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**The Power of Sound to Confound and
Deceive: An Exploration of the Psychotropic
Soundscape of *Berberian Sound Studio***

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Declaration

I declare that the work described in this research paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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Abstract

The genre of horror has stirred much controversy and debate due to its representations of violence, and the psychological and potential detrimental effects that over exposure may evoke in viewers. Indeed, these issues pertain most significantly to the sub-genre of exploitation horror, which has frequently been derided as sensational and vulgar. Peter Strickland's latest feature film, *Berberian Sound Studio*, is a compelling and engaging reflection on portrayals of violence and how, through the processes of creation and consumption, we may be implicated in this horror.

Berberian Sound Studio is both a homage to and critique of *giallo* cinema, the Italian exploitation variant of horror that was popular 1970s. *Giallo* cinema is notorious for its grotesque profusion and excessive violence. However, Strickland subverts this convention through his decision to communicate the horror exclusively through sound. Strickland's motion picture, set in an Italian postproduction sound studio, serves to expose the deceptive and elusive nature of sound and the power of association and context that is central to cinematic sound production. Moreover, the film demonstrates how sonic representations of violence can evoke an imaginative engagement that is often beyond our conscious awareness.

My essay explores the ominous and insightful soundscape of *Berberian Sound Studio* and how it effectively establishes a tone of horror that is all at once morbidly sinister and alluringly cryptic. Moreover, I will examine the sonic portrayals of violence and how its effects pertain to psychoanalysis of the horror genre and current film theory. Through my analysis of the psychotropic sonic realm of *Berberian Sound Studio*, I aim to generate an awareness of the powerful affective potential of sound in film. Indeed, my essay reveals how cinematic sound as a pervasive and insidious medium can stimulate both imaginative and somatic empathy in the viewer, resulting in an intensely emotional, phenomenological experience.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Horror Genre and Psychoanalysis	7
Chapter 2: Stylised Excess and Sonic Representations of Violence	16
Chapter 3: The Implications of Sound in Berberian Sound Studio	25
Conclusion	35
Bibliography	39
<i>Books and Anthologies</i>	39
<i>Web Pages and Interviews</i>	41
<i>Films</i>	44

Introduction

‘So we all begin as hearing beings- our four and a half month baptism in a sea of sound must have a profound and everlasting effect on us-but from the moment of birth onward, hearing seems to recede into the background of our consciousness and function more as an accompaniment to what we see. Why this should be, rather than the reverse, is a mystery.’

Walter Murch (2000).

It is this mystery that has formed the visual bias inherent in our culture and which undoubtedly informs how we experience and interact with film. Murch relates how this cinematic reversal of natural order is one of the prime reasons why criticism and analysis of film sound has always been problematic, if discussed at all (Chion, 1994). Consequently, the leading paradigm for analysing the relationship between the image and sound became the ‘transcendent power of the image and the dependence of the soundtrack’ (Kalinak, 1992: 20-21). Indeed, music and sound are deemed almost a servant to the superior visual image, used to enhance, reinforce or even alter the meaning that lies solely in the autonomous visual narrative. Chion, the French composer, filmmaker and critic contests this precursory approach to film analysis in his 1994 book, *Audio-Vision*. He discusses the concept of ‘added value’, which he claims is the ‘expressive and informative value with which sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen’ (Chion, 1994: 5). He adds that this concept can often be misconstrued as suggesting that sound is not necessary and merely serves to duplicate the meaning that already exists in the image, hence reinforcing the problematic notion of the subordinate disposition of sound. However, Chion relates this concept to the power of *synchresis*, which he describes as the ‘spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time’ (Ibid: 63). This is central to the process of postproduction sound design, which often works outside the boundaries of rational logic, with images and sounds that are far removed from one another,

‘forming monstrous yet inevitable and irresistible agglomerations in our perception’ (Ibid: 63).

Chion takes the example of the horror genre to illustrate the reciprocity of ‘added value’ and to reinforce the need to find a theory that addresses image and sound as equally important perceptual mechanisms. He notes that in horror cinema, it is often the image that makes us hear the sound differently. This idea is particularly applicable to the Foley stage of a horror film, where to take the sound from its real auditory source would be both licentious and illegal. He uses the example of crushing watermelons to depict trauma to the human body: ‘the figurative value of a sound in itself is usually quite non-specific. Depending on the dramatic and visual context, a single sound can convey very diverse things’. He explains that over time, due to the process of synchrony and cinematic convention, we come to associate these sounds with certain events (Ibid: 22).

It is this aspect of sound, according to Murch, that makes film sound problematic, both for critics and for audiences. He explains that, because we are not an ‘auditive’ culture, it is difficult for us to develop the concepts or language to deal with the mischievous and deceptive nature of sound when it is freed from its sonic source (Ibid: xvi-xvii).

Nonetheless, film is dependent upon this ‘reassociation’ of image and sound. Murch relates that this method is employed ‘to *stretch* the relationship of sound to image wherever possible: to create a purposeful and fruitful tension between what is on the screen and what is kindled in the mind of the audience’ (Ibid: xix).

British screen writer and director Peter Strickland’s latest feature film *Berberian Sound Studio (Berberian)* is predicated on this very tension. *Berberian*, which previewed at the Edinburgh Film Festival in June 2012 and appeared again at the London Frightfest film festival the following August has won awards for Best Director, Best Actor and Best Achievement in Production at the 2012 British Independent Film Awards. Strickland made a version of it as a short film in 2005 with *The Bohman Brothers*. He claims he always wanted to return to it ‘because the

violent element of Foley fascinated me. It seemed so unspeakable but so ridiculous at the same time' (Cummings, 2012).

Strickland, in an interview with Basia Lewandowska Cummings, relates how his sense of cinema was informed by sound. He imparts his love for rock and roll and his passion for experimental and avant-garde music and cites composers and musicians such as Bruno Maderna and Lucio Beriano, who founded the *Studio de Phonologia* in Milan as note-worthy musical influences. Moreover, he explains how Beriano's experimental piece *Visage* with Cathy Berberian (after whom the film was named) was extremely inspirational in terms of sound design for the movie (Cummings, 2012). His interest in experimental sound is evident in his involvement with the *Sonic Catering Band* who 'employ a similar approach to electronic music as to (vegetarian) food: taking the raw sounds recorded from the cooking and preparing of a meal and treating them through processing, cutting, mixing and layering' (The Sonic Catering Band, 1996). In the context of Strickland's musical inclination and experience, it is not surprising that his first feature film, *Katalin Varga* won the Silver Bear for sound design in the Outstanding Artistic Achievement Category at the 2009 Berlin Film Festival. Nor is it surprising that his second feature film, *Berberian Sound Studio* would be centred on the production of sound. Indeed, Strickland's enthusiasm for experimental sound is manifest in the expressive and ominous soundtrack that permeates this movie. The implications of this soundscape, coupled with Strickland's decision to communicate the horror solely through sound will be the central concern of this essay.

Set in a 1970s oppressively menacing Italian postproduction sound studio, Gilderoy (played by Toby Jones), a timid, reserved sound-engineer from Dorking, is commissioned to work on a brutally violent *giallo* horror movie, *The Equestrian Vortex*. This movie is the antithesis to the nature documentaries that Gilderoy is accustomed to working on in his garden shed. Apart from the aggressively psychedelic opening credits to *The Equestrian Vortex*, an agitated concoction of screaming red and blacks (a conspicuous reference to *giallo* cinema), the film exists as a mere sheen across Gilderoy's horrified face. We see none of the blood and gore that this *giallo* horror embraces, but rather we receive brief synopses of the scenes

in question and glances at the information map detailing the spectacle and the corresponding plans for sound design. More significantly, *Berberian* invites us into the dark world of analogue sound recording. We hear the whirring of the magnetic tapes as Gilderoy records and treats the anxious breathy dialogue of the actresses. We watch him turning the chunky knobs and dials, adding eerie effects to the haunting vocals, chilling screams and disturbingly deranged babble of the supernatural characters. Strickland relates how he wanted to make a movie about analogue sound due to the incredibly visual and physical nature of it and how it channels a 'very powerful, otherworldly feel: the racks full of oscillators filters, oscilloscopes...There is a ritualistic and mysterious quality to it all and the film is meant to celebrate that' (Wood, 2012). Moreover, *Berberian* charts the Foley process of the savagely barbaric torture scenes so explicitly, that we (the audience) are left in no doubt with regard to the unseen violence occurring on the projector screen in front of Gilderoy. Watermelons are viciously butchered, cabbages are savagely stabbed and amidst this frenzy of vegetable mutilation, we watch helplessly as the menacing world of *The Equestrian Vortex* slowly but persistently invades Gilderoy's psyche. The studio and living quarters amplify Gilderoy's growing isolation and anguish and subsequent mental decline, as they become increasingly nightmarish and claustrophobic. Boundaries of these physical spaces and the diegetic boundaries of the film begin to collapse as Gilderoy is denied the ability to distinguish between the supernatural world of *The Equestrian Vortex* and objective reality, and we are forced to question everything we previously believed and understood.

This psychological meta-horror is both a homage to and critique of *giallo* cinema, the Italian sub-genre of exploitation horror. The genre owes its conception to the Milanese publishers *Mondadori*, who launched a line of books 1929 called *giallo* due to the characteristic yellow covers (Needham, 2002). These books were centred on the genres of mystery and detection and primarily consisted of imported translations of British crime and American murder mystery novels, including writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Edgar Wallace and Edgar Allan Poe. The publication of *giallo* novels increased through the 1930s and 1940s but it wasn't

until the 1960s that cinematic equivalent of *giallo* emerged. However, according to Koven, the 1970s can be considered the 'key threshold for giallo cinema' due to the international success of auteur Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'Uccello dalle Piume di Cristallo*), which truly defined the genre (Koven, 2006: 4). Needham (2002) notes how, unlike the literature variant, *giallo* cinema heavily resisted generic definition and is much more flexible as a genre, including themes of mystery, detection, murder, psychoanalysis and alienation, to name a few.

Anderson (2012) writes that *giallo* cinema points to a 'notoriously sleazy epoch, when audience's age-old hunger for new sensations was answered by an unprecedented and, for better or worse, largely unrepeated-orgy of prog-gothic ostentation, psychosexual extremity and psychedelic excess'. For this reason, *giallo* cinema and exploitation horror in general has been derided as cheap and gawdy and has generated much controversy with regard to censorship and principles of ethicality. Worland notes that 'One of the salient facts about fictional horror is the generally low regard in which it is held- at least publicly-by the proponents of 'good taste' and higher intellectual and aesthetic aspirations' (2007: 3).

Moreover, the horror genre has incited much discussion regarding the potential pernicious effects that exposure to violent and disturbing scenes may have on certain viewers. Strickland's decision to hide the images of horror subverts the very nature of the horror genre and problematizes issues regarding representations of violence. Indeed, while *Berberian* may celebrate certain stylistic nuances of *giallo* cinema and its scope for experimentation with regard to sound design, it also acts as a commentary and reflection on the responsibility that comes with both creating and portraying scenes of violence:

The main challenge was whether filmmakers can responsibly portray violence without sensationalising it. It's a very tough question: no matter how high-minded you are as a filmmaker in terms of seriously portraying violence, you can't control the interpretation of your images once they reach an audience (Wood, 2012).

It is this issue that leads to the discussion in Chapter 1 on the psychological implications of the horror genre and its capacity to concurrently appeal and repel, to

fascinate and to revolt. This chapter will review and assess many popular but contesting psychoanalytic theories regarding these problematic issues. Moreover, I will discuss the experience of film watching as one that is intensely subjective and how this relates to the sub-genres of direct and suggested horror. Chapter 2 will entail a discussion of music and sound in *Berberian Sound Studio* in the context of *giallo* cinema and how Strickland both adheres to and departs from certain stylistic conventions, creating a compelling and engaging subversion of the exploitation genre. Furthermore, I will explore how the complex and eerily atmospheric soundscape of the movie successfully establishes the tone of horror. In chapter 3, I will examine the significance of Strickland's choice to expose the mechanics behind postproduction sound and the process of *synchresis* as discussed by Chion. Moreover, I will analyse the implications of the sonic representations of violence in relation to the emergence of meaning, emotional engagement and imaginative and somatic empathy. Strickland relates how *Berberian* is 'a meditation on sound as much as it is a meditation on violence' (Cummings, 2012). Indeed, I aim to demonstrate how *Berberian* is an exploration and affirmation of the strength of sound in film and its powerful capacity to excite our imaginations, to invade and awaken the deeper realms of our subconscious and to trigger a profoundly emotional and phenomenological experience.

Chapter 1: The Horror Genre and Psychoanalysis

'Cinematic fear *can be* pleasurable. It can be pleasurable because it consists of precious moments of subjective *intensity*.'

Hanich (2010: 24)

The genre of horror is one that has incited immense controversy and debate regarding its psychological implications and the simultaneous attraction and repulsion it evokes in its viewers. Barbara Creed (1993), Robin Wood (1985) and Noël Carroll (1990) are just a few among the plethora of influential critics and theorists who have drawn on Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian and Kleinian psychoanalytical theory and ideas to arrive at an understanding of the horror genre and the pleasures that the viewer derives from watching scenes of horror. The diversity and conflicting nature of many of these theories make it difficult to attain a definitive and all-inclusive conclusion. However, Carroll argues 'If psychoanalysis does not afford a comprehensive theory of horror, it remains the case that the psychoanalytic imagery often reflexively informs works within the genre, which of course makes psychoanalysis germane to interpretations of the genre' (Schneider, 2004: 9-10). Moreover, Schneider (2004) stresses that one singular version of psychoanalytic theory is not sufficient to understanding a text. More importantly, as will soon become clear, horror films, due to their reflexive nature are capable of challenging the concepts of analysis being applied to them. Therefore, I contend that the study of the horror genre necessitates a balanced and expansive study of various theories that pertain to the genre. For the purpose of my study I have reviewed several analyses for a more comprehensive understanding of the pleasure, attraction and emotional responses that the horror film can potentially evoke in the viewer.

Worland notes how critics moved from suggesting that horror cinema constitutes the 'traditional concern of ancient mythology and canonical literature for confronting fundamental, even universal and moral questions about human mortality and the nature of evil; to emphasising the psychological processes either reflected in or stimulated by horror's frightening narratives; to probing the genre for

allegories of contemporary social and political ideology' (2007: 3). Robin Wood adopts two of these approaches in his analysis of the American horror film. Wood employs Freudian theory of repression in conjunction with Marxist theory to analyse the horror genre. Indeed, Wood deems the increasing convergence of Marx and Freud as a significant and progressive development of film criticism, 'the recognition that social revolution and sexual revolution are inseparably linked and necessary to each other.' (Wood, 1985: 196) Wood notes how:

From Marx we derive our awareness of the dominant ideology- the ideology of bourgeois capitalism- as an insidious all-pervasive force capable of concealment behind the most protean disguises, and the necessity of exposing its operation whenever and wherever possible. It is the psychoanalytic theory that has provided...the most effective means of examining the ways that ideology is transmitted and perpetuated, centrally through the institutionalisation of the patriarchal nuclear family (Ibid: 196).

Indeed, Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* explains how human beings are governed by the pleasure principle and how primitive instincts are inherent in all of us. These innate impulses include a desire to kill and an insatiable appetite for sexual gratification. Freud notes that the greatest source of displeasure is the reality that we must live with other human beings in a civilized society, as this leads to the conflict between individual instinctual gratification and compliance with a society that represses these urges. Freud writes 'our so called civilization itself is to blame for a great part of our misery, and we should be much happier if we were to give it up and go back to primitive conditions' (Freud, 2005: 13). He contends that humans become neurotic when they can no longer tolerate the unrelenting frustration that stems from the repression of these urges.

Wood draws on these theories in conjunction with Horowitz' ideas from his book *Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (1977) to make explicit this contention. He notes that, while basic repression, which is 'universal, necessary and inescapable' makes us distinctively human, surplus repression is based on a specific culture and is the means by which people are moulded and assigned predestined roles within that culture since infancy.

He claims that surplus repression 'makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois, patriarchal capitalists' (1985: 197). Neurotics and revolutionaries arise from unsuccessful surplus repression. Wood relates how Horowitz linked Freud's concept of this burden of repression to Marx's theory of alienated labour, 'the most immediately obvious characteristics of life in our culture are frustration, anxiety, greed, possessiveness, jealousy, neuroticism: no more than what psychoanalytic theory shows to be the logical product of patriarchal capitalism' (Ibid: 197).

Psychoanalysis teaches us that repression exists in the unconscious, and can be expressed in symbolic form in dreams. Worland explains how this concept provided a persistent attraction for many filmmakers, particularly those of horror. He writes that 'we need only emphasise the symbols as if in a terrible nightmare...the nightmare analogy suggests itself because horror's realm is a profoundly night time world' (2007: 12). Wood takes this idea further as he compares the experience of the audience to a dream-like state. He explains that a spectator traditionally sits in darkness and how involvement in a film requires a certain 'switching-off of consciousness, a losing oneself in a fantasy experience' (1985:202).

Wood employs this theory of repression in conjunction with the concept of 'the Other' to offer significant insight to the notion of the monster in horror film. He writes that we can fundamentally categorise horror films in social and political terms by examining the way in which the monster is presented and defined via the concepts of repression and otherness, as the figure of the monster serves as a dramatization of these very ideas (Ibid: 201). Wood notes how, in many cases, these monsters can also be deemed victims; victims of society, victims of capitalism- '*our* victims' (Ibid: 214). Worland also reinforces this notion while examining the paradoxical appeal of horror cinema. He explains how the monster often exists on the threshold of society in an almost liminal or transitional state. Worland notes that the 'paradox of the monster is that it incites our fear, compels our attention, and quite often courts our empathy and fascination' (2007: 9). Shaw argues that much of the pleasure we derive from horror cinema stems from the feeling of self-empowerment that this empathy generates when the viewer sides with the

powerful and threatening villain, and from the sense of victory when this villain is finally killed or destroyed (Hanich, 2010).

Wood relates how this triumphant ending, or 'happy ending', typically signifies a 'restoration of repression' (1985: 201). He writes that 'the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that civilisation represses...its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror'. When this 'object of horror' is destroyed, the repression can be restored (Ibid: 201).

Many critics identify a cathartic element to these 'happy endings', and claim that much of the appeal of the horror genre resides in this notion of catharsis. Aristotle claimed that a work of tragedy should serve to purge or purify the emotions of fear or pity aroused in the audience. He indicated that art should not be censored, as the experience of catharsis functions as a 'social safety valve' by preventing the viewer from acting on their natural, but dangerous desires. (Worland, 2007: 13) This notion of catharsis is especially pertinent to Creed's analysis of the horror film, drawing on Kristeva's notion of 'the abject.'

According to Kristeva, 'the abject' is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in between, the ambiguous, the composite...Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law' (1982: 4). In other words, 'the abject' disturbs or threatens to destroy 'symbolic order' (Ibid: 67), which relates to Wood's connection of psychoanalysis and Marxist theory. Creed relates how the horror film is rife with images of the abject, 'foremost which is the corpse, whole, mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears and putrefying flesh' (1993: 10). Moreover, she notes how the notion of a border is imperative to the construction of the monstrous 'to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability' (Ibid: 10-11).

Kristeva also contends that rituals of defilement serve as safe encounters with the abject (1982: 63). Goodnow writes that 'all societies develop rituals or ceremonial forms that help avoid contact with 'filth' or- where contact is unavoidable- help to keep its impact within limits or to decontaminate the people

and the places that may now be sources of danger' (2010: 47). The most important part of this contention for Creed is how this ritual of defilement allows us to get close to the abject within the confines of safety. Creed argues that the central ideological project of the popular horror film is the 'purification of the abject through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct' (1993: 14). This pertains to Aristotle's notion of catharsis insofar as 'the horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject...in order to finally abject and withdraw the boundaries between the human and the non-human' (Ibid: 14). In this way, Creed contends that the horror film functions as a ritual of defilement. The very nature of film itself offers itself as a safe encounter with the abject. Kristeva speaks of the 'spasms and vomiting that protect me' (1982: 2). Expelling the abject makes it viewable, makes it safe. Goodnow notes that the sight of bodily waste 'is not only a reminder of the 'unclean' that is within us, but also a reassurance that it is being safely ejected from the body; cast out, exiled, consigned to a 'safer' place, deprived of its strength or transformed into some inert or harmless state' (2010: 49). Film as a medium, immediately provides this comfort, as it is 'out there', viewable and perceptible (Ibid: 49). Abjection by its nature both repels and attracts. This ambiguity, according to Goodnow, necessitates controlled conditions 'in order that the emotion generated will be tolerable, will not flood one's being, overcome one's usual rationality, break down one's usual control' (Ibid: 49).

This simultaneous repulsion and attraction that the abject evokes in the viewer pertains to Hanich's contention regarding 'the paradox of fear' (2010: 4). Hanich claims that catharsis is not a sufficient explanation for the appeal of horror. He writes that the cinema is the place we visit '*not* in order to *get rid* of our emotions, but precisely to *experience* the lived-body transformations that are characteristic of being emotional' (Ibid: 9). He employs the analogy of a rollercoaster to describe the pleasurable ups and downs of the somatic responses that we experience as viewers of horror: 'for many viewers there is a double pleasure in both bodily transformations: the transformation of the excitation and the subsequent change back to the less agitated experience. Our bodily experience is transformed to and fro, and most viewers enjoy both changes' (Ibid: 10).

Indeed, Hanich's argument makes sense as many filmmakers intentionally deny the viewer narrative closure to eliminate the element of catharsis and to prolong feelings of anxiety or fear. We feel like something could *still* happen. He reinforces his argument by adding that these feelings of horror, shock and fear are pleasurable, so we do not need to be purged of them. We watch the movie precisely to *feel* them.

Moreover, he links his contention to Freud's theory of repression, but in an antithetical manner to Wood and Worland. Hanich claims by watching a horror movie, we are looking for the emotions that civilisation denies us. He writes that the 'cinema works as an efficient institution that counterbalances the emotional and somatic *lack* (not surplus) within the disembodied culture of advanced modernity' (Ibid: 12).

Indeed, Wood emphasised the quality of the monster, and the concept of repression that he represented. In contrast, Hanich chooses to focus on the audience and assigns the viewer a more active role. Hanich can find support from Urbano's argument that 'what is essential to the modern horror film is not the mere presence of a monster, but a set of peculiar and specific feelings that the films elicit in their viewers' (Schneider, 2004: 25). He claims this 'feeling' is primarily that of anxiety. Like Hanich, Urbano notes that this 'paradox' of horror is essentially concerned with the 'attraction towards a situation of expected *danger*', (which pertains to Hanich's analogy of the rollercoaster), rather than the fear or loathing 'provoked by the sight of an 'impure' monster' (Ibid: 24). Moreover, he stresses the need to address the 'mental conflict' at work in the viewer, and in the victim of the horror movie, 'that underlying ambivalence that mysteriously drives the subject caught in the grip of...horror *toward* rather than *away* from its precipitating causes' (Ibid: 24).

This concept is interesting when we examine Hanich's emphasis on film watching as an intensely subjective phenomenological experience. Hanich discusses the pleasure of cognitive and emotional self-expansion and imaginary role-play. He claims that 'through the act of transfer of personal thoughts, emotions and body schemas the viewer concretises and completes the characters and worlds offered by

the film' (2010: 7). This idea is inextricably concerned with the notion of empathy, which I briefly discussed earlier. Hanich relates how empathy occurs when the viewer 'imaginatively takes over the perspective of the character, as it were imagining it from inside' (Ibid: 181). He notes while imaginative empathy is controllable to some degree, somatic empathy is more complex and harder to resist. Somatic empathy, according to Hanich, presents itself in three forms: 'sensation, motor and affective mimicry' (Ibid: 103). This concept of somatic empathy is critical to my argument and is a point I will return to later in more detail.

Of course, these emotional and somatic responses are subject to the type of horror film in question and the individual viewer. Hanich raises the important question of 'appraisal'. He notes that the viewer, when feeling fear, will focus his/her attention on a particular object or event that 'we perceive, imagine or remember and register that this object or event is dangerous to our well-being' (Ibid: 20). He adds that this process does not require a strong cognitive response, but that 'many of our learned emotional reactions are mediated via perceptions' (Ibid: 20). In this way, a visual or aural experience that evoked fear in the past can cause this emotion to reoccur in the present. This concept is supported by Kristeva's notion of the ritual, or violations of the ritual. She notes that the effect and meaningfulness of these rituals, resides in a reserve of knowledge of a cultural past, as meaning derives from experience (Goodnow, 2010: 53). Goodnow notes how producers of horror work with and subvert this 'store of past images and past meanings' to achieve various levels of horror. Moreover, she explains how this is important for the spectator, as we bring knowledge and a history to all images that we see (Ibid: 53). Of course these histories and degrees of knowledge will vary among viewers, so it is impossible to gauge individual responses and reactions. Goodnow writes how Kristeva was concerned with 'a Marxist view of people as varying primarily in their social position, and a psychoanalytic view of them as varying in the forms of experience they are likely to encounter and to which they are likely to have access' (Ibid: 58).

Kristeva's (1982) theories of the 'bounded text' and 'the text of society and history' are also pertinent to the horror genre and how a particular movie will be

perceived. Kristeva notes how certain texts are expected to follow a particular direction or course. Wood relates how:

A genre movie simultaneously participates in an ongoing tradition and creates precedents for the future...horror film is a particularly self-reflexive form, one that often tacitly or directly references its forebears and acknowledges its place in a larger tradition, if only to invert or undercut the assumptions and expectations of those earlier works (Worland, 2007: 16).

Goodnow notes how Kristeva drew on Bakhtin's concept of 'Menippean discourse' to analyse how particular texts display an awareness of traditional forms by subverting, transgressing or criticizing the established form of order, be it narrative or visual (2010: 11-12). It is this practice that has led to the different forms within the horror genre. Different degrees of horror can be aroused or evoked when the producer of horror denies the audience some of the expected formulas that offer a sense of safety. This is the main issue that pertains to direct and suggested horror. Giles writes how the viewer knows how the more he/she stares directly at the horror, the more it will dissipate 'to the extent that the image of full horror will be revealed...as more constructed, more artificial...To look horror in the face for very long, robs it of its power' (Hanich, 2010: 115). This is the reason why most critics would argue that suggested horror is more effective. Rather than being afraid of the horror one sees on screen, the viewer now fears his/her mental or imaginative visualisation of the horror. The emotion is internalised. Hanich's notions of imaginary role-play and somatic empathy are certainly more applicable to suggested horror, as the viewer is almost coerced into imaginatively completing, in most cases, an aurally present source of horror. Hanich notes how suggested horror serves to reconstruct the field of consciousness. He writes how usually the imagination 'supports the perception of 'material' moving images and sounds'. However, in suggested horror, the imagination adopts a more dominant role, 'imagining moves from the periphery into the centre of our field of consciousness' (Ibid: 110). Hanich relates how there is also a pleasurable element to suggested horror, a pleasure in 'not seeing'. It is often the case with direct horror that the viewer covers his/her eyes and relies solely on

aural perception, which Hanich describes as the viewer creating their 'own game of seeing and not seeing, of suggestion and imagination' (Ibid: 115).

This relates to another pivotal issue with regard to suggested horror. Sound is a far more pervasive and penetrable medium than the image. It is easy to cover our eyes and to block out the visual horror, but it is far more difficult to close our ears. Hanich notes how the viewer does not have the 'exit strategy' of looking away, but is forced to confront mental visualisations of the horror (Ibid, 115). Moreover, suggested images are more powerful than direct images because they place the spectator in a less controlled position, 'when we follow the verbal account of a gruesome murder taking place and hear accompanying screams...we can't 'overwrite' the ensuing imagination' (Ibid: 113). This makes suggested horror an incredibly emotional, subjective and engaging phenomenological experience, and in this regard, far more effective than direct horror, which relies primarily on perception, which by nature is more objective.

These are concepts that I will return to and draw on throughout my essay in my analysis of Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* and the affective impact of the soundtrack. Having reviewed these analyses of horror cinema, the most crucial aspect to emphasise is that there can be no one over-arching theory to explain the appeal of horror cinema and the emotional impact it has on us as viewers, as horror movies by their self-reflexive nature will always challenge these theories. Moreover, every spectator is capable of experiencing his/her own subjective, individualised reaction and response. However, I believe it is useful to review several analyses to examine the parallels and disparities between them, in an attempt to arrive at a balanced and comprehensive conclusion. That said, I agree with Urbano when he stresses the need to employ a theory that 'sets out to investigate, first and foremost, not the text or its parts, but the specific ways in which the text engages its readers or viewers' (Schneider, 2004: 21).

Chapter 2: Stylised Excess and Sonic Representations of Violence

'Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them.'

Anne Radcliffe (Worland, 2007: 10.)

In Chapter 1, the disparity between direct and suggested horror was briefly addressed. Suggested horror was deemed to be a more powerful and psychologically complex variant insofar as it readjusts our field of consciousness by enticing, or even forcing the spectator to engage imaginatively with the film.

However, as presented in the previous chapter, Wood is concerned with horror's social and political implications and argues that the exploitation variant can be compelling in its own respect as it carries 'greater progressive potential than glossy, big studio productions which are likely to be formally and politically conservative' (Worland, 2007: 21-22). Indeed, Worland supports his argument by contending that the real energy and enthusiasm was to be found at the 'cultural margins', rather than in conventional Hollywood cinema (Ibid: 22). It is interesting then that *giallo* cinema was deemed corrupt by the Fascist government, and for this reason, many filmmakers disregarded its potential for fascist cinema (Koven, 2006: 3). However, it is the issue of form that pertains more significantly to this discussion.

Giallo cinema has continually been derided as cheap and vulgar due to its garish and impudent scenes of excessive and often uncomfortably sustained sex and violence. Williams explains how the scenes of gratuitous sex and violence, typical of pornography and horror are always discounted or repudiated as sensational and lacking reason or purpose beyond the aspiration to shock or excite (Koven, 2006). Indeed, *giallo* films are notorious for their emphasis on protracted scenes of gore and apparent disregard for narrative coherency, particularly those of world-renowned *giallo* auteur Dario Argento. McDonough writes that 'The world of Dario Argento is one of twisted logic, rhapsodic violence, stylised excess; it's true 20th

Century Gothic with all the inversion and riotous grotesquerie the term can encompass' (1991: 15). Koven (2006) explains that when critics castigate this grotesque excess, they are missing the point. Like Worland, who refers to exploitation horror as existing at the cultural threshold, Koven stresses the need to understand *giallo* as 'vernacular cinema' in order to recognise and appreciate the stylistic issues of representation. He notes that studying *giallo* in this context allows one to acknowledge the local cinematic practice 'intended for consumption outside of mainstream, bourgeois cinema culture' (2006: 19).

McDonough draws on Barthesian theory to understand this stylised excess:

Barthes' radical proposal is that the excess, all the meaning that falls outside the system that determines the work's overall structure, forms its own system, one which may exist parallel or tangentially to the others. The parameters of the system of excess are shifting and elusive but none the less there, persistent, allusive, and tantalizing (McDonough, 1991: 23).

This relates to Koven's theory insofar as the outlandish horror spectacles typical of *giallo* cinema, that seem to take precedence over narrative consistency, are a deliberate and conscious stylistic decision made by the director. They do have intentional *meaning* in terms of style, atmosphere and form. Koven includes Totaro's explanation of the 'set piece' which he describes as 'a situation or set of actions where narrative function...gives way to spectacle...the scene plays on far longer than what is strictly necessary for the narrative purpose' (Koven, 2006: 126). This kind of visual excess is notably evident in Argento's 1977 gothic *giallo* *Suspiria*, which Linda Schulte-Sasse refers to as the 'mother' of all horror movies (Schulte-Sasse, 2002). Similar to the supernatural theme that permeates *The Equestrian Vortex*, Susy Banyon (Jessica Harper), newcomer to a dance academy in Germany, through a series of strange and uncanny events, comes to discover that it is run by a coven of witches. We are introduced to the grotesque profusion quite early on in the film during the murder of Pat (Eva Axe), another student at the academy. The violent set piece begins when, as Pat peers terror-stricken out the window, a black-gloved hand (a familiar Argento trope which Strickland also alludes to in *Berberian*) crashes

through the window, suffocating the young girl. The image distressingly cuts back and forth between the graphic murder and Pat's friend frantically trying to break into the room to save her. The camera then moves to a close up shot of the gloved-hand repeatedly stabbing the girl in a painstakingly drawn out scene of brutality and suffering. If this isn't enough, we see the disembodied hand wind a rope around the girl's legs. As her friend runs through the lobby looking for help, the victim's head crashes through the stain-glass ceiling above. The camera cuts to a close up of the hanging corpse dripping blood on the ground, before revealing Pat's friend, impaled and pinned to the floor by a shard of glass that has cut her face in half. Argento is notable for his sustained horror sequences. Newman refers to Argento's set pieces as being similar to musical numbers that break away from the diegetic reality already established (Koven, 2006: 127). Indeed, much of the plot in *Suspiria* seems merely to serve as a tool to connect these gruesomely artful set pieces, rather than making sense.

While these set pieces are centred on images of copious violence, sound and music are also crucial to the almost overpowering and pernicious atmospheric punch that makes these scenes so memorable. Indeed, the sonic mayhem of prog-rock band *Goblin* was undoubtedly effective in heightening the horror of Pat's murder and in adding another layer of frantic and sinister excess. Mitchell argues that *Goblin's* collaboration with Argento verges on 'aural hysteria that almost overwhelms the filmic images (Hayward, 2009: 89). Strickland notes that he was not just attracted to the gothic horror of *Suspiria*, but the 'bombastic, rock and roll element'. He adds, 'I don't see Argento's *Suspiria* as cinema: it's more psychedelic to me' (Cummings, 2012). Indeed, it is clear that Strickland, while perhaps critical of the explicit portrayal of violence in *giallo* cinema, can also appreciate the stylistic nuances that Koven encourages us to acknowledge. He is particularly interested in atmosphere. In reference to the modern *giallo Amer*, directed by Hélène Cattet, Bruno Forzani and released in 2009, he notes:

They made it incredibly new and psychedelic. They kind of distilled what giallo was: they stripped away plot and all of that and went with atmosphere. When giallo works for me, it's when it becomes more ethereal and atmospheric. When I watch

those films, I don't go into it for the narrative or for the sadism, just to experience the atmosphere. *Berberian* was created to be the same way (Anderson, 2012).

While visually, *Berberian Sound Studio* is incredibly impressive- the stiflingly claustrophobic and dimly lit studio, the flashing *Silenzio* sign and the *gialloesque* extreme close-up shots during the spine-chilling screams, the scope of this dissertation will focus primarily on the use of sound to establish the tone of horror. In addition to the array of Strickland's experimental musical influences referred to in introduction, he also cites a number of *giallo* composers, such as Morricone, Goblin, Nicolai and Cipriani, as inspirational. Indeed, this rich assortment of musical influences has resulted in a diverse and enigmatic aural canvas, rife with frantic riffs, melancholic airs and aggressively ominous drones, coupled with the murmur and clanging of analogue equipment, torturous screams and violent sounds of Foley. Strickland believes that horror is a genre that enables immense experimental scope and that 'allows music to breath and go off into these reveries that you wouldn't find in social-realist films, for instance' (Anderson, 2012).

James Cargill and Trish Keenan of Birmingham indie, electronic band *Broadcast* both wrote and performed the tracks for *Berberian*. Regrettably, Keenan passed away during the making of the soundtrack, but her haunting, ethereal vocals can still be heard on certain tracks such as 'Teresa's Song'. Cargill relates how Morricone's avant-garde style was hugely influential, both his hypnotic repetition and his innovative and often jazzy approach to rhythm (Calvert, 2013). Indeed, Morricone's collaboration with Argento, evident in movies such as *L'Uccello dalle Piume di Cristallo* (1970), which arguably shaped the genre (Koven, 2006: 4), is immensely significant to the *giallo* sound world. Bender believes that it was the nature of the genre that sparked the expressionistic and stylistic music of Morricone. He writes:

The genre's extreme stylisation and exploitative bravura are indicative of an expressionistic allegorical milieu...the *giallos* provided him with the enhanced psychosexual canvas upon which he could paint some of the boldest aural concepts of his career (Hayward, 2009: 91).

It is this aspect of *giallo*, coupled with many of the genre's composers' incorporation of music concrete, free-jazz and avant-garde sound that inspires Strickland and causes him to appreciate *giallo* music as a strange but effective hybrid of academia and trash (Cummings, 2012). This influence is particularly evident in the theme tune to *The Equestrian Vortex*. This melody is accompanied by the opening credits to Santini's *giallo* horror: a frenzied and surreal assemblage of hellish and haunting images in fiery reds and blacks. It is unmistakably a tribute to *giallo* sound with hints of Morricone and Gobin in its raging and vertiginous organ, crashing cymbals and its progressive, jazzy swing. It can also be likened to Cipriani's theme tune for the 1973 Italian crime movie *La Polizia Sta a Guadare*. Moreover, the atonal, screeching electronic synth tracks of 'The Mark of the Devil' and 'Found Scalded, Found Drowned' that play during some of the Foley torture scenes are laden with gruelling feedback and most certainly point to the sonic excess associated with *giallo* soundtracks. This is evident during the scene in which Gilderoy creates the sound of a priest stabbing a witch. We watch Gilderoy viciously stabbing cabbages while the roaring electronic synth and agonising screams bellow throughout the scene, producing a stomach-churning atmosphere of horror. Indeed, the vexatious drone coupled with the intensely graphic sounds make it impossible not to visualise the violence Gilderoy is depicting.

Cargill explains how the first pieces they wrote for the movie adhered more faithfully to the distinctive 70s style of the *giallo* movies. However Strickland opted for a more mournful and emotive aesthetic that bordered on romantic to communicate Gilderoy's loneliness and nostalgia, (The Outer Church, 2012). Cargill explains:

Although the themes were written for the 'film within the film', we (the audience) are watching Gilderoy most of the time, not *The Equestrian Vortex*. So we had to make sure the music worked on that level too, the themes had to resonate with this character and his yearning to be back home in Dorking, as well as providing the score for Santini's film (Calvert, 2013).

Indeed this pastoral, nostalgic feel is captured most effectively by the melancholic flute melodies of 'North Downs Dimension' and 'Such Tender Things.' These are tracks we come to associate with Gilderoy and his longing for his past at home. We learn relatively little about Gilderoy's past, and his letters from his mother are the most effective insight that the movie offers us. 'Such Tender Things', with its gentle, rural air plays as Gilderoy reads the letter from his mother about the little 'chiff-chaffs', during one of the few scenes of serene relief that Strickland offers us. These letters become tied into the whole narrative and begin to obtain a sinister quality as the narrative coherence begins to spiral out of control. Strickland explains that 'because of these links, we always regarded the film and the filmmaking as a kind of spell. To be completely immersed in it is to be physically within the soundtrack, to be in the sprockets, both for Gilderoy, for us as filmmakers, and also for the audience' (Cummings, 2012). In this way, as the movie gradually unfolds, and the narrative becomes increasingly ambiguous and complex, the pastoral themes become layered with a sinister quality. Indeed, this concept of theme development is critical to the soundtrack's atmospheric effect. Perhaps the most notable theme development in *Berberian* is that of 'Beautiful Hair', which at one point is used as a transition from the studio to Gilderoy's living quarters, while accompanying the breathy Italian dialogue of the 'Malleus Malefacrum' scene. These kind of match cuts that are characteristic of the film reinforce the sense of incessantly disturbing work that Gilderoy is forced to endure. As both the interior setting and music become increasingly threatening and oppressive, they communicate a sense of being eternally trapped in the sonic mayhem and claustrophobic confines of the studio. This theme of 'Beautiful Hair' repeatedly returns under a series of guises with different instruments and altered arrangements. Moreover, as the film proceeds and Gilderoy mixes in the bloodcurdling sounds of the interrogation scenes, the themes become more powerful and ominous. This is most effectively evident in the hair-pulling scene. The music accompanies the flashing *Silenzio* sign, before the scene cuts to close-ups of Gilderoy, with a look of pained self-loathing, tearing the leaves from radishes to capture the torture inflicted upon the witches. Indeed, the music adopts more menacing and malignant properties as it is augmented by pain-staking

screams and explicit sounds of torture. This increasing intensity of sound mirrors Gilderoy's growing anxiety and mental anguish as the horror of *The Equestrian Vortex* persistently invades his psyche. This conglomerate soundscape successfully generates an atmosphere that is all at once cryptic, intensely ominous, sorrowful and nostalgic, and undoubtedly hauntingly unnerving.

Strickland notes how he wanted to use horror as a springboard, 'but we don't have any murder or a drop of blood...it's not about being scary, it's just about working in that dynamic or horror in terms of pitch and tone' (McEwan, 2012). The omission of this blood and gore (a crucial aspect of *giallo* cinema) and exposure of the mechanics behind sound production was an incredibly audacious and subversive move that forces us to question representations and portrayals of violence in cinema. *Berberian Sound Studio* is a reflection on how violence is received and potentially aestheticized and sensationalised. Moreover he investigates the effect of this violence both on audiences and filmmakers, raising the questions of violence by proxy and desensitisation or trauma from over-exposure. *Berberian* suggests that viewers and filmmakers alike may somehow be implicated in issues of violence on screen through both creating and consuming.

This is an issue that has been highly contested for generations and continues to generate immense controversy today. Worland writes that:

Plato and many later theorists and censors feared that the depictions of anti-social acts and immoral behaviour in art were socially dangerous because they situated our baser emotions and instincts rather than appealing to our higher faculties of reason and analysis (Worland, 2007: 14).

Contrary to this notion is the Aristotelian theory of catharsis, which Stephen King draws on in his opinion on cinematic violence:

I like to see the most aggressive [horror films] as lifting a trap door in the civilised forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath. Why bother? Because it keeps them from getting out man' (Worland, 2007: 14).

This issue of censorship calls to mind the heavily debated and controversial French film *Irréversible*, written and directed by Gasper Noe, released in 2002. Notorious for its nine-minute intensely graphic rape scene with actress Monica Bellucci, *Irréversible* drove many viewers to leave the cinema both in shock and disgust. The guardian notes how the 'British Board of film classification decided to release *Irréversible* uncut on the grounds that, though the film may well be shocking and unpleasant for many viewers, its content was unlikely to provoke harmful activity' (Jeffries, 2003). Furthermore, Cassell (protagonist alongside Bellucci) deemed it to be a work of art that should not be tampered with by censors (Ibid). This closely relates to Koven's argument about the deliberate artfulness and aesthetic quality of the protracted scenes of horror that feature in *gialli*. Moreover, like Santini, Cassell defended the film on moral grounds, suggesting that it was truthful and realistic and shows violence how it really is. 'It is a moral movie, but also a nihilistic one. It shows us the animal in us' (Ibid). Indeed, Strickland's movie encourages us *not* to take Santini's moralistic defences seriously, and constructs his character as a philanderer, more concerned with the actresses his film than the film itself.

It seems that most theories, on both sides of the debate acknowledge that violence in cinema, whether it is artful or moralistic, causes us to face the darker, more basic side of human nature, bringing us back to Freudian theories of repression. Strickland's movie contests both sides of the argument by communicating how film watching is an intensely subjective and individual experience where a viewer's response cannot be predicted. This relates to Kristeva's (1982) theory of how people vary according to knowledge and experience, and in this way, it is impossible to predict how individual audience member will receive violence and respond to it. Strickland contends:

As soon as you try and defend violence, as soon as you try to make it something reflexive, you get into very dangerous territory because you don't know your audience. That's what's so scary about it and so beautiful about making films: you can't predict how someone's going to interpret it. No matter how responsibly you portray violence you can't stop someone from sensationalising it. Even the sound

of violence, someone out there might be getting off on it. I'm not saying we are immune from that as well! But the film is saying that no matter whether you're presenting violence for the sake of entertainment or commenting on the horror of it all, it's basically out of your hands as to how it will be appropriated or interpreted (Anderson, 2012).

Strickland is posing serious questions about how vast exposure, and more significantly, about how partaking in these violent scenes, can cause us to be somehow implicated in them. Toby Jones relates how Gilderoy is Strickland's guinea pig and how, in being forced to watch the horrific images, he is not only implicated but completely consumed by them. He adds that 'there's a sort of corruption that Peter's interested in about what we watch and how we watch it, and the gradual eating away at what we will tolerate' (Artificial Eye, 2012).

This idea is perhaps most applicable to the red-hot poker scene. We see Gilderoy recoil in horror as he watches the action he is forced to communicate: throwing oil on a hot pan to depict a red-hot poker being inserted into the witch's vagina. Gilderoy, overwrought and distressed refuses to create the sound of her torture, believing he can somehow save her if he doesn't follow through. This concept of imaginative engagement will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Unfortunately the scope of this thesis does not permit a more detailed discussion on the effects of violence in film due to the complicated and multi-faceted nature of the subject. Rather the remaining chapters will focus on the representation of violence through sound, and more importantly, the power and implications of sound in film and its capacity to generate emotional, physiological and somatic affect and empathy, which Strickland makes explicit through his reflexive movie centred around the process of post-production sound design.

Chapter III: The Implications of Sound in *Berberian* Sound Studio

‘Starving the eye will inevitably bring the ear, therefore, the imagination, more into play.’

Randy Thom (1999).

Murch notes in a foreword to Chion’s *Audio-Vision*, published in 1994 that ‘it is symptomatic of the elusive and shadowy nature of film sound that Chion’s four books stand relatively alone in the landscape of film-criticism’ (Chion, 1994: ix). Indeed, Chion was one of the few critics during this time to examine the phenomenon of film sound and how it is primarily acknowledged and appreciated in visual terms. Is it coincidental then that Hanich (2010) relates that emotion, affect and somatic experiences we also largely ignored in film studies until the 1990s? This chapter will address these issues and reveal how *Berberian* makes explicit the manner in which sound, and emotional and bodily affect are inextricably linked.

Murch (2000), while discussing the perceived inferior and self-effacing nature of film sound, reveals how this can actually work in the filmmaker’s favour in terms of reassociation of sound and image. He explains that due to the dominance of the image and the subordinate position of sound, we as an audience have a propensity to accept new juxtapositions of sound and image to be true, for example in *Berberian*, when marrow is thrown viciously on the floor to depict a body hitting the ground or using a blender to make the sound of a chainsaw. Moreover, Altman (1985) relates how the technical innovations in sound production during the thirties shaped the effacement of work associated with the conventional and established bourgeois ideology that Hollywood cinema adhered to. He explains how ‘camera blips, microphone booms, incandescent lights...highly directional microphones’, as well as editing practices such as ‘blooping, cutting to sound, carrying sound over the cut’, all derived from a ‘felt need to reduce all traces of sound work from the soundtrack’ (1985: 47).

Strickland contests the conventional bourgeois approach to filmmaking by setting his reflexive movie in a sound studio and by exposing the mechanics of postproduction sound design and editing. Indeed we see innocent sound making being connected to brutal abhorrent actions, but somehow, the effect is still unsettling. *Berberian* illustrates how film, and film sound in particular can still maintain its effectiveness when its crafty and elusive workings are revealed. Indeed, the entire delusive creation and manipulations of sound in cinema is unveiled in *Berberian* and this somehow only serves to enhance its magical allure.

I argue that the film retains its power for two reasons. As mentioned in the introduction, the process of *synchresis*, a term coined by Chion (1994), often works outside the boundaries of logic, with sounds and pictures that bare no relation to one another. Belton (1985) notes that an editor must strive to establish synchronisation between sound and image early in a scene, most often through lip-synch, to assure the audience that what they see and hear is authentic: 'Once that has been done, the editor is free to do almost anything with the picture and sound, confident that the audience now trust what they hear, since it corresponds to (or is not overly violated by) what they see' (1985: 65). Strickland's meta-horror unveils the surreptitious nature of sound production. Chion writes 'There is something about sound that always bypasses and surprises us no matter what we do' (1994: xvii). Moreover, due to the barbarous nature of Gileroy's project, the deceptive process seems to grow even more insidious. The incongruence between the image of the innocent vegetable and the heinous sounds of horror that it can help to produce is deeply unnerving and eliminates our sense of trust in film. Strickland reveals how easily we can be tricked and duped by the cunning process of sound editing. Indeed, *Berberian* serves to heighten our awareness of our own naivety and predilection to accept and believe what we see to be true.

This brings me to my next point regarding context and association. Strickland writes:

I guess I was attracted by how something so unspeakably horrific can be so ridiculous once you take it to Foley stage. As an audience you're caught between

the sound of a woman being murdered and the sight of a man flapping cabbages. The two things are as far removed as you can get (Wood, 2012).

Actor Toby Jones, who we see immersed in the Foley process throughout the film reiterates this contention by saying that, 'the disconnect between the effect you're trying to generate and what's causing it is often comical' (Artificial Eye, 2012). While this humour exists as a glimmer of light relief in the dark recesses of this film, it is undoubtedly coupled by a palpable tension, as the once innocent vegetables adopt a venomous quality in the context of the brutality they serve. This is emphasised by the close up shots of rotting vegetables that recur throughout the movie. Indeed, *Berberian* plays enduring games of cause and effect, which are impossible to resist. This concept really comes to light in the scene where Gilderoy uses the sound of tomatoes in a blender to act as the noise of a chainsaw. The pureed tomatoes splash onto his face and the scene cuts to a close up of Gilderoy examining his face in a mirror. In the context of the action Gilderoy strives to depict, it is inevitable that we come to associate this with blood. Furthermore, the Foley making by Gilderoy (and Massimo and Massimo) takes on a mark of cruelty as the vegetables are mutilated so violently, that we can be left in no doubt about the actions occurring in the interrogation scenes of *The Equestrian Vortex*.

This concept of context and association is closely related to the idea of imaginative engagement as discussed in the introduction. Hanich (2012) stresses that it is important to understand that in most cases, this is not a conscious process. Indeed, the power of suggested horror resides primarily in its capacity to coerce the spectator, ordinarily through aural cues, to imaginatively complete the scenes in question. Murch (2000) stresses the importance of ambiguity in film, for example, choosing what to include and then adding accompanying sounds that may be deemed discordant with the accompanying image. He notes how this process can 'open up a perceptual vacuum into which the mind of the audience must inevitably rush' (2000). Murch explains how this metaphoric distance can create effective tension. Moreover, he discusses the concept of dimensionality that is pertinent to *Berberian*; 'the mental effort of fusing image and sound in a film produces a dimensionality that the mind projects back onto the image as if it had come from it

in the first place' (Ibid). This effect in *Berberian* causes the audience to imagine the Foley process to be imbued with corruption and perversity that closely relates to the imagined violence of Santini's *giallo*. Moreover, it causes us to imaginatively visualise the horrific torture scenes that Gilderoy is working on. In this way, we see things on screen that exist only in our mind. Hanich speaks of spatiality to determine why this imaginative experience is so engaging and unnerving: 'Could it be that the spatial limbo of imagination is phenomenologically closer to the self than the externality of perception?' (2010:116). This can be linked to Cook's theory of the metaphor model insofar as, once an analogy between sound and image has been made, a whole range of meanings and possibilities emerge.

In *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Cook (2004) proposes that the metaphor may be deemed a practical model of cross-media interaction. This model does not assign autonomy or supremacy to the visual, but rather finds significant meaning in the intersection between sound and image. A transfer of attributes occurs in this intersection from one term of the metaphor to the other, and this is where meaning arises. Cook notes how if 'synaesthesia is predicated on similarity' then multimedia should be 'predicated on difference' (2004: 65). In contrast to Eisenstein's theories, the metaphor inheres meaning not in similarity but in 'the difference that similarity articulates by virtue of the transfer of attributes (Ibid: 81). This concept of emergence is central to the metaphor model and relies on divergent media to allow the similarity to enable the creation of new meaning. Therefore, one may argue that the omission of the *giallo's* violent visuals and the juxtaposition of sound with the image of its original sonic source, serves to distance us from the direct violence we often associate with horror films. However, it is this distancing process that creates the space for new meaning, and more profound meaning to emerge. Cook stresses that the metaphor model 'invokes similarity not as an end, but as a means', allowing myriad associated meanings to emerge (Ibid: 81). In this way, although all images of physical torture are hidden from the audience, the Foley scenes are still invested with an air of disturbing malevolence that makes for an unnerving viewing experience, which is undoubtedly heightened by the presence of the cryptic score.

Furthermore, Cook relates how music can potentially jump the diegetic gap and to use the words of Hermann (Hitchcock's collaborator) 'seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters' (Ibid, 66). In this way, perhaps the music can be interpreted as a thematic extension of Gilderoy's deteriorating psychological condition. Strickland notes that the film consists entirely of diegetic sound: 'It was really important to have that concrete element...because the film does go off the rails a bit. There is always that anchor...the whole paradox being that we're making a film about non-diegetic sound' (Cummings, 2012). However, as it is Gilderoy who is creating, editing and treating this sound, perhaps the sound serves to represent or expose his growing mental anguish. As discussed in Chapter 2, the growing intensity of the complex soundscape, as music, sound effects and dialogue become layered in a cryptic fashion, could be indicative of how *The Equestrian Vortex* is penetrating and infecting his psyche. This is particularly pertinent to the pastoral melodies of 'North Downs Dimension' and 'Such Tender Things', which we come to closely associate with Gilderoy and his sheltered, rural background. Indeed, Gilderoy's feelings of isolation, anxiety, guilt and fear are made palpable by the eerie and insightful score.

Hermann also contends that music is the 'communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience' (Cook, 2004: 66). This explains how Gilderoy, immersed in the depths of sound production became so consumed by the horror movie, that he believed he was in fact creating the violence. This is also applicable to how we, as an audience, experience *Berberian*. This emotional connection occurs primarily through the process of empathy. Hanich (2010) notes how two forms of empathy come into play and intermingle during the experience of film watching, particularly the sub-genres of suggested or dread horror. The first is imaginative empathy. An exaggerated form of this kind of response is made explicit in the red-hot poker scene discussed in the previous chapter. Hanich discusses the emotional and cognitive expansion of imaginary role-play. He writes that 'The spectator transcends his or her own limited identity and can thus pleurably stage himself or herself as someone else for a short period of time' (2010: 7). In doing this we aspire to complete the character and the world he lives in. However, the complexity of this motion picture resides in the fact

that it is a film within a film. Gilderoy, though working on the film is also in the position of spectator. This perhaps enables the viewer to feel a heightened sense of imaginative empathy, as we can relate to Gilderoy's position. Cook notes how music encourages this process of empathy. He draws on Eisenstein's notion that by 'embodying motion, music embodies emotion' (2004: 79), enabling a level of profound empathy with the character in question. Moreover, he incorporates Hanslick's contention that 'the core of musical expression is in its kinetic qualities' (ibid: 88). It is interesting then that Strickland when discussing his influences, speaks of the physical nature of rock and roll, specifically *Suicide's* Alan Vega screaming: 'I found that incredibly physical. It transforms your blood pressure' (Cummings, 2012). Indeed, Widgery speaks of the 'motor aspects of empathy and notes how 'gesture is the intermediary between music and emotion', that allows the audience to identify with the character on screen through 'an inner imitation of them 'in the mind's muscle'' (Cook, 2004: 79).

This relates significantly to the second form of empathy, somatic empathy, which is undoubtedly intensified by the presence of sound or music. Somatic empathy does not rely overtly on cognition or strong character knowledge and association. Therefore it is more imperceptible and harder to control. Hanich (2010) notes that it occurs in three forms: sensation, motor and affective mimicry. Indeed he relates how 'a peculiar, intense foregrounding of the lived body' is common to how an audience experiences horror cinema (2010:104). Sensation mimicry is often at its most intense during direct horror scenes of torture, a familiar convention in *giallo* cinema. It is interesting that Smuts (2002), in his article on Argento's *Profondo Rosso (Deep Red)* discusses how Argento rarely chooses regular tools of violence, but rather opts for extreme versions of common dangers, for example, being cut by a knife, scalded by boiling water, burned by a hot object or cut by broken glass. He writes that 'Argento takes this commonly experienced pain from a minor household danger and amplifies the source into a horror device' (2002). This is also significant in the context of *Berberian*, or rather *The Equestrian Vortex*. Although we do not see the torture scenes directly, we experience them explicitly through sound, we hear the bubble of boiling water from the pot on the hob, we hear the sizzle of the hot

iron object touching skin from the oil on the pan, we hear the crash of glass and the thump of marrow to depict the body hitting the ground. Hanich explains:

We experience and comprehend movies not just *cognitively* but with our entire *bodily* being—a body that is always informed by the history and *carnal knowledge* of our acculturated sensorium. Since the viewer is dependent on the personal carnal knowledge of the object and the pain it inflicts, *familiar* weapons and affected body parts tend to cause stronger somatic empathy (2010:106).

These are common dangers that the majority of viewers will have been susceptible to at one time or another. Sounds of torture primarily evoke sensation mimicry. Hanich also explains how motor mimicry can involve ‘a weak or partial simulation of someone else’s physical motion’, but it can also involve the ‘inner’ mimicking of fearful body postures, slow motions and tense breathing—all of this contributing to the viewer’s own lived-body constriction’ (2010: 182-183). Indeed, as Gilderoy winces in disgust at the violence he is forced to endure and take part in, we too recoil in horror, as we know exactly what the sounds he makes are depicting. Indeed, the entire complex soundscape, including the subtle but significantly present eerily cryptic sighs that permeate the film, serve to enhance the dread, and subsequently, our bodily constriction.

The last form of somatic empathy relates most significantly to the impact of music and sound. Hanich notes that affective mimicry is ‘the phenomenon whereby we-pre-cognitively mimic an emotion or affect expressed by someone else’ (Ibid: 115). Indeed this is an immensely subjective and emotional experience, which is intensified through music and sound. Hanich (2010) explains how close-ups of the character in question affect the viewer more profoundly, as we gain deeper insight into their emotional state. Indeed, *Berberian* is rife with close-up shots of Gilderoy, as he is forced to create barbaric sounds of torture. We watch intently as his sense of guilt, dread, disgust and isolation exacerbate. As mentioned earlier, we come to associate the melodies that recur as increasingly ominous motifs with Gilderoy and his troubled state of mind. These sublime and sinister tracks, coupled with close-ups and strengthened by the fact that we are in a similar position to Gilderoy as

spectator, make it difficult to resist an empathic connection with him. Moreover, Strickland has made it incredibly difficult to empathise with most of the other characters, for example, Francesco and Santini are misogynistic bullies and Elena erects a barrier of cold indifference from the very beginning of the movie. These characters serve to further arouse our sympathy for Gilderoy.

The use of close-ups to evoke empathy is employed most effectively at the end of the movie. As the film proceeds, the violence exacerbates and the narrative begins to erode, we see a change in Gilderoy, a growing desensitisation as his personality becomes closer to that of Francesco and Santini. This change is most notable when he uses sound to torture Elisa, which serves as an allusion to Argento. Mitchell relates how Argento was known for trying to scare his actors into their roles by playing music from Italian prog-rock band *Goblin* to them during the shooting of *Suspiria* (Hayward, 2009: 88). Indeed, at the end of the movie we see Gilderoy using sound to manipulate Elisa into screaming more authentically. With the encouragement of Francesco, Gilderoy continues to turn up the oscillators, channelling a 'terrible noise' through Elisa's headphones. The emotional intensity of this scene is heightened by Strickland's employment of extreme close-ups, a popular stylistic convention in *giallo* cinema. While we are subjected to an attenuated version of this excessively appalling noise, the scene cuts repeatedly between Gilderoy's expression of self-loathing, the dial being turned up and extreme close-ups of Elisa's intense suffering. This climatic scene engages all three forms of somatic empathy. Again, the majority of viewers will have at some point experienced the piercing sound of feedback, or other noises so loud, that we rush to cover our ears. In this way, this scene immediately evokes sensation mimicry. Our bodies constrict as we as we feel the discomfort of the torturous pain in Elisa's ears. Moreover, the extreme close-up of her severe anguish incites our affective empathy. This scene in question is so unnerving and disconcerting, that we cannot help but empathise with Elisa's plight and we too long for Gilderoy to stop the torture. Strickland compares proxy, which he claims most of us are guilty of in one way or another:

There's an urge to consume violence. It may be ridiculous to associate this idea of violence by proxy with the cabbage, but if you take it to its logical extreme, you get

the Stanford Prison experiment, which is how the film ends in a way (Anderson, 2012).

This idea, not only of violence by proxy, but of the torturous potential of sound is particularly interesting in terms of the reports of torture in Guantanamo Bay and other prisons in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This concept of the dangerous power of sound was made explicit by the reports of music being used as a method of torture. In 2008, a disturbing Associated Press report revealed how loud, repetitive music was played to ‘create fear, disorient...and prolong capture shock’ (Neal, 2012). Heavy metal, mixed with Sesame Street and Barney songs were used to drive the prisoners to insanity. Neal’s (2012) article revealed how prisoners were screaming and banging their heads against walls and would have opted for suicide had the been able.

Indeed, while we interpret images with our intellect, we interpret sound with our emotion. This subjective experience is invasive and has the potential to arouse cognitive, bodily and emotional affect. It is sound’s power to penetrate not only our minds but our entire being that makes it so forceful as an instrument of torture. *Berberian’s* emphasis on sound over image makes explicit this notion. Strickland acknowledges the emotional quality of sound when he relates why he opted to omit violent images: ‘this movie is not presenting my personal take but the characters apprehension about what he’s going through’ (Anderson, 2012). Indeed, Strickland’s movie not only represents ‘the power of sound to confound and deceive’ (Wood, 2012), but also its ability to coerce imaginative engagement and generate an intensely emotional, phenomenological experience. It also highlights how difficult it is to resist this coercion. As mentioned in the introduction, sound is a far more pervasive and penetrable medium than the image, as it is more difficult to close our eyes than to close our ears. *Berberian* particularly denies the viewer the option of an ‘exit strategy’ due to its omission of visual horror. If we cover our ears to block out the spine-chilling screams and savage sounds of torture, we will miss the whole point.

Thomas Keenan, director of the Human Rights Project at Bard College, emphasises the power of sound in reference to the torture methods in the prison camps discussed earlier, claiming, 'It is music's capacity to take over your mind and invade your inner experience that makes it so terrifying' (Neal, 2012).

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I outlined how both sound and emotional and bodily affect have been problematic and largely neglected in film studies until recent decades. Critics of film studies found it difficult to find a means to speak about sound outside visual terminology. Furthermore, Chapter 1 illustrates how the body of literature regarding the emotional affect of cinema was often divergent and inconsistent. This problem was particularly applicable to the horror genre, which was frequently dismissed as sensational and vulgar. However, Worland reveals that over time, this perception began to change:

For at least a generation now, the term 'horror genre' has likely evoked acts of graphic violence rather than subtle constructions of ominous atmosphere. Yet over time, horror stories have often differed by how much or how little their atrocities were hinted at or shown directly. In this regard, some have sought to distinguish between 'terror' and 'horror', arguing that the former is more artful and unsettling than the latter, which is condemned as aesthetically cheap, perhaps even ethically suspect (2007: 10).

Indeed, the emergence of these sub-genres of horror and its self-reflexive nature make horror films capable of challenging the concepts of psychoanalytic and film theory being applied to them. This pertains to Kristeva's (1982) theory of the history of text and society, where she outlines how an awareness of previous texts is essential in order to subvert, disrupt or critique established and expected forms of order. Indeed, even in the horror genre, these established forms can offer a sense of safety. Take for example, the *giallo* genre. The violence is often so heavily stylised and artificial that it somehow distances us from the horror of it all. In films such as *Suspiria* (1977) and *Profondo Rosso* (1975), the violence, although explicit, is almost aestheticized so it appears as artful rather than brutally horrific.

Strickland, through his subversion of the expected *giallo* narrative, intentionally departs from these conventions by removing the violent spectacle entirely, leaving us vulnerable to the powerful effects of the soundscape. Strickland

relates that what was exciting about the genre, was the fact that it had its own history, rules and regulations that he could manipulate and play around with (Artificial Eye, 2012). Although Strickland makes many interesting references to particular tropes and stylistic nuances of the *giallo* genre, it is his departure and disruption of the genre that is more interesting. His decision to communicate the horror solely through sound was both radical and innovative and demonstrates his astute awareness of the effects of sound and music. Indeed, his allusion to Lynch, and more pointedly, *Mulholland Drive* (2001) through the flashing red '*Silenzio*' sign, which recurs throughout the film as a visual motif, is perhaps significant in this regard. Strickland was undoubtedly inspired by Lynch's legendary and meticulous attention to sound design. David Lynch, in an interview with Larry Sider, stresses the importance of mood and feeling in relation to sound. He asserts, in order to choose the most effective sound, 'you have to open yourself up to, you know, *feeling*' (Sider, 2008).

Indeed, this kind of intuitive approach to sound design and awareness of the emotional and affective potential of sound permeates *Berberian* through the consistently visceral and expressive psychotropic soundscape of haunting melodies, barbaric sound effects and anxious dialogue, that is augmented through the hair-raising screams, psychotic babble and eerie, tortured sighs. As detailed in the final chapter, Strickland's meta-horror serves to expose the deceptive nature of sound and the power of association and context that is at the crux of cinematic sound production. Moreover, *Berberian* is an exploration of how sonic representations of violence can evoke a profoundly subjective, phenomenological experience and generate a level of imaginative involvement and somatic empathy that may even occur outside our awareness. Indeed, in this way, the insidious and pervasive nature of sound is unveiled, which contests all former theories that sound exists merely to enhance or duplicate the meaning of the seemingly autonomous image.

In Chapter 1, I outlined the need, with the support of Urbano's contention, to find a theory that examines how a film engages its audience emotionally, rather than focusing on the text itself. Indeed, Urbano emphasises that what is crucially important is not the mere presence of the monster or horror subject, but rather 'a

set of peculiar feelings that the films elicit in their viewers' (Schneider, 2004: 25). I argue that *Berberian* is a successfully intriguing exploration of the affective impact of horror, and more pointedly how sonic projections of horror can evoke a profoundly subjective, emotional experience. Furthermore, it investigates how discordant and conflicting juxtapositions of sound and image can result in the emergence of new meaning. This production of new meaning is closely linked to the processes of identification and empathic engagement that Strickland's film effectively encourages. As a 'film within a film', not only does *Berberian* illustrate the effect of violence and sound on Gilderoy and the other characters in the studio, but its meta-quality also encourages us to examine how sonic representations of violence affect us as an audience. Moreover, the ambiguous and obscure nature of the ending, where realities shift and erode and the film loops back to the beginning (a reference to musical form), makes it difficult for an audience not to contemplate what has occurred and what Strickland intended us to feel and learn from this enigmatic motion picture.

This ties into the concept of narrative closure as discussed in the introduction and challenges the Aristotelian notion of catharsis that Hanich (2010) contests. Hanich relates how watching horror allows us to experience and derive pleasure from emotional and imaginative engagement and physiological and bodily transformations. He notes, adhering to Freud's theory of the pleasure principle, that these are the emotions and affects that civilisation denies us and that horror cinema offers us an outlet to indulge and revel in them. This pertains to the simultaneous repulsion and attraction of horror, which continues to incite controversy and debate today. Indeed, while *Berberian Sound Studio* is often unnerving and repulsively cryptic, it still maintains an attractive and compelling allure that is difficult to resist. This stems not only from the concurrently unsettling and fascinating exposure of the deceptive and seductive power of sound, but also from the emotional and somatic affect that the insightful and eerie soundscape can potentially generate in viewers. Moreover, by denying the audience images of horror, Strickland intensifies the emotional experience as we can no longer rely on perception and are forced to engage our imaginations, aided by the aural clues. The mental visualisations we

contrive can induce a deeply internalised emotional experience that may even be beyond our conscious awareness. Although this meta-horror is self-conscious and self-reflexive by nature, Strickland's intentions for the cinematic reception echo the generally unconscious processes of imaginary role-play and somatic empathy discussed throughout this essay:

It's not important to get all the references or understand everything. It's film that's meant to be experienced in the same manner as a piece of music...an audience can go into this by losing themselves in another world (Wood, 2012).

Indeed, it is difficult not to become consumed and engrossed in this hauntingly beautiful and ominously brutal sonic realm. We should not underestimate the value of Francesco's words at the beginning of the film. 'A new world of sound awaits you' (Berberian Sound Studio, 2012).

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