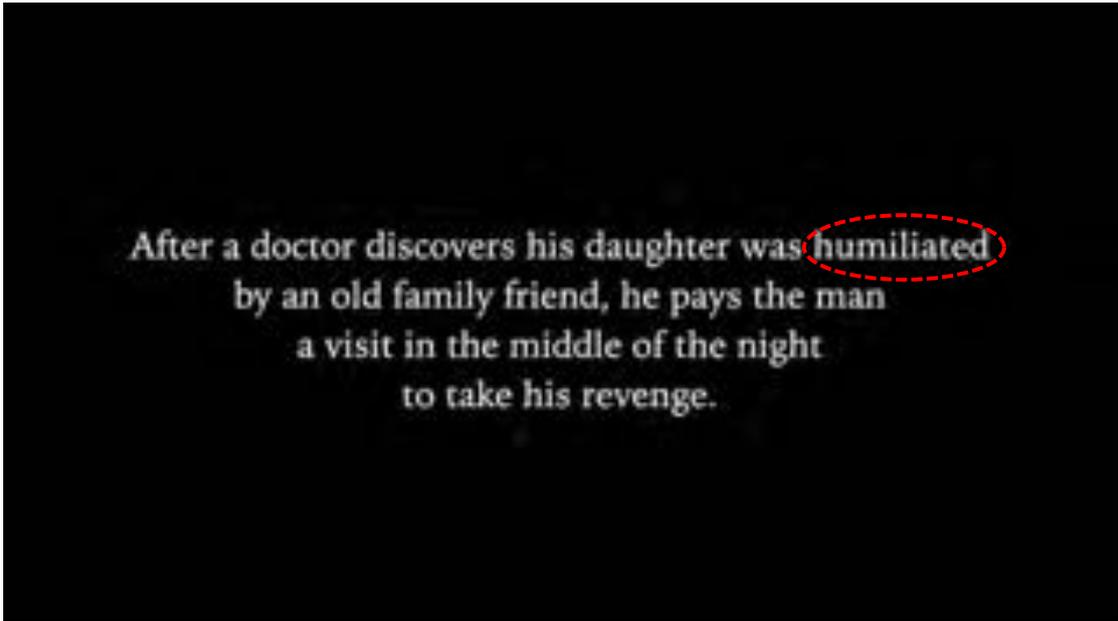
➢ The identity of the **past victim** of the crime previously committed:
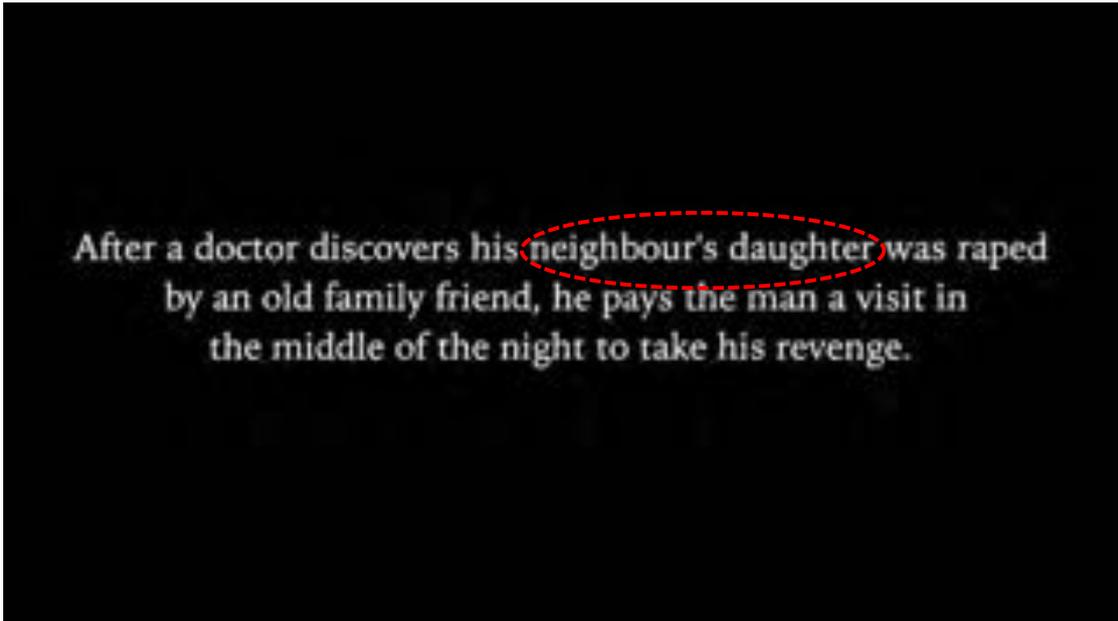
> The **temporal distance** between the previous crime and current revenge:

After a doctor discovers his daughter was raped and killed by an old family friend (10 years ago,) he pays the man a visit in the middle of the night to take his revenge.

> The perceived **urgency** of the revenge act:

After a doctor discovers his daughter was raped and killed by an old family friend who plans to leave the country (before tomorrow's trial,) he pays the man a visit in the middle of the night to take his revenge.

A range of carefully controlled permutations could be created in an attempt to see if hope and fear for Blaney's impending revenge is inverted under certain conditions that influence feelings of *deservingness*. Participants could be asked a several points throughout the sequence to rate their suspense, fear, how much the hero deserves to succeed and the perpetrator deserves his fate, and the level of hope that the sleeping perpetrator is bludgeoned.

Example 3: Curiosity

Half-way through the serial killer thriller *Seven* (1995) comes one of the most compelling foot chases I have ever sat through in the cinema. What seems to distinguish it from many other movie foot chases is that the suspect chased is not only unknown; he is also utterly mysterious. Barely identified suspects may be chased in countless cop dramas, but this movie made the killer almost otherworldly. The chase was his first appearance onscreen, shrouded in darkness in hat and coat, adding to his mysterious nature established in the elaborate, Old Testament murder scenes he had left investigators.

The consequence of this set up was that I was incredibly invested in hoping that Detective David Mills (Brad Pitt) would somehow catch up to the seemingly supernatural killer, for I was unbearably curious as to his identity. This circumstance permits a simple starting test of the influence of curiosity upon suspense by immediate granting full knowledge of the identity of the killer, John Doe (Kevin Spacey), *before* the chase sequence is viewed (whether via re-editing, pre-text, or even openly showing a later sequence out of order). Thus we could compare responses in this condition with the original scene to see if suspense ratings and level of desire that Mills catch the man he doggedly chases drop significantly across viewers. If Loewenstein (1994) is correct that curiosity is an aversive state arising from a gap in knowledge that we wish to close through information gain, ratings for suspense, hope that John Doe is caught up with, and fear that he will not be, should all be reliably higher in the original, UNKNOWN KILLER condition.

Concluding Remarks

'The cinema…', wrote Carl Jung, 'makes it possible to experience without danger all the excitement, passion and desirousness which must be repressed in a humanitarian ordering of life' (1933, p. 219; also cited in Perkins 1972/1991, p. 144).[148] It is precisely this physical safety and the (mostly) private nature of narrative reception that has enabled indulgence in Makavejev and Mortimer's 'illegal operations' in the darkened theatre. But this same fact may have blinded us to the full source of such participatory responses during suspense and side-taking. Although 'it's only a movie' means we can experience these thrills without social or physical danger, this does not mean we are not faced with real psychic cost. In such a light, it is perfectly logical that viewers forgo empathic concerns and are frequently selfish, 'immoral', and loose in their loyalties to character and goal. When the stakes get too high, why bother putting the welfare of imaginary others in imaginary events ahead of our own, very real, egocentric costs and benefits?

'There is always a tendency for researchers to fall in love with the theoretical models that they create', writes art practitioner and educator Derek Pigrum (2009, p. 7). In Carroll and Zillmann's case, I could hardly blame them, for I too have fallen in love with their elegant accounts of suspense and side-taking. But their neatly compatible theories continue to frame the viewer as far too (traditionally) moral and partial. Unfortunately these factors cannot be neatly squared off, and to ignore them would be crippling to the long-term viability of Carroll and Zillmann's astounding theoretical contribution I am committed to improving upon. Considering the full complexity of moment-by-moment audience response, the co-existence of competing *empathic* and *egocentric* concerns, and the apparent ease with which these can be leveraged by limiting information regarding deservingness, escape routes, and impending arousal, it is time for those who truly love these theories to acknowledge their simplifications and meet the challenges this investigation has laid bare head on.

Rooting for outcomes during narrative art and dramatic spectacle is a delightful unplanned consequence of our biocultural being. Like the delight children take in spinning on the spot to make themselves dizzy or the pleasure adults find in non-reproductive sexual practices, far from frivolous, this participatory response brings joy to millions. It is sadly ironic that opposition to 'immoral' rooting arguably causes infinitely more harm than our indulgence in its pleasures, and that for all the preaching and finger-pointing, audiences not only continue to sit and feel and root, but academics are also none the wiser about the workings of the movies or the strange phenomenon known as rooting in popular cinema. And so I leave you with these parting words (in my very best Hitchcock tone):

Cinema sluts around the world, we all must come together. So long as *rooting* remains our dirty little secret, it will continue to be policed and frequently framed as perverse. It is time we finally brought this pleasurable activity out of the darkness. For only under the cold fluorescent light of the human laboratory might its mysteries, and ours, be better understood.

Endnotes

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[1] See also Bogdanovich (1963); Brean (1959); Stevens Jr (2006); *The Illustrated Alfred Hitchcock: Part 1* (1972); Truffaut & Scott (1967/1984).

[2] Although 'rooting for' has traditionally been associated with the support of characters or sides in a conflict, storytellers often do not care exactly *who* the audience is rooting for, so long as they are rooting for or against something (i.e. an impending *outcome*). The moment the viewer is devoid of hope or fear regarding impending narrative outcomes, the story is lacking in suspense and the viewer might stop watching. In contrast, if viewers are simply lending their support to a character, interest in outcomes is not guaranteed. If said character is at home trying to find their spectacles or write an academic paper, for instance, boredom may well ensue.

The reason I have opted to make unconventional use of the notion of rooting to refer specifically to a desire for particular *outcomes* is that this is usually implied by the term. That is, the conventional thinking is that when we root for outcomes, we do this on the basis of supporting characters or causes. My argument is that this is far from true, and thus we must distinguish between 'rooting for outcomes' and 'rooting for characters', with the latter influencing, but not equating to, the former. For filmmakers like me, rooting for outcomes is more important to understand and achieve than rooting for *character* because it guarantees suspense and subsequent interest in the unfolding narrative, whereas the latter does not. The history of media effects, however, thinks differently about the relative merits of investigating these two possibilities. Unless otherwise noted, all references to rooting in this thesis will refer to our passionate desire for particular *outcomes*, as highlighted in Hitchcock's anecdote. Usage in quotes from others, however, still carry the traditional assumption that our hoped for outcomes emerge from character support. The industry notion of 'rooting interest' is most explicit in this regard.

[3] Logan's comments were made during his January 1952 address to the New Dramatists group in New York City. The New Dramatists were an organisation that 'introduced a selected number of playwrights with modest credits to the intimate world of Broadway theater' through craft discussions with prominent professionals (Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 3). Logan was a successful Broadway writer and director before working in Hollywood.

[4] Directed by Pamela Fryman, written by Carter Bays and Craig Thomas, the episode originally aired in the US on March 2, 2009.

[5] We might also note that the enthusiasm in tackling this question, and tackling it in this way, is arguably further evidence for the judgmental and oppressive attitudes that surround rooting. These kinds of morally 'complex' responses have played a part in low budget crime and exploitation movies for years with nary an ounce of academic support or understanding. The moment this 'trick' is cleaned up as 'quality tv' for middle-class audiences (see McCabe & Akass 2007), there is a sudden rush to explain (i.e. justify) the response. A more charitable interpretation may be that academic eyes have only now been opened to an issue of which they were previously unaware, but consider this: Would academics really rush to explain these responses if they themselves did not experience them firsthand? And would they really be trying to explain them so politely if it were only others who responded this way? Revealing and combatting this issue is one of the purposes of my research.

[6] According to biographer Patrick McGilligan, the 'Master of Suspense' tag was invented by an advertising agent during the promotion of the first episode of what was to later become the long-running radio show *Suspense* (2003, p. 276). However, the phrase had already appeared in advertising material for others as early as 1921. Outside the film industry, it had even been used to describe author James Fenimore Cooper in *The Athenæum* journal of 1847 (p. 1047) and thus likely many other entertainers before and after.

[7] The current research concentrates on concious hopes and fears for narrative outcomes. That the audience may also *nonconsciously* hold out hope that Hitchcock's bomb goes off in order to guarantee an exciting plot development is another matter altogether, and one outside the scope of this thesis.

[8] Bordwell's preference for an *ideal* rather than *real* viewer is presumably due to inherent logistical and methodological complexity as much as his focus on common response. Although my research started out with noble intentions of being one of the few in film theory willing to look for evidence from flesh and blood viewers in support of its claims, thereby responding to Martin Barker's criticism of the field (2000, p. 7), the lack of adequate literature on rooting for narrative outcomes forced a complete revision of plans. This thesis therefore offers exploratory chapters on rooting for narrative outcomes during scenes of suspense, engaging in a

predominantly theoretical investigation into its importance, encouragement, and causes supported by my own autoethographic experience in combination with textual analysis. Although every attempt has been made to drawn upon practitioner knowledge and pepper the text with pre-existing audience data drawn from a diverse range of sources, plans of putting theory into practice and testing it in front of real viewers has been postponed until future research. Whilst this lack of recognition of the complex and often unpredictable reactions of real audiences has led Barker to criticise Carl Plantinga's *Moving Viewers* (2009) for pursuing a purely theoretical investigation into emotional response in the cinema at the expense of empirical evidence from actual audience members, ultimately I see the approach in this thesis as a necessary evil and an important preliminary step towards studies with real viewers. It achieves this by helping us to arrive at appropriate research questions we might ask of fellow human beings during film reception.

[9] As the *…For Beginners* website proudly proclaims:

> For Beginners® is a graphic nonfiction series that deconstructs complex ideas. Every book in the
> series serves one purpose: to present the works of great thinkers and subjects alike in a straightforward,
> accessible manner. With subjects ranging from philosophy to politics, art, and beyond, the For
> Beginners series covers a range of topics in a humorous comic book-style. Every book takes a
> comprehensive approach that respects the intelligence of its audience (*For Beginners: a documentary,
> graphic nonfiction book series* 2016).

This more or less sums up my own aim in this thesis.

[10] ('root for' n.d., *Dictionary.com Unabridged*).

[11] Early uses of 'rooting for' in sport, celebrity, and politics can be found, respectively, in the *Exhibitors' Times* (1913, vol. 1, no. 6, p. 20), *The Saturday Evening Post* (1915, vol. 187, no. 5, p. 50), and *Variety* (1917, vol. 46, no. 7, p. 39).

[12] For usage of the word in early interviews, see Coulter (1937, p. 4) and 'Sees uniform censorship as benefit to industry' (Anonymous 1934, p. 2). For movie reviews see '"Fighting Bill Fargo"' (Anonymous 1942, p. 10) and '"The Sundown Kid"' (Anonymous 1943, p. 6). For studio memos, see Selznick (1944, p. 375). For screenwriting manuals see Siodmak (1946, p. 4). Broadway playwright, Howard Lindsay, claims that producer, Sam Harris, was 'the one who created the phrase "Who am I rooting for?"…because he knew the audience wanted to root for somebody' (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 13). Harris, an ex-prizefight manager who shifted to Broadway producing in 1903 and was later described as 'the most successful manager in the theatre today or yesterday' (Wilkerson 1934, p. 2), seems a credible enough candidate as the first to turn 'rooting' from sport toward drama. However, evidence is inconclusive. There appears no written record of Harris' early use of the term, and only four months after Lindsay declared Harris the originator of this important industry concept, he sounded less than certain, this time saying 'Sam Harris…was *about* the first fellow to say, "Who am I rootin' for?"' (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002, p. 127, emphasis added). Lindsay's claim is likely built on hearsay given that he did not write his first play until 1927, a time when the word was already firmly in use. Although Harris was known to complain that there is nothing to root for in his assessment of bad theatre (Hopkins 1948, p. 40), much uncertainty remains as to whether he was the first to apply this concept to drama.

[13] Criticism that Gerrig presents narrative reception as 'an almost inevitable product of universal cognitive processes' (Snow 1994, p. 109) and fails to recognise 'the social dimension of cognition' (Marback 1995, p. 174) is another issue altogether. It should not stand in the way of investigating moviegoers who have already acquired these processes and appear to apply them to their narrative reception.

[14] The current thesis was originally entitled *Film as Sport: The Rooting Audience in Popular Cinema*. Its core interest goes back to my aborted Masters of Arts research using the sports/rooting analogy, which found little support from my supervisor at the time.

[15] To protest that film is different from sport in so many ways is, once again, to miss the point.

[16] The Payne Fund Studies were a series of research papers on the social and psychological effects of cinema published in the early 1930s. Although these were conducted by esteemed academics of the day (including W.W Charters, Paul Cressey, and Edgar Dale), a journalistic puff piece entitled *Our Movie Made Children* (Forman 1933) that disseminated the results grossly distorted the research to serve the interests of the conservative Catholic funders eager for definitive evidence of 'ill effects'. Sadly this has meant that this most impressive array of qualitative data on movie-viewers has been frequently ignored. Foreman's book can be found online at Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/moviemadechildre00formrich. For an excellent summary

of the entire fiasco, see Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller's *Children and the movies: Media influence and the Payne Fund controversy* (1996).

[17] Director King Vidor tells a similar tale about a Texan cowboy who 'pulled out his "six-shooter and put several shots in the screen" when the hero was to be hung for a crime he didn't commit' (cited in Ross 1999, p. 20). These tales are part of a list of anecdotes about audience members mistaking fiction for fact. The viewers in these stories are almost always working class, country yokels, or non-Western viewers. For instance, craft teacher Eugene Vale writes:

> **Primitive** audiences…may even cease to distinguish between the actor and the part he plays. Mark Twain tells the story of a showboat troupe giving a performance somewhere on the Mississippi River, when suddenly one of the spectators began to shoot at the villain of the piece because he manhandled the innocent girl (Vale 1998, p. 160, emphasis added).

Screenwriter Wells Root recalls:

> I once met an old actor who had trouped the stick towns in tent shows, playing old-fashioned melodramas. One play featured a little tinkly music box that played the dove-like heroine's favourite tune. A heavy had loaded it with a powder charge that would blow the box and the girl apart if she lifted the lid to play the tune. Every night when she approached it with outstretched hand to lift the lid, the actor told me, some **hick** in the gallery would stand up and yell, "No! Stop! Don't touch it, lady. It's going to blow up" (Root 1980, p. 55, emphasis added).

And, in what James Burns (2000) describes as 'one of the most enduring and oft-told tropes of African credulity' (p. 199) told and retold since 1927, close-ups of mosquitoes in a British colonial medical documentary were supposedly taken by Nigerian natives as literal representations of giant-sized insects. Burns explains:

> [T]he specifics of the incidents are rarely given. And if true they are certainly open to alternative interpretations. Megan Vaughan, in discussing the reaction of the audience to the mosquito on the screen, pointed out that Sellers and his successors never considered that such comments might have been meant ironically [1991]…My own experience in Zimbabwe suggests the likelihood of this possibility. Two separate former mobile cinema operators of the Rhodesian Information Service recounted to me their experiences showing rural people films explaining the life cycle of a new strain of maize. The use of time-lapse photography inspired members of two separate audiences to ask 'Why does our government not give us this maize which grows so fast?' Both informants related this story as evidence of the credulity of their audiences. However, when I told a third retired cinema operator this story he merely laughed: 'Did they not realise the people were only joking?' (Burns 2000, p. 202).

This seems a prime example of Morin's warning that mutilating thoughts lead to mutilating actions. As late as 1950, the head of the Northern Rhodesian Department of Information advised:

> The appearance of a lion on the screen has more than once caused a stampede and the audience has had to be brought back and reassured of the beast's two-dimensional quality. Cartoons are not understood, nor are diagrams, maps, or any kind of trick filming. The ideal film for the villager should be of slow tempo, on a subject with which he [sic] is familiar (Harry Franklin cited in Burns 2000, p. 208).

The same attitude was found within the Zimbabwean advertising industry as recently as 1991 (see Burke 2002). It even appeared in an ostensibly more enlightened setting onscreen in Jane Campion's arthouse hit *The Piano* (1993) when New Zealand Māori audience members were portrayed as niavely mistaking a stage performance of the Bluebird's Wife tale as actual evidence that female performers had been beheaded,.

[18] For more on the emergence of middle-class modes of audience behaviour that took over in both late ninteenth century theatre and early twentieth century movie houses, see Levine (1988) and Grieveson (2004).

[19] Can it be mere coincidence that Ardon Van Buren Powell (1919, p. 120) also noted viewers 'take sides' and 'guess ahead'?

[20] *Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need* (Snyder 2005) is the number one selling screenwriting book on Amazon.com as of 1st February, 2017 – as it was when I began writing this chapter back in 2013.

[21] This phrase was attributed to Makavejev by my supervisor, Lorraine Mortimer, author of *Terror and Joy: The Films of Dušan Makavejev* (2009), in our personal communication. Inspection of the source, however, showed no sign of the phrase. What would appear to be a false memory on Mortimer's behalf nonetheless perfectly sums up the idea at hand better than Makavejev did and is, I believe, worth retaining.

[22] If Gerima is presenting his childhood response as a case of false consciousness, since his 'interests' as a native were put aside because of his excitable emotions, this does not mean the matter is settled and the conversation on such forms of rooting should be closed. To have fun at the movies and get one's money's worth is an egocentric interest that should not automatically be viewed as less worthy than a social interest such as fighting for racial freedom by spitting at the screen, refusing to participate in the hokey tale, or whatever Gerima now deems politically appropriate. It need not be an either/or argument.

[24] Pope's credits include *Hammett* (1982), *Someone To Watch Over Me* (1987), and *Bad Boys* (1995).

[25] Rubin's films include *Ghost* (1990), *Deep Impact* (1998), and *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2009).

[26] The online version of the original *London Telegraph* article, for instance, sports a shameless lead photograph of the author hooked up to electrodes pulling a caricatured 'weeping face' for the camera as he watches the movie on an iPad. This is in clear contrast to his thumbnail profile picture, perfectly proper English intellectual in horn-rimmed glasses. See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/11130668/Filmgoers-get-out-your-hankies-the-weepies-are-coming.html. I point all this out not to take the high ground, for Wallop's entire assessment would be nonsensical if I had never held similar attitudes to such artworks. Like others, I frequently find myself making knee jerk claims about the validity of particular experiences or ideas on the back of a whim. Drawing attention to this shortcoming is not done in the delusion it can ever be avoided; it is merely an attempt to acknowledge and understand our simplistic impulses in order to reduce their impact when they rear their ugly head, particularly during research, which strives for unencumbered thought.

[27] 'During an 'immortal dinner' on 28th December 1817 hosted by Haydon and attended by Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, Keats, and Keats' friend Monkhouse, Keats lightheartedly said Newton had destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by explaining the science behind it brilliant colours display. He then proposed a toast to '"Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics" to the amusement of all' (Penrose 1927, p. 635). The thought found its way into Keats' narrative poem, *Lamia*, about a woman trapped in the body of a serpent, published in 1820.

> …In the dull catalogue of common things.
> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
> Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
> Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
> The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade (1897, p. 151).

More recently, 'Unweaving the rainbow' became the title of a book by evolutionary scientist Richard Dawkins (2000), arguing for acknowledgement of science's ability to open our eyes to the full wonder of the world – a 'poetry' that will never cease to amaze. Nevertheless, the entire interpretation of Keats' idea may be illfounded. In *30 Great Myths About the Romantics* (2015), Duncan Wu argues, 'This was not an argument against science; it is pitched against the empiricist notion that experiment, observation, and measurement trump the intuited…imaginative vision' (p. 19).

[28] For recent reconsiderations of what hedonism has to offer when unemcumbered by twentieth century assumptions about it as an all-consuming moral or psychological force, see Hewitt (2010), Feldman (2004), and Crisp (2006). I am particularly sympathetic to Crisp's interest in 'hedonism as a theory of well-being, that is, of what is ultimately good for any individual' minus hysteria about the blind pursuit of pleasure at all costs (2006, p. 621). In many ways it has become inappropriate to talk of one's own pleasure unless it is re-labelled as something more worthy, whether 'experience', 'insight', 'understanding', etc. I would argue that this same issue drives much academic writing about popular culture, which is a kind of rescue mission. I must admit the current thesis has parrallels with this aim, however I am not seeking to define rooting as anything other than pleasurable. I ask only that we except that a) legitimised forms of rooting are simply pleasure wrapped up with a different ribbon, and b) pleasure may be enough if we stop to dispense with all the ideological baggage against public displays of emotion.

[29] Although Martin Barker loathes the term *effects*, because it 'has been too powerfully co-opted by anti-media campaigners for us to operate in' (Barker & Staiger 2000), using the word within a *craft* context appears to strip it of much of that meaning and give it a more positive spin (akin, for instance, to 'special effects'). I am therefore

satisfied that when the word is divorced from 'media' (i.e. 'media effects'), it avoids such connotations whilst still allowing for the possibility of both 'good' and 'bad' effects, whatever they may or may not be.

[30] Despite his constant lecturing on the matter, Hitchcock frequently mixed up suspense with surprise in his own authorised articles. 'My Husband, Alfred Hitchcock, Hates Suspense,' an authorised article purportedly 'told by' his wife, Alma, states, '[M]y husband *hates* surprises. He can't stand the idea of facing the unexpected, and he becomes downright ill if you keep him in suspense,' implying a link between surprise and suspense that Hitchcock elsewhere denies (Ambramson 1964, p. 13, emphasis in original). And his association of surprise with mystery during his 'definition' of suspense is entirely questionable from the outset. In mystery, the viewer has no *answer*, whilst in surprise, the viewer has no *question*. As Madrigal, Bee, Chen and LaBarge (2011) put it, '[S]urprise occurs in situations where few if any expectations exist. As a result and in contrast to relief, there is no preference for a particular outcome and, consequently, no heightened levels of empathetic distress [as experienced in suspense]' (p. 263).

Hitchcock arguably muddles things up by associating only mystery with a lack of knowledge. But suspense may clearly also lack just as much knowledge as a whodunnit mystery. In neither case does the viewer know the outcome ('Paradox of Suspense' issues aside, in which we are strangely able to re-experience suspense when rewatching a movie for the 100th time). What differs between mystery and suspense is surely the *question*. In the suspense situation, viewers know about the bomb and wonder if it will go off. In a mystery situation, viewers might wonder whose gloved hands planted that bomb and why, regardless of whether it has gone off or not. The knowledge the viewer *lacks* is not the same, though the knowledge she holds may be. Hitchcock's ongoing association of surprise and mystery therefore appears misguided, and perhaps derives from the assumption that answers to mysteries will be unexpected (i.e. *surprising*). Regardless, even if viewers groan upon discovering that the butler did it, they have still felt the pull of curiosity commonly known as mystery, which *is* an emotional response, despite Hitchcock's simplistic claims to the contrary. Mystery may prefer surprise in its solutions, but that does not make it a case of a lack of knowledge in *surprise* versus full knowledge in *suspense*.

[31] Hitchcock and Houdini had more in common than one might suspect. Both were masters of self-promotion. Both frequently employed handcuffs. Houdini was even known as 'The Handcuff King' early in his career, a title Hitchcock might have taken on in light of the reccurance of this 'motif' in films such as *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Saboteur* (1942), and *The Lodger* (1927). And both men ended up narrowing their focus on spellbinding their audience with suspense; Hitchcock onscreen, and Houdini hanging in a watertank upside down behind a curtain as the audience watched a clock, convinced that *this time* he had finally run out of breath.

[32] In a London screenwriting seminar entitled 'Hitchcock and his Writers', Charles Barr (2013) describes David Sterritt doing the same thing. After beginning his book, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (1999), by admitting the shortcomings of the autuerist argument in a clearly collaborative and commercial industry, Sterritt suddenly turns around to claim that Hitchcock is 'a special case' (p. 2).

[33] Scott Curtis (2007) points to a particularly amusing lie found in a memo from publicist, Rick Ingersoll, to one of Hitchcock's secretaries, Dolores Stockton. The memo requested that the Master of Suspense sketch thirteen frames for the famous crop duster sequence in *North by Northwest* (1959) for publication in *Coronet* magazine. What makes the instance so amusing is that Ingersoll includes thirteen stills from the completed picture that he wants Hitchcock to *copy* in order to produce, as Ingersoll puts it, '"theoretically sketches he made before the scenes were filmed"' (Curtis 2007, p. 27). Though Curtis believes the existing sketches were never published, the hilarity continues as these sketches were not drawn by Hitchcock at any rate, but by another artist's hand.

[34] In the same work, Nietzsche clarified the worldview which I would contend drove much of his philosophy:

> My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it…but *love* it (1887/1989, p. 258, emphasis in original).

My desire to discuss all human responses to movies, jokes, or moral dilemmas is driven by the same basic bellief that to sweep it under the carpet is detrimental in the long term. Morin has expressed a similar view (see Morin 2008; Mortimer 2005).

[35] As Patrick Colm Hogan argues, 'Wonder is also in part a matter of cortical arousal that we find pleasurable and thus wish to sustain' (2008, p. 149). This may help explain our desire for mystery.

[36] The golden ratio is an ancient mathematical proportion which, in aesthetics, is thought to lead to pleasing composition. See also the 'Rule of Thirds'.

[37] It might be thought that in most cases, random rooting interest will predict that roughly 50% of the audience will root for the same outcome, as suspense scenes typically a dichotomous scenario in which we can root for outcome A or outcome B (e.g. the heroine will either be sliced in half by the buzzsaw or saved by the hero). However, we must remember that there is a third option – *indifference*. We could therefore presume that random rooting predicts a third of the audience will adopt each option: outcome A, outcome B, and indifference. Nevertheless, as most suspense scenes most of the time seem able to induce a preference one way or another (however weak), thereby reducing the likelihood of indifference to an as yet unquantifiable degree, it may be safer to simply assume that, at random, roughly half of *those who root* will root for the same outcome.

[38] It is not only artistic endeavors that can lead to oppressive attitudes as a result of the denial of techne. Indigenous Australian Rules Football player, Adam Goodes (2010), argues that constant reference to the 'so-called magical skills' of Aboriginal players masks the real work and sacrifice that makes this on-field magic happen. 'There's nothing magical about indigenous footballers', writes Goodes. 'They are not born with any special powers. Their skills are not bestowed from birth, just waiting to bear fruit on an AFL field 20 years later'. The parallel with Artistic genius should be readily apparent, and it again highlights how a neglect of craft can also be (whether knowingly or not) an ideological move, encouraging belief in innate traits and personal limits that can function to keep people in their place. Those privileged enough to afford tennis lessons, a cello, or racing-cart are marked with talent, whilst those who cannot clearly never had talent to start with, so the logic often goes. Techne-blindness also helps perpetuate stereotypes, and thus the black person without rhythm or the woman without nurturing skills are aberrations. But if Goodes' article was a wake up call, its online reception was even more so. Readers chided him for 'complain[ing] about being called "special"' and claimed that he should simply accept his "genetic benefits" and get on with it. Others were saddened he 'had to be negative' and even countered that he must be inferring that 'all indigenous players train harder than non-indigenous players and that is why they have the so called "magic" moves.' The possibility of different techne developing in different cultures (playing barefoot in the outback versus booted in the suburbs, for instance) was apparently not considered.

[39] In the humanities, empirical and empiricism are too often conflated. *Empirical* is an approach; *empiricism* is a doctrine. Where the former refers to knowledge claims based upon systematic obervation as opposed to theoretical speculation, the latter claims that knowledge can *only* come from such experience. Thus where empirical offers observational evidence, empiricism demands this evidence by failing to recognise the existence other kinds of evidence. At the outset of his book *What is a Person?* (2010), sociologist Christian Smith perfectly sums up my position on this matter:

> I reject the philosophical belief that valid human knowledge is always and only obtained through sense perceptions of observed evidence gained through experience and ideally through deliberate experimentation – and thus a priori ruling out the role of reasoning, as well as perhaps innate ideas, intuition, or, in principle, revelation. My argument, however, fully affirms the need for science to be empir*ical* as one of the defining characteristics of natural and social scientific work. We need all of the empirical evidence we can gather for our reasoning minds to use in larger processes of understanding and explanation in order to better grasp a reality not all aspects of which are empirically observable (Smith, C 2010, p. 4; see also Carroll 1996b, p. 67).

[40] I speak of Greg, Susan, Jeff, and Murray *Smith*.

[41] For example, James Baldwin falsely recalls the climax of *The Defiant Ones* (1958), describing partipatory responses in the audience around him that cannot logically be true. So strong was his false memory that it apparently made him recollect the kind of racially charged responses he wanted to remember. '"Get back on the train, you fool!"' screamed the Harlem audience, according to Baldwin, after black prisoner on the run (Sidney Poitier) 'jumps off the train in order not to abandon his white buddy' (cited in Shohat & Stam 1994, p. 349). His white buddy is fellow chain gang escapee (Tony Curtis), to whom he has been reluctantly (and metaphorically!) shackled for most of the movie. But the reality is that Poitier does not *willingly* jump off the train. He falls off from exhaustion as he reaches for Curtis' hand, both men tumbling down an embankment. Furthermore, the train then disappears in an instant as the pair lie in the grass catching their breath. It would have therefore made little sense for any Harlem viewer to scream "Get back on the train, you fool!", for this is not even presented as a possibility. Baldwin's claim that 'Liberal white audiences applauded' Poitier's leap from freedom to stay with his white buddy is logically suspect, as is his conclusion that Poitier's imagined jump is performed, as Shohat and Stam put it, 'in order to delude White people into thinking that they are not hated' (p. 349). For other intriguing examples of false memory at the movies, see recollections in Stempel (2001).

[42] This issue of 'forced-choice' will rear its head several more times before the end of the thesis.

[43] One of the examiners of this thesis, Professor Martin Barker, noted that my use of *social science* ends up 'virtually equating this with behavioural psychological accounts, which only makes sense really in American or

American-influenced contexts' (Examiner's Report, October 8 2016). As the three occassions I refer to *social science* in this chapter explicitly involve a North American historical context or quotes from North American theorists Carl Plantinga and Stephen Toulmin, I am satisfied that this is not a major issue. Nevertheless, we must certainly be mindful that social science extends far beyond behavioural psychology. My particular interest lies in practices such as gathering audience data, speculating about common viewer activity, and performing experimental manipulations to films in hopes of putting these claims to the test. As Barker's own work demonstrates, the first two tasks can be – and have been – undertaken outside of behavioural psychology.

[44] Culkin is best known for *Home Alone* (1990) and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), but appeared in a number of films. Such was his fame and appeal that his two younger brothers were soon cast in multiple movies as if to cash in on the Culkin name and distinctively 'goofy' looks.

[45] What's that? You have never experienced any ill will towards Macaulay, Kieran, or Rory Culkin? Then clearly you have yet to be afflicted by 'The Culkin Complex'. But this is no proof the complex does not exist, for *absence of proof is not proof of absence*. If this defense seems empty and utterly infuriating, we might note that it is a major source of support in popular theories about 'identification' and 'media effects' that are often accepted *a priori* to exist in particular forms.

[46] Although this sequence is arguably the most famous of Hitchcock's late work, and expresses all the hallmarks of the Master's touch (food, sex, and death, not to mention morbid humour), Richard Allen points out that '[t]he content of this scene is lifted almost verbatim from Arthur La Bern's novel, *Goodbye Piccadilly, Hello Leicester Square*, from which the film was adapted' (2007, p. 64).

[47] We should also note that it is only an enigma by virtue of its being *problematized* as such by Carroll's (and Zillmann and Smith's) moral account of suspense and side-taking.

[48] Carroll even suggests that identification assumptions may arise from the existence of mirror reflexes when watching film (2007, p. 109). However, this would not seem to explain why identification has been an equally popular explanation for audience response in regards to written or aural narrative. Amy Coplan has also noted the logistical absence of emotional contagion (via facial cutes) from literary narratives (see 2006, p. 31).

[49] Carroll cites Keith Oatley's *Best-Laid Schemes* (1992) as the source of 'dysphoric' and 'euphoric' emotion, though Dolf Zillmann has been using these terms in relation to audience emotion and suspense for much longer. See, for example, Zillmann and Cantor (1977) and Zillmann (1980), which Carroll (1990, 1996b) has himself cited in passing.

[50] See also Richard Allen (2007), who alludes to similar things in stating, 'Hitchcock goes out of his way to encourage us to root for Bruno by having him drop the lighter down a sewage drain and then struggle with great difficulty, in excruciating close-up, to retrieve it' (p. 57).

[51] If Hitchcock's crosscutting enhances the scene, it arguably achieves this not through pitting the two intercut actions against one another, but through what Zillmann dubs 'excitation transfer'. This occurs because affective arousal recedes slowly and can therefore carry over from one event to another, regardless of valence (i.e. the positive or negative nature of the arousal is irrelevant), and because human beings are able to misattribute the source of their affective reactions. Zillmann has shown that sexual arousal can increase laughter (Cantor, Bryant & Zillmann 1974), for instance, and that arousal via exercise can increase sexual arousal (Cantor, Zillmann & Bryant 1975). Excitation transfer also neatly explains why substandard 'comic relief' jokes in tense moments often get the biggest laughs in the entire movie (Zillmann 2007, p. 167). Our excitation transfers over, ignoring valence altogether. Zillmann even appeals to excitation transfer to explain our intense euphoria at the end of a suspense sequence or popular narrative where success is finally achieved. However, this explanation is at odds with Carroll's moral theory of suspense and does him no use in explaining away the apparent 'immoral' rooting that I experience in this scene because excitation transfer is strictly amoral.

[52] In the recording of Macklin's interview with Hitchcock, he follows up his own statement with 'And I didn't feel that way', as if genuinely confused (1976/2014). In the published interview, this line is ommitted. Uncertain as to whether Macklin left the line out because he, like Carroll, was unsympathetic to Rusk during the sequence and felt foolish because he now wondered if he had missed the intended effect, I asked him to clarify his response to the 'Tie-Pin in the Potato Truck' scene.

> Maybe my choice of the word "sympathy" was inexact. I did say "in a sense." Hitch and I -- and I
> assume the audience -- didn't want Rusk get away with the crime; Hitch made them simply want him
> to get out of the *immediate crisis*. I didn't "root against" Rusk in this particular scene; I simply didn't

discard my moral values and root "for" him (Macklin, Personal correspondence, September 2nd 2015, emphasis added).

This again parrallels the precious statements by DeRosa, Davidson, Toles, and Allen that suggest a splt between rooting for or siding with characters globally, and rooting for or siding with outcomes locally. As this investigation concerns our moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes, our global 'attachment' to character may be much less of a factor in determining the narrative outcomes we root for on-the-fly than has been assumed. Macklin's question to Hitchcock also points to the potential conceptual confusion between 'sympathy' and 'rooting for', an issue I have attempted to avoid in focusing on rooting for specific outcomes rather than (far too broadly) characters.

[53] In conversation with Truffaut and Scott, Hitchcock refers to this example as 'The Prying Person in Another's Room' (1962, 27:00). On all other occasions I have encountered, he offers no name for the tale.

[54] Actually, this is not entirely true. In the book, it is Truffaut who interupts Hitchcock with suggestion of Hitler and a bomb in a briefcase (which itself might account for many mistaken claims that Hitchcock's anecdote describes a bomb *in a briefcase* beneath a table). Before Truffaut's interjection, Hitchcock says 'a group of gangsters', but given that: a) he clarifies his point in the original interview recordings with 'evil men' (see Truffaut, Hitchcock & Scott 1962, 26:16) and b) we have already argued that Truffaut's printed version is fully authorised by Hitchcock, the text of which quotes the Master as (fictitiously) replying, 'Yes. And even in that case…' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73), we may safely accept that Truffaut's suggestion (an editorial addition not even uttered in the recording) falls safely within the Master's own argument.

[55] It might be thought that a major source of suspense here is the hero's *need* to save Fry. That is, to clear his own name with Fry's testimony, else be arrested by the police standing on the railing above. Although viewers might assume that, the narrative ends up suggesting it is uncessary after all. Once Fry falls, Barry climbs back up to his love interest and the film happily fades out as if evidence was not needed.

[56] Even if this were not so, the source of our hope and fear for narrative outcomes would seem irrelevant. If we were to dismiss people's preferred narrative outcomes on the grounds that they are built on falsehood because they are not truly cognitive, we should do the same with Zillmann's excitation transfer effects (1983). The intense burst of laughter from the audience when the hero's side-kick makes a wise-crack at a particularly tense moment not be a real sign of humour appreciation. This makes little sense. And given that Carroll's cognitive emotions are already open to misappraisal (e.g. the snake that we fear turns out to be a rubber toy), I see no reason why *affect* cannot also be granted the same consideration. Any conscious experience it encourages, such as hope Bruno reaches the lighter, is as real as one's fear of a rubber snake or laughter during a tense moment of comic relief. Either way, the response is the response, and to argue that human beings can misjudge their own *conscious* emotional state (such as hope and fear) is highly problematic and, potentially, all but impossible.

[57] Despite my general distrust of psychoanalytic readings, it is difficult to avoid the distinct possibility that Fuller is having fun with Freudian imagery, as the woman goes through a series of potentially sexual looks while the predator's fingers fondle her goodies down below.

[58] In perfect illustration of the fallability of memory in our recall of films with which we are familiar, Peterson realises as the scene unfolds that he has described events incorrectly, stating:

> It's not the spring what goes down [sic], it's actually the bullet that goes down. But it's the same kind
> of effect of him now…going down there trying to…get the bullet back in here with his foot…And, of
> course, everybody hopes he gets it and it's strange [*Chuckles*] (Peterson, W 2001).

[59] Romero agreed it was 'the most successful sequence I've ever done' (cited in Gaspard 2009, p. 178).

[60] I confine the comment to 'narrative' suspense here in referrence to Carroll (1984/1996, p. 116) which recognises that other cinematic elements may be responsible for feelings of suspense. These are presumably not dependent on morality.

[62] It may, however, have a potential impact on hope and fear for *revenge* after a transgression has been committed. For instance, a character who wrongfully harms our preferred character, whether physically, through social humiliation, or by reducing their property, may be viewed as deserving of *more* punishment. That they may be judged less remorseful may also contribute to this feeling. This may be in part why popular narrative frequently generates enjoyment at the comeuppance of others.

[63] See Black (1998), Chaux (2005), Cooney (1998, 2003), and Phillips & Cooney (2005).

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[64] Note that this says nothing about Vaage's ability to explain our continual willingness to excuse characters *after the fact*, thereby retaining affection for Tony Soprano and her other misbehaving antiheroes. Suspense, however, involves rooting for and against *impending* actions and outcomes.

[65] Haidt's Moral Foundation Theory, which Kurt Gray and Jonathan E. Keeney explain makes similar claims that particular

> "cognitive modules," defined as "little switches in the brains of all animals"…are "triggered" by
> specific moral "inputs" (Haidt, 2012, p. 123)
> (Gray & Keeney 2015b, p. 859),

has also recently been challenged by these authors (though see Graham 2015). Gray and Keeney claim to have 'disconfirmed MFT [Moral Foundations Theory] on its own terms' by demonstrating that 'purity concerns are not distinguished from harm concerns–in either MFT or naturalistic scenarios–and that controlling for domain-general dimensions eliminates effects previously ascribed to moral "modules."' (Gray & Keeney 2015a, p. 874). Christopher L. Suhler and Patricia Churchland also object that 'the mechanisms (viz., modules) and categorical distinctions (viz., between foundations) proposed by the theory are not consilient with discoveries in contemporary neuroscience concerning the organization, functioning, and development of the brain' (Suhler & Churchland 2011, p. 2103; though see Haidt & Joseph 2011).

[66] This bears a slight resemblance to Gerrig's aforementioned suggestion that a moral heuristic such as '*The hero should succeed*' (Gerrig 2005, p. 550, emphasis in original) may be at work when engaging with narrative fiction. However, where Gerrig suggested we may root as a result of this cognitive shortcut, Raney suggests we may form a moral allegiance with (i.e. a moral disposition to) the hero based on such a cognitive shortcut, which then leads to rooting. Thus Raney includes an added step we might call 'character attachment'.

[67] It is notable that Vaage's adoption of Raney's views preceded her usage of Greene's dual-process theory of morality. This suggests she may have considered Raney's theory incapable of fully explaining the enigma of immoral suspense and side-taking on its own.

[68] I agree with Vaage's contention that Carroll, Smith, and Zillmann appear to lean towards a more traditional, rationalist theory of moral deliberation that was dominant before Haidt's influential appeal to moral intuition (Vaage 2015a, pp. 15-17). Even if these three accept that moral intuition exists (and Carroll and Smith have made it clear they do), they presume that it is not subject to the errors and biases that Vaage argues is at the heart of our engagment with narrative fiction.

[69] Granted, this does not mean that watching from the pilot onwards may not make viewers *more* sympathetic and stubborn. The only way to test this would be to pit a long term 'attachment' to the antihero with a short term. However, based on upcoming examples in this thesis, I have significant reservations about the supposed power of viewer stubbornness in regards to rooting for moment-by-moment narrative outcomes.

[70] Again, going to 'great lengths' hardly seems the cognitively miserly or reflexive option.

[71] Although one study claims that being anonymous does not prevent dissonance effects (see Harmon-Jones et al. 1996), Kurzban and Aktipis caution that the experimental design may have implied to participants that their written comments explaining why they liked the taste of an unpleasant-tasting beverage were not so anonymous after all.

By the same logic, one might wonder why participants in the Archie Bunker studies *failed* to show signs of dissonance. I suggest that their conflicting opinions – liking Archie more but thinking Mike more sensible – posed no particular threat to cause dissonance and motivate external consistency. As the sitcom's creator, Norman Lear, wondered when responding to criticism that it is impossible to 'be a black-baiter and lovable' (Hobson 1971/1979, p. 104), who of us hasn't encountered 'a father, brother, uncle, aunt, friend or neighbor who was both lovable and bigoted' (Lear 1971/1979, p. 109). We are perfectly capable of privately disapproving of a friend or family member whilst retaining care and affection for them, even if we show public support for their actions or, more commonly, for their character *after* a transgression, as Lieberman and Linke's 2007 study suggested earlier. To assume otherwise is to, in Morin's sense, mutilate reality.

[72] Zillmann (1991, p. 142 & p. 151) acknowledges that his empathic contagion mechanism has parallels with William McDougall's (1908, 1922) 'primitive passive sympathy'. Where the Scottish surgeon proposed alternate explanations for our ability to avoid empathising with everyone around us, such as mirth, which helped ensure our own wellbeing in the face of otherwise pathological suffering caught from all those we witness, Zillmann saw our empathic reactivity as mediated by moral disposition we form towards others. '[M]oral assessments

enable us to hold off and even hedonically reverse our empathic inclinations…Our moral interpretations allow us, so to speak, to be malicious with dignity' (Zillmann 2012, pp. 294-295).

[73] One could argue that if emotion equates to a reliable action-tendency, that emotional contagion via mirroring may lead to motivation for said actions. This important issue requires more space that the current chapter allows and will therefore be addressed in the next chapter. Regardless, Vaage and Barratt do not appear to lean on this contagious-emotion-as-action-tendency claim, instead speculating that seeing an *action* makes us engage empathically and somehow leads to motivation.

[81] In all probability a misattribution, as even my Russian Literature contact could not find record of it anywhere in Tolstoy's notebooks. If anyone is aware of its origin, do let me know.

[83] This is Gregory Currie's use of empathy, which Vaage has critiqued for its lack of emphasis on emotional effect (Vaage 2009). Distinguishing low-level, *embodied empathy* from higher-level *imaginative empathy* is her primary weapon in this argument, but it is far from certain that this achieves what Vaage wishes in regards to rooting for narrative outcomes as we shall see in the next episode.

[84] 'Alignment' is Murray Smith's term to distinguish being placed with a character by the narration (i.e. aligned with) in contrast to forming a moral bond with them (i.e. allegiance). See Smith (1995a).

[85] Plantinga and co might point to moments where we appear to condone the hero killing in cold blood. Consider the big laugh when Indiana Jones shoots the swordsman in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). Can this be explained without an appeal to alignment and moral disengagement? I believe so. The laugh comes not primarily from the timing of the man's elaborate moves met with a single gunshot but from Indy's benign violation of the heroic code. He takes a gun to a sword fight and shoots first! The reason we are able to excuse it on humorous grounds is that the swordsman was the latest in a series of opponents trying to kill Indy. That is, we knew he meant Indy harm. But the belly laugh itself comes from the 'benign violation' (McGraw & Warren 2010; Warren & McGraw 2015) of norms that we implicitly recognise has been transgressed, in the same way we can laugh at the over-the-top justice dished out by the *Toxic Avenger* (1986) – tearing a guy's arm off and hitting him with it; deep frying another's hands – or when an arrow is accidentally fired into a gym teacher's behind in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999).

[86] I concede that we cannot be sure del Toro was actually talking specifically about Bruno, or whether the documentary editors took it out of context, for Bruno is not exactly 'hateworthy' in my eyes. Nevertheless, he is the antagonist trying to achieve an immoral goal, and whether del Toro made this interview comment in reference to Bruno or Rusk or Fry or any number of Hitchcock villains, the point still stands in opposition to Carroll's theory of suspense.

[87] In a 1950 interview, Hitchcock nominated this ice floe sequence as the best chase he had ever seen and claimed that he learned 'the suspense of the chase' from Griffith (cited in Brady 1950, p. 131).

[88] Simulationists could claim that viewers were simply prompted to imagine the heroine's impending fate during these shots, but glimpses of plunging ice over the rapids occur regularly throughout the sequence and it seems fair to ask why viewers did not retain this ongoing danger in their mind as the heroine lay helpless in close-up floating down the river. A more immediate objection is that fluctuations in pulse (and heart rate and skin conductance, for that matter) do not equate with a clear emotional outcome. Despite the familiar device of an increasing heart beat on horror suspense movie soundtracks in moments of imminent danger, Sylvia Kreibig (2010) reports that 'Suspense, induced in the context of film clips, has been found to be associated with deceased HR [i.e. Heart Rate]' (p. 408). This might suggest that Lore's conclusion should be inverted. That is, felt suspense may have actually *dropped* during moments when the helpless heroine's face was onscreen and pulses exhibited a sharp rise. The limited number of studies on this issue (Kreibig cites only two, both by Hubert & de Jong-Meyer back in 1990-1991) and the lack of viewer reports of moment-by-moment preferred narrative outcomes leaves this issue difficult to resolve. Even then, much of the issue comes down to how we define an emotion. For instance, where Kreibig (2010) states

> [A]lthough feelings are often and typically conscious, conditions may arise, under which people do not report and/or are not aware of an emotional experience, although other subsystems, such as facial expression, physiological activation, and behavioral tendency indicate occurrence of emotion (p. 411).

Quigley, Lindquist, and Barrett (2014) conclude

> [P]eripheral physiology was not engineered to help us express emotion – it evolved for homeostasis and metabolic regulation. This means that only a small proportion of the variance in biological

measures reflects changes in mental states. Furthermore, bodily state measures such as measures of heart rate or skin conductance have their own limitations. These include often being multiply determined by both sympathetic and parasympathetic autonomic changes (i.e., heart rate) that make the autonomic determinants unclear, being sensitive to many psychological effects other than just affect or emotion (e.g., familiarity of stimuli, prior learning about stimuli), or even just being affected by changes in the physical environment (e.g., skin conductance can be altered by the humidity and temperature of the testing room) (p. 244).

This important issue will be discussed in more depth during the next episode.

[89] The reason that automatically rooting *against* the 'negative disposition' character should have angled downwards like the red dashed line is that, following Carroll's calculus of suspense, a less likely negative outcome for an evil character should produce *high* levels of suspense (because it is hoped for but highly probable), whilst a very likely negative outcome for an evil character should produce *low* levels of suspense (because it is feared but highly improbable).

[90] For other theorists, see Cooke (1990, p. 194), Perez (2000, pp. 295-296), and Jose and Brewer (1984, p. 912). For practitioners, see Neil Simon (cited in Linderman 1979, p. 57), Frank Capra (cited in Stevens Jr 2006, p. 103), Buster Keaton (Keaton & Samuels 1960, pp. 175-176), Daryl Zanuck (Behlmer (ed.) & Zanuck 1993), Howard Lindsay (cited in Von Hartz et al. 2002). For educators, Eugene Vale (1998, p. 160), Blake Snyder (2005, p. xv), Beth Serlin (2004) , David Mamet (2008, p. 124), and Orson Scott Card (1988, p. 82).

Whether attachment deserves this reputation in predicting our *emotional* response to particular narrative outcomes is another matter altogether. I believe these have constantly been conflated, possibly due to the popular view of emotions as 'action tendencies', a portrayal that implies an automatic path to motivation. It is clearly possible, however, to be motivated to hope for an outcome whilst feeling upset about that outcome's occurrence. Any moral dilemma should make this clear. Thus we can have the *motivation* to hope for an outcome that goes against a character we are 'attached' to, whilst still being influenced *emotionally* by the outcome.

[91] Hitchcock also frequently referred to this idea, particularly when discussing *Rear Window* (1954) and its emphasis on point of view shots intercut with a wheelchair-bound protagonist, L.B. Jefferies (Jimmy Stewart). Hitchcock even included his own version of the Kuleshov experiment in his two-part documentary interview on CBC's *Telescope* (1964). Standing outside in a sunny park, Hitchcock looks into the distance and breaks into a smile. Intercut with his look and his smile is a point-of-view shot of either a woman with a baby or a woman in a bikini. In the former instance, he appears like a kindly old man; in the latter, a dirty old man.

[92] Smith is surely right in claiming that context cannot bend any expression into any shape, but he is equally wrong if he thinks that removes the problem his basic emotion position encounters. That a smile cannot be made to look sad by surrounding someone with suffering is not clear evidence a smile is an innate sign of happiness. It might just as well be a case of clashing cultural information. The *learned* information about a smile clashes with the context, and we must decide which way to intepret it. I encountered this exact issue in a recent episode of the ITV 'reality tv' show, *Made in Chelsea* (2011-present). Cast member Stephanie Pratt makes a phone call to her friends announcing that her uptight boyfriend has decided he does not want her to have them over to his apartment as planned because they might mess up his space. During the call, Pratt looks like she is smiling. I was completely confused by the scene, attempting to work out whether she was meant to be lying to her friends or somehow happy that the event was not on. In the end, I concluded that the scene was scripted to be played straight, but that Pratt's poor acting ability and/or her botox and plumped lips had conspired to make it appear as if the viewer was meant to think she was smiling happily.

[93] This 'thought theory' stretches back to Peter Lamarque's 'How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?' (1981).

[94] And we might assume that Howard is generating her tears in the same way – by evoking the memory of her dead dog, as the cliché goes. See it at http://www.mtv.com/news/2184600/bryce-dallas-howard-cries-on-cue/.

[95] Macaques are believed to share similarities with humans and the human brain, hence the great significance this discovery seemed to hold to our self-understanding.

[96] Barsalou's idea also helps make sense of more bizarre behaviour, such as why when walking to the front door from my driveway on multiple occassions since upgrading to a car with a modern remote control key lock I find myself clicking the device expecting the door of my house to magically open. Worse yet is when, after hour upon hour, day upon day doing Photoshop or video editing work that involves a lot of *Undoing* on the

computer, I make a mistake in the kitchen and quickly say to myself, 'Doh! Undo' ready to roll back the misstep before realising that real life cannot be undone.

[97] See also Carpenter, Uebel & Tomasello (2013), Kavanagh et al. (2011), Kühn et al. (2010), Kulesza et al. (2015), Lakin, Chartrand & Arkin (2003), Lakin et al. (2008), and Over et al. (2013).

[98] The same might even hold for empathising with our in-group, which may result not from shoe-wearing or resonating mirror neurons, but from simply attending to their plight in the first place (as opposed to mentally ignoring out-group suffering). For example, empathy researchers, Alicia Hofelich and Stephanie Preston write:

> Overall, we find that any attention to others' emotion spontaneously produces conceptual encoding, but that individuals differ in the extent to which they are driven to attend to this information. Future research should particularly examine how individuals monitor, allocate, and reorient attention to control the degree of involvement in others' states, and the role that these processes play in the prosocial response (Hofelich & Preston 2012, p. 27).

[99] Murray Smith (2003) necessarily omits this in his short pop piece for the *Times Literary Supplement* but has elsewhere acknowledged that the argument is far from settled. In a 2010 footnote, Smith writes:

> In fact, the sense in which some emotions are "basic," and others less so, is more complex and more controversial than I imply here. See Paul Ekman, "All Emotions Are Basic," in *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, ed. Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 15–19; and Jesse Prinz, "Which Emotions are Basic?" in *Emotion, Evolution, and Rationality*, ed. Dylan Evans and Pierre Cruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69–87 (Smith, M 2010b, p. 262).

I would ask that Smith — the current President of the Society of Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) — revisit developments over the last decade, particularly as current constructionist models of emotion can no longer be accused of being disembodied or opposed to adaptation as Prinz (2004) complained. Prinz's conclusion that 'Emotions are evolved and constructed' (2004, p. 69), born of core bodily ingredients, even reads much like Barrett's own theory.

[100] That Fridlund is Ekman's former student, offering a comprehensive critique of his teacher's claims, is of particular interest.

[101] And if not for its relevance to my research, I suspect I never would have watched it. Despite my curiosity, I am unwilling to face real-life execution scenes and have yet to face any footage of political prisoners beheaded in the Middle East. The 'reality' of these scenes appears to be an important factor in my response, intensiying my anticipated emotional reaction in line with Vaage's contention that fiction grants us *relief*. Where I can watch the Cronenberg wrist snap or a samurai sword beheading in *Shogun Assassin* (1980) and squirm, gasp, or giggle, the threat of the real-life event on Australian television or jihadist video is infinitely more distressing.

[102] Whether it is an evolved mechanism that aids survival by leading one to slow bloodflow to aid clotting in the face of massive blood loss (Diehl 2005), to convincingly play dead on the battlefield during 'Mid-Paleolithic warfare' (Bracha et al. 2005), to protect the heart from acute stress (Alboni, Alboni & Bertorelle 2008), or is simply a 'genetically neutral accident' with no adaptive function at all (van Dijk & Sheldon 2008) makes no difference to my argument about the perceived personal threat we may experience at the movies.

[103] See, for instance, Bozutto (1975), Cantor (1991), Cantor and Reilly (1982), Himmelweit, Oppenheim & Vince (1958), Horowitz (1969), Johnson (1980), Lazarus and Opton Jr (1966), Lyle and Hoffmann (1972), Mathai (1983), Nomikos, Opton, Averill, Lazarus (1968), Palmer, Hockett, and Dean (1983), Sparks and Sparks (2000), Sparks, Spirek, and Hodgson (1993), Tamborini (1991), Tamborini, Stiff, and Heidel (1990), Wilson, Hoffner, and Cantor (1987), and Zill (1977). The political influence behind such research, its conclusions, and its recommendations is another issue altogether. My point is simply that films can be felt as *personally* threatening, not what this means to arguments about what 'ought' to be produced and consumed.

[104] I use *egocentric* distress as an intuitive counterpoint to *empathic* distress, not as any allusion to Freudian 'ego'. I prefer this to the term *personal distress* found across empathy literature, which provides no linguistic counterpoint (i.e. *personal* vs *empathic* distress, as opposed to *egocentric* vs *empathic* distress).

[106] Some may argue that this is a false dichotomy given that empathy is thought to naturally involve egocentric distress as we feel *with* the potential victim (i.e. feel *as if* we are the victim). However, the self-other distinction is seen as central to empathy, and separating personal and empathic motivation has been an ongoing problem

in empathy research. For almost four decades, Daniel Batson has dedicated his career to the search for behavior that is indisputably empathic and altruistic, performed purely for the benefit of another, rather than to alleviate one's own *personal distress* (2009; Batson et al. 1981; Batson, Fultz & Schoenrade 1987; Batson et al. 1983; Batson & Shaw 1991). Despite firmly believing this behaviour possible, the reason for Batson's ongoing quest is precisely because its existence is still in dispute (see, for instance, Batson 1987, 2015; Davis, MH 1983; Eisenberg & Eggum 2009; Gebauer et al. 2015; Hoffman, ML 1991; Hornstein 1991; Stich 2016; Stich, Doris & Roedder 2010).

Douglas G. Mook has argued that Batson's search is overly idealistic, and that there is no particular reason we should not consider behaviour based on a desire to alleviate one's own distress or to feel good about helping as *altruistic*. Mook suggests that such egocentric interests 'may not be alternatives to altruistic motivation, but rather mechanisms that underlie it' (1991, p. 139). Although I agree, this position still leads to potentially different predictions for rooting behaviour, and different proposals about how the audience may be manipulated by filmmakers, than the common view that empathic concern alone underlies our hopes and fears for narrative outcomes.

[107] 'There is no terror in a bang, only in the anticipation of it' is attributed across the internet, and in countless books on all manner of topics, to Hitchcock without ever naming a source. After suspecting it was a fake quote promoted by Hitchcock's PR factory, I finally discovered it in an obscure article in *Films in Review* (Vermilye 1966, p. 232). Although this means the quote was willingly endorsed by the Master of Suspense, it does not, however, mean it was not still fabricated on the page like many of his other popular interviews in print.

[108] Jeremy Bentham (1789) argued anticipated experience could be painful, an idea adopted by economist William Stanley Jevons (1905) who coined the term 'anticipal pain' (Loewenstein 1987, pp. 666-667).

[109] Bordwell (2007) suggests a distinction between suspense and dread. Where the former involves uncertainty over an outcome, the latter involves certainty. Robert Yanal also refers to a 'fear of the known' that he sees as distinct from suspense which requires uncertainty (1996, p. 154). If Bordwell and Yanal's claims are true, it could mean that the paradox of suspense is non-existant or rare. Gerrig's amazement that he could watch footage of the Challenger space shuttle disaster over and over on the news in 1986 and find himself hoping beyond hope it would not explode this time could simply be a case of *dread*. As Gerrig reported in 1993:

> I knew the outcome, and yet again and again I found myself watching the first few seconds of lift-off and crying out mentally, "Make it!"…I never felt prompted to cry out "Make it!" when watching shuttle footage until I knew that this one shuttle had failed to do so. *It felt as if this desire had been called forth by the same knowledge that rendered it impotent* (1993, p. 177, emphasis added).

This important issue requires further discussion elsewhere, as I am not sure how we could empirically distinguish between dread felt when re-watching the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) and suspense that paradoxically persists in the face of knowing exactly what is to come. Moreover, Gerrig's own answer of the paradox of suspense (1996, 1997), which points to shortcomings in *global* memory retrieval when focused on a *local* situation, might imply that some instances could involve a complex mixture of both. That is, knowing on a global level and thus feeling *dread* as Marion Crane turns on the shower, and not knowing on a local level and thereby feeling *suspense* due to temporary uncertainty as to her fate. For my current investigation, however, it matters little as I am not so concerned with official definitions of suspense so much as our moment-by-moment preferences for particular narrative outcomes. Thus whether *dread* is not technically 'suspense' is unimportant so long as it affects rooting responses. That said, to put Gerrig's response down to dread may explain the anxiety he felt but still does not answer a question he asks which relates directly to the study of predilections for narrative outcomes: 'Why root–strenuously–for something that I know is not going to happen?' (1997, p. 170).

[110] According to Loewenstein, this may be because the satisfaction gained from information is practically instantaneous, immediately returning us to a neutral state, in stark contrast to drives such as sex and hunger that are slowly satiated (1994, p. 92). When curiosity is resolved with a surprise, as in a twist ending, satisfaction may be greater because 'surprise fades over time' (Golman & Loewenstein 2015, p. 18).

[111] This raises that possibility that *if* emotional states often lead to physiological response patterns then the bodily response to curiosity and suspense are opposite. That is, where it was reported earlier that suspense had been found to *lower* heart rate, curiosity here is linked to *increased* heart rate. That suspense and curiosity are often intermingled during first-time viewing, as viewers fear a potential outcome whilst also wondering which outcome will eventuate, raises even greater problems in untangling physiological data during movie reception. Furthermore, any sudden changes or tension between and increase and decrease in heart rate might be interpreted by viewers themselves as a particular affective–emotional response.

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[112] Despite the power of curiosity to attract our attention, it is important to note that this can be short-circuited when attention is diverted away from the knowledge gap to other concerns (Loewenstein 1994, p. 92). Flicking over to another channel during a commercial break in *Baggage Battles*, I can stumble across a clifftop scene in which a woman clings to two young boys dangling high above icy winter waters and completely forget the latest suitcase I was so intent on seeing opened.

[113] I performed this experimental manipulation upon myself and sensed that the discomfort at witnessing a car that will not start, and the desire that it will, was still present. Nevertheless, I must concede that my self-conscouisness during this brief test felt particularly high, reducing confidence in my reported response. The test thus requires first-time viewers to report their moment-by-moment predilections for narrative outcomes.

[114] Given common claims about the importance visual input is said to have upon male sexual arousal compared to female, it would be interesting to see if the same dramatic situation in *written* form produced comparatively less hope in male audience members like me that Nick will bed Catherine and more fear that he will fall under her sexual spell than in the movie.

[115] Even the breakdown between micro and macro seems far too limited. We might also talk of *nano* questions or other terms that covered the full range of questions at a story, sequence, scene, action, and sub-action level (i.e. the tiny actions required to complete an action goal). Recognition of the multiple levels at which questions are prompted, it becomes even more apparent that our preferred answer to one narrative question may conflict with another. Carroll seems to assume far too much consistency in each viewer's response, an issue we shall return to shortly.

[116] Raskin sums up this view across the literature in a single sentence:

> Virtually all screenwriting manuals categorically assert that "all drama is conflict" (Field 1994, 12); that "without conflict a film story cannot come to life" (Howard and Mabley 1993, 46); that conflict is "the heart *and* soul of screenwriting" (Hunter 1994, 19) and "the central feature of the screen story" (Dancyger and Rush 2002, 3).

Raskin then goes on to challenge it by suggesting that *connectedness* to events and characters is more important, at least when it comes to short films.

[117] A popular misconception is that evolution is either a purely random process or a purposeful process (Gregory 2009). The power of natural selection is that it is both, combining random mutation with non-random selection. Those mutations that manage to be increasingly reproduced in a particular population in a particular environment are 'selected for'. However, there is no agency or intent in this process, as is commonly assumed. Whilst many struggle with the notion that something as complex as the human brain could have been designed by mere 'chance', evidence on the development of another complex organ — the eye — across centuries and across species has all but 'proven' that random mutation is indeed the engine behind its evolution (see Gregory 2008). Although natural selection has no intent, a small percentage of random errors in genetic duplication that happen to prove advantageous to a population's reproduction rate can, across hundreds and thousands of years, cause life forms to evolve in startling new directions and create the illusion that these adaptations occurred *in order to* solve a particular survival problem. Kurzban is not mounting an argument that psychological mechanisms developed out of need or deliberate design, merely out of random mutation that led to reproductive benefit. Misunderstanding about evolution across the population is ongoing, even amongst high school biology teachers (see Nehm & Schonfeld 2007; Nelson, CE 2008). Other important misconceptions include the assumption that evolutionary theory claims *every* aspect of our biology is the result of natural selection, and that evolution has *stopped*, thereby allowing some skeptics to ask why we aren't still evolving. The answer is, 'We are'.

[118] This is not to claim that everything is an adaptation. Some things are simply byproducts. Human blood, for instance, is red due to a range of chemical properties, not because the colour confers any advantage. Kurzban contents that way to determine what is and is not the product of evolution is to follow any other accepted scientific field in creating hypotheses (in this case about a purported adaptive function) and finding ways to experimentally test these claims.

[119] Survival mechanisms such as startles might be an exception due to the overwhelming stakes at play. Failing to jump back suddenly could result in serious injury and death. Nevertheless, evolutionary mechanisms in general are not claimed to *guarantee* behaviour, and to do so is arguably maladaptive, as seen in phobias of 'startling' dangers such as spiders. All that matters is that selected mechanisms give a statistical advantage to human reproduction over time in a particular environment.

[120] Strictly speaking, Bordwell's piece is a blog entry, not an *article* per se. Nevertheless, the intellegiance and rigour with which these short pieces are written make them arguably one of the most important sources of film theory in the last decade.

[121] An alternative explanation of viewers' strange willingness to root for the bomb door circuitry to be fixed despite hoping the bomb is not dropped comes from an appeal to Gerrig's claim that memory limitations may be behind the paradox of suspense. That is, as we watch local events unfolding before us, global goals may be temporarily unavailable. Thus. in that instant, we may be technically unaware of the horrible outcomes down the track should our local goal be achieved, even if we become aware a moment later. This important answer requires serious investigation, however I am uncertain as to how this might be achieved. Perhaps Gerrig could measure viewers' retrieval time of questions regarding a goal when it is local or global, comparing them to claim that shorter times equate to active memory. But until we have a reliable sign that memory access is taking place or has taken place, determining when someone is aware of a global goal and unaware may prove difficult. I live in hope that an ingenious way to solve this issue is found by future researchers.

[122] Aaron Smuts (2008) argues that helplessness is at the centre of suspense, which is born of a frustrated desire to intervene. This explains why suspense is noticably absent when one is able to act upon an event, but may be experienced when one is suddenly unable to have an influence. For instance, when a penalty shot to win or lose a game is about to be taken, the player taking it would not usually describe herself as being in suspense, though interested onlookers likely would. But as the ball floats towards the target, the player also becomes a helpless witness and may well experience heart-in-mouth suspense (Smuts 2008, p. 284). Ardon Van Buren Powell's stampeding bull scenario outlined in the Introductory chapter also highlighted the helpless nature of the onlooker (1919, p. 120). And even Hitchcock emphasised the importance of helplessness and frustrated desire when telling Truffaut in the bomb-under-the-table scenario that the audience is 'longing to warn the characters on the screen' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73). The director tells an amusing anecdote about the premiere of *Rear Window* (1954) that illustrates Smuts' idea. When Lisa (Grace Kelly) is snooping in the killer's apartment as he (Raymond Burr) unexpectedly returns, Hitchcock claimed that Joseph Cotton's wife in the audience was so distraught at the heroine's prospects for escape that she turned to her movie star husband and whispered, 'Do something, do something!' (cited in Truffaut & Scott 1967/1984, p. 73).

Martin F. Norden has also made statements that parallel Smuts' own, noting that 'the spectator is in a completely helpless position' and that 'film experience…[has a] strong element of frustration' in our inability to warn characters of impending threat (1980, p. 75). Unfortunately this is not where the similarity ends. Like Norden, Smuts' article has been sadly neglected – as has an earlier paper arguing for the importance of helplessness co-authored with Jonathan Frome (see Frome & Smuts 2004) – despite offering a worthy new solution to the Paradox of Suspense proposing that uncertainty is irrelevant to the entire suspense experience.

[123] Kurzban and DeScioli (2012) conclude that these findings falsify the claim that altruism mechanisms underlie moral judgment, which should predict no change in willingness to push a family member or friend. They suggest that a mechanism other than kin selection is therefore behind the incredibly high levels of reluctance to push one person to save five, which accords with their claim that the adaptive function of moral judgment is to ensure moral coordination and avoid moral condemnation.

[125] For instance, the so-called *actor-observer bias* might suggest that, despite narrated information, the viewer's interpretation of such information is not equal. This well-known psychological phenomenon is described as a 'pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements [i.e. to dramatic context], whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions [i.e. to character traits]' (Jones, E & Nisbett 1972, p. 80). Although this popular explanation for asymmetry when accounting for behavior could be seen as further support for the influence of partiality, somehow judging the immoral behavior of characters closest to us as imposed by the situation whilst interpreting others' immoral acts as indicative of their lower moral virtue, it may be another case where 'the simplicity and elegance of this formulation has surely contributed to its appeal' (Malle, Knobe & Nelson 2007, p. 511). According to these authors 'there is no reason to expect simplicity as a mark of social–cognitive phenomena' and that 'even though textbooks in social psychology have described the classic actor–observer asymmetry as a robust and well-supported phenomenon, there is no evidence for it, either in the published literature or in the present studies' (2007, p. 511 & p. 509, see also Malle 2011).

[126] Hindriks (2015) points out that 'Bandura rarely if ever uses the term [cognitive dissonance] in writing' (p. 243). He also observes:

> Moore (2008) maintains instead that disengagement pre-empts cognitive dissonance. This may well be
> due to a failure to acknowledge the possibility of anticipatory guilt feelings and anticipatory
> rationalizations (Hindriks 2015, p. 243).

Given that suspense is thought to involve anticipatory emotions such as hopre and fear for particular outcomes, I think the potential for anticipatory guilt and its dismissal through disengagement techniques before an act is committed is perfectly plausible and leaves my explanation of Bandura's process intact. As Hindriks plainly concludes of Bandura's appeal to an hypothesised inner discomfort during perpetration of an inhumanity, 'these feelings constitute cognitive dissonance' (Hindriks 2015, p. 243).

[127] For instance, the social heuristics hypothesis proposes that 'intuition favors behavior that typically maximises payoffs' (Rand 2016, p. 1192). As young human beings learn the benefit of social cooperation and siding with the moral rules to avoid condemnation and personal cost, this soon becomes a heuristic — a mental shortcut when faced with a moral problem. However, this rule of thumb can still be overridden during deliberation, which 'favors behavior that maximizes one's payoff in the current situation' (p. p. 1192). That is, in situations when we realise there is more benefit to be had in breaking the moral rules we may do so. Rand's theory seems to synch with many of my own claims in this episode where egocentric interests appear to have consciously outweighed my moral judgment at the movies. The full implications of such a theory on rooting in the cinema rests upon narration's ability to highlight the presence of clear benefit in foregoing standard moral rules in order to trigger moral deliberation to pursue other egocentric interests I have flagged so far. David G. Rand's appeal to heuristics may avoid the criticism addressed at previous moral heuristic theories such as Sunstein (2005), which claims that individual moral rules of thumb are internalised (see Waldmann, Nagel & Wiegmann 2012 for a sharp critique). However, it has little to say about our *interpretation* of moral rules in particular contexts, which is clearly a major part of moral judgment. After all, intuition does not seem to instantly side with the rule 'Thou shalt not kill' when self-defence is involved, or when one man can be killed indirectly to save five. Other processes are clearly involved. If Rand claims these are actually cases of moral deliberation, how might need to explain why 'Self-defense' is not also a heuristic. How Rand's claims may interact with our moral computations remains to be discussed. Do we have mechanisms that rapidly compute moral signals into order to determine the side most members of our society will likely agree is appropriate? (On this issue, which lies beyond the scope of my investigation, see DeScioli 2008, 2016 and DeScioli & Kurzban 2009, 2013).

[128] Aristotle himself writes '[T]he spectacle of…a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity…neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear' (Butcher 1911, p. 45).

[129] As Plantinga (1998) points out, the same kind of moral discomfort is encouraged throughout the movie when Munny and his fellow assassins kill the men involved in cutting up a young prostitute's face. Instead of a shoot out with cartoon bad guys, they kill ordinary men who have paid penance and expressed remorse (albeit insufficient) by ambushing them unawares when sitting in the outdoor lavatory or farming in a canyon below. Even more shocking is when Munny murders the saloon owner, unarmed and in cold blood, minutes before killing Little Bill. His only reason for this act is that Ned's body sits on display in a coffin out the front of his establishment. But this display is not even the proprietor's own doing, rather Little Bill's warning to others who threaten law and order in his town. Although anticipatory empathic and egocentric pain and distress at the impending shooting is no doubt involved when Munny warns customers to step aside as he aims his shotgun squarely at the defenseless saloon owner before pulling the trigger, I suggest that the notion of *deservingness* is another significant factor at play here.

[130] Zillmann and Cantor (1977) argued that deservingness ratings could not explain the results of their audience data without an appeal to the notion of affective disposition because the neutral protagonist produced empathic effects equal to, if not higher than, the benevolent protagonist. If hopes and fears were built purely on objective notions of moral deservingness, the authors' claimed, a neutral character should have been viewed as neither deserving nor undeserving of any particular outcome and therefore induced minimal empathic response (i.e. indifference), whilst a benevolent character should have been regarded as much more deserving of benefit and undeserving of harm. That the data did not match these predictions suggested to Zillmann and Cantor that deservingness ratings alone could not rule empathic response (Zillmann & Cantor 1977, p. 163). Something needed to account for this variation, and that something was affiliation – the dispositional stance we quickly form towards a character that colours our deservingness ratings and goes on to influence empathic reactivity. As they put it, our biologically default empathetic reactivity to others is 'mediated by considerations of deservingness' (p. 47; see also Zillmann & Bryant 1975).

[131] Furthermore, if DeScioli and Kurzban (2013) are correct to assign the influence of identity and morality to separate cognitive mechanisms, it is more likely to be exhibited in after-the-fact defenses of a liked character than during their impending immoral acts. Thus when Martins, Mares, Malacane, and Peebles (2016) report –

> When asked whether they thought it was "okay" for the perpetrator to use aggression against the
> victim, tweens who liked the perpetrators typically said, "Yes because [the victim] really deserved it"
> or that the victim was "being a jerk." On the other hand, preadolescents who did not like the
> antagonist answered this question by saying things like "Two wrongs don't make a right; the

[perpetrator] did not have to be mean" and "It's not okay because violence is never the answer." (Martins et al. 2016, p. 19).

– as support for Raney's contention that partiality encourages moral latitude for liked characters, this should not be taken for evidence that these immoral actions were actually rooted for before their occurrence. Further data is required to make this claim, and it is quite possible that viewers will simultaneously not want an immoral event to occur *and* to justify its occurrence after the fact, as responses to moral dilemmas in The Trolley Problem have shown.

[132] For instance, Arthur Raney writes:

Disposition theory contends that viewers form [moral] alliances with characters in drama on a continuum of affect from extremely positive through indifference to extremely negative…More simply stated, as drama viewers, we like and cheer for certain characters, while despising and rooting against others (2004, p. 350).

How does Raney shift from the first statement to the second 'more simply stated' proposal without mutilating the predictions he elsewhere shows he is fully aware that disposition theory makes regarding rooting for narrative outcomes?

Zillmann's own definition of suspense could also be said to encourage the assumption that deservingness and disposition are directly linked and practically one and the same.

[D]rama-evoked suspense [is]…a noxious affective reaction that characteristically derives from the respondents' acute, fearful apprehension about deplorable events that threaten *liked* protagonists…

Here Zillmann implies that viewers uniformly root for outcomes favourable to *liked* characters. Yet in the very next sentence, he quietly concedes that *liked* protagonists are not necessary for suspense after all.

According to this definition, the experience is *compromised* when protagonists are insufficiently liked or disliked…(1996/2013, p. 389', all emphasis added).

This second sentence, highlighting disposition's influence as an intensifier of suspense, opens the door for amoral egocentric influences that disposition theory has yet to acknowledge.

[146] This 'choice' is not necessarily made consciously, merely rapidly computed and likely involving a mixture of conscious and nonconscious factors that outputs an overall rooting desire for one potential narrative outcome, even if we simultaneously hold some desire for the other outcome to occur.

[147] Again, this need not be a conscious calculation, merely the way we navigate the world, rapidly weighing up costs and benefits moment-by-moment to determine what to do next within our current environment.

[148] Plantinga, in an apparent oversight during the compilation of his extensive book on cinematic emotion, attributes the quote directly to Roger Manvell (Plantinga 2009, p. 1).

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