Cinema of Confinement

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Notes

Introduction

2. Certainly one can argue that Cuarón’s reason for not showing the bomb first is to capture the film’s uncertain and dystopic futuristic setting due to two decades of human infertility, which has led to a breakdown in systems of government.
7. My analysis of Lacan’s theory of the gaze as a knowable and/or unknowable force in confinement cinema is indebted to Todd McGowan’s outstanding work involving the intersection of Lacan and cinema.
9. Ibid., 92.
10. Ibid., 101.
15. Ibid., 85.
16. Ibid., 185.
17. McGowan, Real Gaze, 128.
18. Ibid., 163
19. Ibid., part 4.
21. Also see Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 12–16.
27. Ibid., 44.

Chapter 1

3. Slavoj Žižek explains that the empty screen is one of the three dimensions of the real. Žižek notes that “the real is also and primarily the screen itself as the obstacle that always already distorts our perception of the referent, of the reality ‘out there.’” Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 220–21. Also see Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 134–35.
8. Quoted in Jacob Hall, “‘Green Room’ Director Jeremy Saulnier on Pat-

9. Ibid.


12. Ibid., 56.


Chapter 2


3. Ibid., 315.


5. Certainly, unwritten rules can mean different things in different cultures, such as greetings and etiquette. There is no written rule, for instance, that one must say “hello” when answering the phone, or say “God bless you” after someone sneezes. Yet many of us enact these unwritten rules in our daily interactions. And those who do not follow the unwritten rules tend to stand out, for example, wearing shorts and flip-flops to a Roman Catholic funeral. This is often what comedians tune into when writing jokes—exposing the unwritten rules that organize a given society. For example, in the *Seinfeld* episode “The Good Samaritan,” Jerry (Jerry Seinfeld) suggests that they say “You are so good looking” after someone sneezes rather than “God bless you.” The episode humorously violates an unwritten rule in Western society after someone sneezes. For a full theoretical account of jokes, see Todd McGowan, *Only a Joke Can Save Us: A Theory of Comedy* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2017).


7. Quoted in Bob Thomas, “Alfred Hitchcock: The German Years,” in *Al-


11. Ibid., 268.

12. Ibid., 270.


14. Ibid., 117.


16. It is also important to consider Jeff’s unease with his marriage to Lisa in relation to lack and desire. It is not until Lisa climbs into Thorwald’s apartment that she becomes eroticized for Jeff.


18. Henry Krips notes that “not all anomalies in the visual field constitute moments of anxiety. For example . . . the sights of an actor in a film behaving ‘out of character,’ straining to ignore the fly that has blundered onto the film set and landed on his nose, may occasion viewer amusement rather than a distress.” This, as Krips points out, raises a question of a politics of looking pertaining to the gaze. For more on this, see Krips’s reading of Lacan’s story of a boat trip he took with a group of fishermen as a young man and his encounter with the gaze. Henry Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 102–8.


20. Another example of the disruption of window transparency occurs during the dining scene aboard the Twentieth Century train with Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) and Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) in Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (1959). The scene is filmed against the passing of the beautiful background of the Hudson River. Toward the end of the scene, the train begins to slow. Unbeknownst to Thornhill, as the train is about to stop, two police officers are seen exiting a police vehicle parked in the background seen through the train’s window. Here, the sudden appearance of the law, combined with the slowing of the train, causes the window to lose its transparent effect as Thornhill learns that the state police are looking for him.


24. Ibid., 23.
26. Also see Žižek, Looking Awry, 78.

Chapter 3

2. Ibid., 77.
3. Ibid., 78.
5. See Žižek, Looking Awry, 139. Also see Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, Conversations with Žižek (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 119–21.
8. Ibid., 100–101.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 69–74.
18. Ibid., 69–70.
19. Ibid., 79.
20. Ibid., 81.
21. McGowan, Real Gaze, 73.
22. Ibid., 74.
23. This is also because Mulvey does not acknowledge that Peter Brooks misreads the Freudian death drive in his analysis of narrative and drive. What Brooks does not consider in his analysis of narrative propulsion is that the death drive is the repetition of loss. See McGowan, Real Gaze, 223.
29. It could also be suggested that cinema’s hidden secret is not only the still frame, but the excess of the gaze, what Slavoj Žižek describes as a “primordial point of fixation (or freeze) in what we see in the gaze itself.” Žižek explains that “the gaze not only mortifies its object, it stands itself for the frozen point of immobility in the field of the visible.” See Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 111.

Chapter 4

4. Ibid., 32.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 36. Author’s emphasis.
7. Ibid., 38.
9. Ibid., 246.
10. Ibid., 250.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 181.
16. Žižek, *Fright of Real Tears*, 36. Author’s emphasis.
21. The indeterminate location of the gaze closely follows Michel Chion’s notion of *acousmêtre* (a cinematic voice that has not been embodied). “For the spectator . . . the filmic acousmêtre is ‘offscreen,’ outside the image, and at the same time *in* the image: the loudspeaker that’s actually its source is located behind the image in the movie theatre.” The *acousmêtre* is a voice that is at once inside and outside. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 23. Author’s emphasis.
22. One is reminded of the credit sequence in Robert Aldrich’s *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). The film’s opening credits roll in reverse, suggesting that Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker), as well as the viewers, will encounter something that is incomprehensible: namely, atomic annihilation.
26. The opposite could be said for the toilet-diving scene in Danny Boyle’s *Trainspotting* (1996). Renton (Ewan McGregor) takes opium suppositories to combat his heroin withdrawal. Unexpectedly, the suppositories kick in and Renton is forced to use the “Worst Toilet in Scotland.” Renton enters an extremely filthy bathroom, with brown smudges on the wall and a disgusting unflushed toilet. After Renton relieves himself, he dives head-first into the toilet to find his opium. Here, we have the reverse effect of the drain as preventing things returning from the “netherworld.” As Renton passes through the drain, the water is beautiful and magical as he swims, searching for his opium.
28. Ibid., 174.
29. Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 133.
37. Ibid., 26.
Chapter 5

1. Lacan identifies four partial drives: the oral, the anal, the scopic, and the invocatory.
   7. Ibid., 289.
   12. Ibid., 41.
   14. Another film noteworthy in this regard is Clint Eastwood’s *Play Misty for Me* (1971), a film about a disc jockey (Clint Eastwood) who is stalked by Evelyn (Jessica Walter), an obsessive fan who always requests the jazz tune “Misty.” I kindly thank Annalisa Weaver-Zox for pointing this out to me.
   17. Also see Barry Keith Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
   21. Ibid., 60.
   23. Ibid., 113.
Chapter 6

1. See chapter 2 in Sconce, Haunted Media.
3. Ibid., 21.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 334.
12. Ibid., 24. Author’s emphasis.
19. For a full account of Althusser’s notion of interpellation, see chapter 5 in Henry Krips, Fetish: An Erotics of Culture. See also Žižek, Tarrying with the Negative, 73–80.
20. Also see Matthew Flisfeder’s excellent reading of desire and interpellation in The Symbolic, the Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek’s Theory of Film (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 144–46.
22. Ibid., 1.
23. Ibid., 248.
24. Ibid.
25. Chion, Voice in Cinema, 28. Author’s emphasis.
26. Ibid., 27–28. Author’s emphasis.


Chapter 7

1. Neroni, *Subject of Torture*, 143.
2. Ibid., 140.
3. Ibid., 141.
4. Neroni describes Sydney as embodying the “detective of the real,” one who sees “the importance of irrationality, desire, and anxiety as markers of the subject and thus of truth,” whereas “biological” see procuring truth within the symbolic (and occasionally in the imagery), such as the ideology of torture at work in 24. See Neroni, *Subject of Torture*, 128–33.
5. It is not made explicitly clear whether or not Megan is deceased. Howard first tells Michelle: “Megan’s not with us anymore.” Later, he tells her that her mother turned Megan against him, and then they took off to Chicago. Emmett also tells Michelle that Howard’s family moved to Chicago.
10. Ibid., 15.
14. The intersection of fantasy and desire in cinema is what Todd McGowan terms “the cinema of intersection.” See part 4 in McGowan, *The Real Gaze*.
17. At the same time, the overload of digital effects can potentially cause anxiety, or what Hugh S. Manon argues is the lack of lack. See Hugh S. Manon, “Beyond the Beyond: CGI and the Anxiety of Overperfection,” in Žižek and Media Studies: A Reader, ed. Matthew Flisfeder and Louis-Paul Willis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 184–97.


19. Ibid., 98.

20. In certain ways, Michelle follows some of Carol J. Clover’s description of the “Final Girl” often depicted in horror films. For Clover, the Final Girl is typically the one who escapes the slasher who has murdered all her friends, such as Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) in John Carpenter’s Halloween (1978). The final girl is often smart, young, and innocent. She is typically coded as masculine, such as Ripley in the Alien franchise. See Carol J. Clover, Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Conclusion


5. Ibid.

6. A film that works in an opposite fashion is Akira Kurosawa’s ransom thriller, High and Low (1963). The film begins with Gondo (Toshiro Mifune), a wealthy executive of a company called National Shoes. Gondo plans to take control of the company. But in order to set up his leveraged buyout, Gondo mortgages his home. Just as he is about to put the plan into effect, a man calls (Takeuchi [Tsutomu Yamazaki]) and says that he has kidnapped Gondo’s son, Jun (Toshio Egi). Takeuchi wants a ransom of $30 million—all the money Gondo borrowed to take over National Shoes. As Gondo prepares to organize the money, he discovers that it was not his son who was kidnapped, but his chauffeur’s son, Shinichi (Masahiko Shimazu). At first Gondo is reluctant to pay the ransom, but eventually he decides to pay. The first section of the film takes place entirely in Gondo’s home—predominantly in his living room, where a large window looks out over the city of Yokohama. This section of the film runs a little over fifty minutes as a chamber-play film. Like Talk Radio, Takeuchi can see
Gondo from below in the city, but neither the viewer nor Gondo can see Takeuchi, creating a space of uncertainty through the separation of voice and body. At the end of the film, after Takeuchi has been caught by the police, he asks to meet with Gondo before he is executed. At the prison, Takeuchi and Gondo are protected by a glass barrier. Kurosawa superimposes their faces on the glass to suggest the dangers of going it alone and detaching oneself from society. At the start of the film, Gondo sets a course of obtaining power for himself by controlling National Shoes. As Geoffrey O’Brien explains in his essay from the Criterion Blu-ray, the superimposition of Gondo’s and Takeuchi’s faces shows that the two have become one. Takeuchi, as O’Brien observes, “is a demon of isolation, defiantly cut loose from those indispensable ties of human contact that are measured throughout every frame of High and Low by a constant play of glances and postures.” The last image of the film is Takeuchi’s scream of pain as the barrier descends on Gondo. As such, Gondo has now achieved his solidarity in attempting to go it alone in his power grab of National Shoes. Yet the ending leaves us with uncertainty as Gondo remains alone in front of the barrier at the prison. Also see Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto’s excellent reading of High and Low in Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

7. Another film worthy to note is Rodrigo Cortés’s Buried, in which the truck driver Paul Conroy (Ryan Reynolds), working in Iraq, is attacked and later finds himself buried alive in a wooden casket. The captor leaves a cell phone in the casket in order for Paul to orchestrate paying a ransom of $5 million for his release. Working with Paul is Brenner (Robert Paterson) at the U.S. State Department. Brenner is able to find Paul’s location through an insurgent. At the end of the film, Paul hears Brenner’s team digging, telling him that they have found his location. But it turns out that the insurgent led Brenner to another contractor’s burial site, Mark White, who was supposedly rescued by Brenner. Like The Wall, the film leaves us with antagonism and with the need to ponder its potential meanings in relation to the Iraq War.

8. It is interesting to note that “townstone” sounds eerily like “tombstone,” alluding to the premature burial narrative. I kindly thank Annalisa Weaver-Zox for pointing this out to me.


10. Copjec, Imagine There’s No Woman, 212.


13. It is interesting to add that when talking to friends, colleagues, and students about my project, they would often recommend movies for my research, which attests to the recent surge in and awareness of confinement cinema.

14. See Allan Cameron’s Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema (Lon-
16. Ibid., 32.
17. Žižek, Fright of Real Tears, 148.
18. Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, 323.