

BECOMING VISIONARY

Brian De Palma's

Cinematic Education of the Senses

Eyal Peretz

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
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To my teachers—Shoshana, Stanley, and Ira!

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on the other hand, the apparatus participates, and most powerfully, in the pornographic desire to trap the unreflected and to close the haunting by technological means, to capture the ghost in the machine.

The technological apparatus functions here in another way as a compensatory device for the horror discovered in the opening scene, and this within the order of the narrative, by means of effecting a paranoid suturing of the type discussed in the previous chapter. If in the opening segment, we are exposed to a haunting we want to exorcise, then in this segment, we immediately receive a narrative answer to our horror, for the blank holes that addressed us are now paramorphically sutured and explained away through our exposure to a machinery operating behind the scenes. If there is something behind the scenes, a figure of a master pulling the strings and a machine that can explain the fragmentation, then our anxieties are resolved; there is an answer to our haunting.

*

Let us now continue to examine Terry's trajectory, the trajectory of he who is both our emissary, the double in charge of getting us that which we don't know that we want, and our stand-in, the one who activates, within the world of the movie, a trajectory in many ways parallel to our own, a trajectory of those discovering at their heart a blank haunting.

Splitting the Screen

Following the opening scene, in which the director dispatches Terry to find a good scream, as well as to record some other sound effects, we see Terry in his sound lab, busy editing. Leaving his editing desk, where he is working standing up, for a short break, Terry goes to another part of the room (geometrically occupying precisely another half of the screen, closer to the viewers), where he sits down for a moment as if fatigued, turns on a TV set, takes a smoke, and watches the evening news, the subject of which happens to be the upcoming presidential election. A certain governor is so popular that he seems likely to beat the president. Sitting as he does watching the TV, the film screen is no longer divided into two equal halves but is now mainly occupied by the part of the room dominated by the TV, which seems to draw Terry's full attention. However, in a small space on the left

hand of the screen, the editing area is still visible, as if Terry, while trying to focus his attention on one thing, is nevertheless exposed to another activity, which, though occupying only a peripheral status at the moment, is nevertheless constantly present.⁶⁴

The president's campaign manager is interviewed and is asked about the likelihood of the president's defeat. He mentions the improvement the president is about to introduce and feels assured of a quick economic recovery, which gives him the confidence in the president's reelection. As he watches the interview, Terry suddenly hears the beeping sound of his editing machines from the other side of the room, only a small section of which is still shown, indicating that he needs to get back to work. As he looks into the space off screen, having to change the center of his focus and lose sight of the TV, he hears the voice of the campaign manager, whom he no longer sees: "A lot can happen between now and then" (that is, Election Day).

As Terry gets back to work, the screen is again symmetrically divided, and he is occupying the left half of the screen while the right half shows the TV as the news continues. As the news anchorman speculates that the governor will soon announce his candidacy and "throw his hat into the ring"—using a signifier with an auditory (and romantic) dimension—the screen is *split in two*, and following this split, the anchorman immediately addresses a question to, and opens a dialogue with, an anchorwoman, who wasn't seen before and with whom he now shares (half of) the screen. The screen itself, following the split, is occupied henceforth by two half screens separated by a small dark gap between them; the one following Terry's actions, the other occupied with the news report. The left half screen shows Terry operating the tape recording machine and cataloguing various sounds—footsteps, glass, shot, body fall—while the right half screen shows a report of the governor's ball.

The main interpretative problem of the scene, what mainly calls for our attention, is the problem of the logic dictating the device of splitting the screen, first in the context of this scene, but also more generally. What is it that calls for this device, used so frequently in De Palma's films, constituting one of his paradigmatic cinematic gestures,⁶⁵ a gesture marking his most succinct demonstration of the birth of the cinematic image, his most elegant presentation of the structure of human subjectivity, and standing perhaps, in its simple and precise economy, for everything he is trying to

do in cinema?⁶⁶ Starting with a somewhat formal analysis of this device, we can say that it basically involves three moments: (1) an *act* or *event* of splitting; a fragmentation or breaking; of the whole image; (2) the simultaneous and autonomous existence of two framed surfaces between which there is a (practically invisible) gap, thus a breaking of the screen constitutes a complete single frame; and yet (3) a breaking in two that nevertheless maintains an essential tension with, perhaps under the domination of, and as an inescapable desire for, the *one* screen (or more precisely for the *unification* of the screen) shared by the two frames.⁶⁷

Going slightly beyond this formal analysis, but remaining for the moment focused on structure, and trying to inquire into the conceptual and logical significance of the split screen for our context, we may ask: Is there a more remarkable cinematic device for introducing, quite “literally,” the outside into the inside? Probably not. For what is the split introduced into the frame, into the heart of the cinematic image, if not the cutting separation that usually takes place between successive images or frames, in an edit for example, and that is thus understood as external to each of the frames, limiting them but not affecting their interiors? We may thus view the split, to begin with, as an interior or internal edit/limit, and it marks that which usually separates one frame from the next as operating at the heart of the frame and separating now the framed image from itself rather than from simply another frame.⁶⁸ Through the blank gap traced by the split in its interior, the framed image becomes other than itself, and the split thus transforms the question of the Other to the frame to become the very question of the frame’s relation to itself, for the frame now has to relate to itself through its alienation, its becoming other, and does so through the mediation of this outside that intervenes in it, this Other to the frame that becomes part of it, that is folded into its heart, marking a hole in it. The split is thus neither exactly internal to (in the sense of part of) the cinematic frame, nor exactly external (in the sense of separate from) but is an external interior, or what we called a haunting. The split-interior edit is the haunting of the image by the absolute outside, making it differ from itself and relate to itself.

This interior edit, which effects a relating of the frame to itself through the mediation of an Other by which it is haunted, is a non- (fully) reflective relation of the self (the frame) to itself and is equivalent, from the point of view of our discussion of the mirror, to a self relating to itself without eliminating the haunting phantom that is the mirror’s condition, that is, relat-

ing to itself obliquely, by passing through the Other or phantom of which it becomes a slice, and on which it becomes a perspective. The split screen thus resembles a mirrored reflection with the blank gap of the split marking the trace of the nonreflective haunting of the Other, and the frame/self becomes a self-relation through an Other, which incorporates the Other as an excess it cannot completely internalize and that cannot be reflected, but nevertheless constitutes the possibility of its interiority and self-relation or reflection. Thus, if we consider the frame as standing for an image, or a model, of subjectivity, we might say that the split screen is the cinematic equivalent to Arthur Rimbaud’s famous formula “‘I’ is an other.”

Through this haunting traced by the split at its heart, the frame thus discovers an excessive, absolute outside through which it has to pass in order to relate to itself and thus become itself (“become who you are”), that is, to become a frame, a fragmentary perspective on an Other, and not a totality or a whole.⁶⁹ But this discovery of its own being as a frame exposed to an Other that exceeds it, this discovery of its split from itself, involves a simultaneous discovery—that there is and must by definition be more than one frame, more than one perspective. There are at least two frames or perspectives. The moment the frame relates to itself as an Other is thus also the moment that it must relate to another frame, and the split screen is therefore both a self-relation of the frame as well as of the simultaneity of two distinct frames. But because there are at least two fragments or perspectives, meaning two perspectives on an Other, it follows that the basic unit of articulation (in cinematic and in general terms), the basic unit defining the split screen involves three terms—two frames and an Other between them that exceeds them both, and makes them relate to themselves and to each other through it. By the term *basic unit of articulation*, I mean the original structure of that movement we call the movement of sense or meaning. It is shown by the split screen to be a movement between at least two simultaneous fragments that transmit to each other their own fragmentarity, that is, their own exposure to an Other that exceeds them, which signifies their incompleteness, and which they share in not having (as part of them). Transmitting to each other their incompleteness, they also transmit a certain experience of loss, a loss of wholeness (which never existed but is projected backward as having been⁷⁰), and they look to each other for a solution to this loss revealed by their fragmentary nature, trying to exorcise the phantom of the Other that constitutes each of them, and

make the other (the second fragment) cover up their originary hole, close the split in the screen, thus completing them and establishing them as a unity, or a totality with no outside. Their discovery of their own nature as a fragment/frame thus immediately produces the illusion that they are what we called the first type of frame, standing in relation to a preexisting totality of which they are a glimpse and which can be reconstituted through another frame/fragment with which they will unite to form a whole. The split screen as the basic unit of articulation thus corresponds to the original Greek concept of the sign, the *Symbolon*, or symbol, that object broken in two parts whose desire it is to reunite, and, we might add, not realizing that the two broken parts are broken parts with no unity preceding them.⁷¹ We might therefore say that the activity of splitting the screen is already on its own a full cinematic statement and can be viewed as the minimal event of a complete film, for it is the discovery of the frame as frame, thus as a fragment relating to itself through a haunting Other, having essentially as well a second frame in relation to which it constitutes a signifying event, which always leaves an excess of the abyssal Other, the absolute outside by which the viewers are addressed and haunted beyond their identification with any single frame.

All these aspects of the split screen constituting, we might say, its structural matrix are always activated in the many split screens in De Palma's films, but each time this basic structure is illuminated in relation to a different set of conceptual and thematic concerns. Let us examine, then, the set of more specific issues raised by the split screen in the sound lab scene we are discussing, both from Terry's point of view as well as that of the viewers.

The event of splitting in this scene involves four types: It is a splitting of attention, of the center of focus, Terry's as well as the viewers', because the screen is split precisely when Terry's attention is divided between the news report and his editing work; it is a splitting between the senses, between hearing and seeing, because the screen is split between what Terry sees and what he hears; it is a splitting (operating less importantly in this scene, but very importantly in the film in general) between the sexes, because the split is related to the moment when the single voice of the male reporter dominating the news suddenly loses its mastery and has to relate to another voice, that of the female reporter; and finally it is a split in meaning, or in the sense, of the situation, because the situation will be dominated by two

centers of meaning that will vie for centrality, the sound editing on which Terry is working and the news report. The centers of focus, the centers of meaning and interpretation, the senses, and the sexes thus all split and fragment simultaneously in this virtuosic use of the split screen, revealing between them an Other, an internal outside traced in the blank gap of the split itself.

Let us start with the question of attention. Most immediately, the split in this scene—this enigmatic intrusion of a disturbing dimension of invisibility, of the nonsensical nothing of a cut, into the previously unified visual field—occurs as a disturbance that splits Terry's (and our) attention, divided as it is henceforth between the television news he continues to hear but no longer sees and the editing of sounds he is working on (which are themselves split because they are sounds with titles written on the film material), a division of attention that becomes a division into two centers of focus, two units, as well as a division between what Terry sees and what he hears. But what does it mean to say that the attention is split, and why does it have to do with the device of splitting the screen into two simultaneous frames?⁷² According to the main conceptual opposition dominating this chapter, the opposition between the two types of frame, one relating to a hierarchical logic of continuity and totality, the other to a fragmentary and creative logic of incompleteness, we can say that there are also two concepts of attention. The first, what we might call the metaphysical notion of attention, is related to the first conception of the frame. According to this conception, attention implies a stabilizing order of existence, a unifying rhythm (time to work and time to play, and so forth), a hierarchical distribution between a center of focus and expanding peripheries, as well as a framing mechanism of interpretation. That is, in paying attention, one has to isolate from a certain originary experience of multiplicity that vies for our attention a center of focus understood to be the most significant aspect of a certain situation, or of the whole world, of existence, a center that then hierarchically dominates all the other components of a situation that have to be understood in relation to it and are distributed according to their contribution to its prominence, that is, to its being able to maintain a position of centrality.⁷³ As such, this center becomes a center of meaning and sense, a center in relation to which everything else is oriented and in relation to which everything receives its significance, its place in a unified and hierarchically ordered whole. This center is essentially

related to the concept of the frame in that its powers of centralizing, of establishing a hierarchy in an ordered totality, depend on two powers held by the frame, both relating to the frame as that which holds the power to order the division between inside and outside. Based on this power, the frame⁷⁴ embodies first the decision about what fits inside a situation (and the center uses this power to have inside only that which can enhance the center's prominence) and what remains outside (that which disturbs the center and does not fit with its powers, henceforth counted as insignificant or nonexistent).⁷⁵ Based on its power to create an inside and an irrelevant outside the frame also becomes a hierarchizing power marking the order of existence based on the distance from the center of the frame, marking a gradual decrease of power the more one is distanced from the center and brought closer to the peripheries, where one approaches being relegated to the complete insignificance of the (relative) outside.⁷⁶

But what happens when more than one center claims our attention, more than one focus, and thus more than one frame, for the "same" situation and at the "same" time? In other words, what happens when there is more than one frame for the "same" screen? An experience sets in of that which is not of the order of the frame and that is in excess of its powers, and thus it is discovered that the frame, being haunted by an Other external-internal to it rather than completely possessing the power of decision upon an irrelevant outside from the position of an essential inside, involves an essential fragmentation, a split, as we saw, both from itself and from other fragments with which it cannot form a whole. This fragmentation also signifies that the frame/screen/time was never the "same," was never "one," but, as we saw, was from the beginning different from itself, or Other from itself. This discovery of the frame's Other and thus of an essential, nonorganic multiplicity also signifies the loss of the thought of the center and of metaphysical attention because it means that the frames cannot be unified again, haunted as they are by the Other discovered in the split that is in excess of them and cannot be covered over.⁷⁷ Attention will henceforth not be directed toward the location of a center dominating a given totality but the slicing of a perspective that, by definition, must always relate to other perspectives, other centers of attention challenging each other as a perspective on the Other and unable to be reunited around a single center.

This loss of metaphysical attention and center occurring in the splitting of the screen introduces an anxiety: the horror of disorientation and of

a disintegration of a certain experience of reality, the collapse of the experience of reality as it was classically defined as that which has, in principle, only one center, and is thus unified, or constitutes a unity of direction and meaning, be it even teleologically defined, in relation to a regulative idea, or a vanishing point in the future.

In short, this loss implies the collapse of what has been termed the metaphysics of representation, which culminated with the birth of the Cartesian subject (the center) of representation, the one presupposed in advance in any decision about meaning and in relation to which, as a dependency on its powers, every event has to be thought.⁷⁸

The splitting of the screen thus implies the pain of disintegration of this imperative for unity; a pain more forcefully felt standing as it does constantly under the imperative of, and the desire for, the *one-screen-one-frame* equation, thus the desire to constantly integrate again that which has split.⁷⁹ Terry, and we the viewers, are caught, through this act of splitting, not by any of the separate frames but rather, precisely by their disjunction, that is, by the blank and invisible gapping wound between the frames that signifies a "hole" (or a scarred trace of the haunting Other) in each of the frames' completeness (that is, in their ability to dictate or announce a whole order), thus signifies their fragmentarity, their exposure to, their secret and bleeding communication with, each other. Put another way, we are caught in this (invisible, non-) place, the border, where the impossible demand of translation between the frames—of bringing to each what the other says and means, that is usually reduced to the effort of relating them both to a single order of meaning, thus erasing the split and restoring the single frame/screen—is heard.⁸⁰ This gap, then, *addresses* Terry as well as the viewers, implicates them in the disintegration of their identity (identity being understood both as a demand for a unity and the preexistence of a center in relation to which everything that arrives receives its meaning), and exposes them, makes them passive to, a dimension of the Other as an *excess of sense* (in all senses of the term), implied by the blank gap.⁸¹

The Excess of Sense

What is the significance here of the concept of excess, and what is its relation to the question of sense? Excess in this context should not be understood as a numerical or quantitative category but, rather, as a main

category of what we are trying to elaborate as “new thinking,” this thinking of an immanent outside. Excess designates, in the context of this thinking, the very being of the outside in the inside as a haunting it cannot contain (for the outside is a no-thing and therefore cannot be contained), which keeps it open, preventing it from closing in upon itself, and in relation to which it is passive; excess therefore, as we saw, immediately implies a thinking of fragments with no whole where each fragment both essentially differs from itself and is more and other than itself, in excess of itself, an internal difference that simultaneously implies a thinking of “more-than-ness” or of an essential multiplicity of fragments.

This thinking of excess immediately implies as well a new thinking of sense. If the senses were traditionally understood according to the metaphysical division of an inside world of the senses and a non-sensual, intelligible outside from which the world of the senses received its significance and in relation to which it was a pale copy, then in the new, fragmentary thinking of excess where the outside is introduced into the inside as a non-substantial haunting, we discover that we need to consider the senses in a completely different way. If the logic of excess, of the introduction of the outside into the inside, is to apply to the senses, this has to mean, we realize, two things: First, it means that each sense is its own difference from itself, in excess of itself, because of its haunting by the internal-external Other, and second, it means there are essentially, that there have to be, several senses or fragments. That is, if there is to be sense at all when the outside is introduced into the inside, into what used to be called the world of the senses, then there has to be an essential multiplicity of senses or fragments. It cannot make sense to talk about a unique sense, one sense encompassing all, once the outside is introduced into the inside. Here too an essential shift is introduced into the second significance of the term *sense*, that is, sense as meaning. For what is metaphysical meaning if not the attempt to reunite the multiplicity announced by the world of the senses under a single, non-sensual center? But once this center is lost because of the new discovery of an essential fragmentarity implied in the thought of the immanent outside, meaning itself cannot function as it did metaphysically; that is, as a power of oneness (the metaphysical outside) that dominates and gives justification for the (non-essential) plurality of the inside. Meaning now ceases to be this domination of the many by the one and becomes the bleeding communication happening in between the

essential multiplicity of fragments/senses that cannot be unified. Meaning does not justify or give meaning to the senses but is the non-sensual event happening in between them as a communication of their fragmentariness to each other, a communication of their hauntedness, and it is itself never one, but also essentially multiple, always different, in excess of itself.⁸²

This logic of the excess of sense is brilliantly worked out in the split screen we are discussing, and I would like to briefly show how its two main aspects, of the senses and of meaning, operate in this scene. Let us start with the question of meaning.

The excess of sense as meaning activated by the split screen implies that it is constitutively impossible to assign *a* meaning to the situation by which we are confronted—*meaning* being understood as a unifying identity or identification that gives every element in the situation a justification, a place in an ordered whole—an impossibility first experienced as the competition among several centers, or frames, of interpretation for the domination of the meaning of the situation. Thus, in our scene, the question is which frame will dominate the screen’s meaning: Will it be the news report about the presidential race, or will it be the sound editing process? Deciding upon a dominant frame would mean that the two activities would stand in a comprehensible relation to each other, in which one would explain and justify the other. Is the sound editing part of a vast political story or is the political story an element in a vast experiment of sound editing? This is one of the constitutive tensions dominating *Blow Out*. Making this decision will mean, precisely, that the painful blank gap will be closed, covered over so as to give the screen back its unity, covering it over with a single frame, the (dream of the) frame of all frames, which is therefore no frame at all.

This desire—to close the gap and to unify the frame/screen by deciding that one of its two frames is dominant and gives justification to the other—allows us to say that one possible reading of *Blow Out*’s narrative following the scene we are discussing—a scene that ends, precisely, with the dissolution of the split screen and a resumption of the storyline in which Terry goes to the bridge where he will record the accident—is as a phantasmic construction of a coherent narrative (narrative being a unifying operation which gives events a causal order in a whole) that will make the two frames come together.⁸³ That is, Terry’s ensuing adventure can be seen as his paranoid or phantasmic⁸⁴ attempt to cohere the split—between

the TV news and the sound editing, between eye and ear, and more profoundly, he seeks to eliminate the very horror of separation discovered in this split—to make the political story cohere with the sounds of bodies falling, wind blowing, and so on.⁸⁵

I must now stress, by way of repeating some of our previous points, two things in relation to this notion of excess discovered through the vying with each other of several interpretative frames for the “same” situation. And both these points have to do with the nonquantitative nature of the notion of excess: First, excess does not have to do simply with the fact that there is a *plurality* of meanings or frames, a plurality of ways to *unify* (the operation of the metaphysical concept of meaning) a situation but, rather, with an essential *multiplicity of fragments/frames*, discovered as an essential failure of meaning understood as unification, and its transformation into that which communicates in between fragments that cannot form a whole. A second point, implied by the demands of the first, is that the relations between the multiplicity of frames of interpretation cannot be grasped as a numerical accumulation, as if saying, this frame is valid, and this frame is valid as well, and so forth. Trying to achieve this conciliatory stance of seeing together many interpretations and points of view as equally valid and even as simply enriching, through numerical variety, the accumulated meaning of a situation or of a work, would mean following again the dream of the frame of all frames, a richer, plural frame. It would mean that there is a sense of talking about the *same* situation to which all these various frames refer, a situation as if external to them, existing on its own. Rather, the feeling of excess here has to do with the experience of a constitutive and irreducible heterogeneity and multiplicity of the various frames/fragments/perspectives on the excessive Other. It is the discovery of an essential, unbridgeable, and unconciliatory difference between an irreducible multiplicity of positions exposed to, that is contested by (and inevitably so because having another center means, by definition, being exposed to that which undermines the center’s unifying authority) each other, and the threat of annihilation of one center/frame/point of view by another, discovered through the exposure to the gap, experienced as address in between the frames.

The second main dimension of the excess of sense in our split screen scene in the sound lab, as I mentioned, has to do with the raising of the question of the senses, with the way in which the splitting into

two frames involves a disjunction between two senses, the sense of sight and that of sound. The logic of an originary splitting or multiplicity of meanings/frames/points of view discovered in the blank gap in between the frames turns out at the same time to involve, this scene seems to suggest, an essential demand to think the question of the senses under the problematics of a no less originary splitting between them (hearing and seeing, in our case). It is as if the very notion of a bodily sense is truly discovered for the first time once the metaphysical thought of the center collapses and the logic of a nonorganic fragmentation or essential multiplicity of frames implied by the introduction of the concept of an immanent outside comes to the fore. It would now seem that each of the senses is to be thought of as constituting a particular framing or perspective that is not simply complemented by the other senses participating, but is actually contested by them. It is as if the existence of each additional sense, such as hearing in addition to seeing the situation, contests the other sense’s claim to give us the whole, unified picture, and thus the accumulation of senses in the “same” situation does not (simply) give us a fuller experience of it, but, strangely, introduces a hole at its heart, indicating to us that there is no whole picture, and that a situation is the communication between fragments that cannot form a whole. Each additional sense *incompletes* the others, we might say, destroys the illusion of unity that each wants to give, rather than completes them into a fuller picture.⁸⁶ But it is precisely this quality of the senses that opens them up to each other (because they are exposed to each other, discover something that does not originate in them); that is, that makes them communicate with each other, and teach each other, for communication can occur only between a multiplicity in between which an essential, and irreducible, contestation is discovered. If the eye listens, as Paul Claudel famously said, it is not because the two senses somehow complement each other but, rather, because the disjunction from the ear signals a hole in the eye, destroying its autonomy, a hole that makes the eye turn to the ear, or touch the ear, in the vocabulary I used in my discussion of *The Fury*.⁸⁷ In between the senses, a blank gap opens,⁸⁸ a gap that means, to repeat what I argued earlier, both that each sense is different from itself, contains a haunting limiting it from the inside,⁸⁹ and that, in an essential manner, there *has to be more than one sense* for there to be sense at all⁹⁰—because the demand of sense, the demand of a thought of excess beyond

the unifying center, seems to indicate that sense never be complete, that it never be one, and this is only possible, logically, if there is an originary dimension comprising a multiplicity of points of view on the “same” situation contesting each other.⁹¹

Therefore we can say that what De Palma shows us in a scene such as this one, a scene of the splitting of the screen, is that if cinema, the art of film, is the art that so essentially has to be thought in relation to the old dream of the total work of art, a work bringing together, unifying all the various arts and senses into one work, then film arrives not as the fulfillment of this dream but as its most devastating critique. The various arts—and senses—come together in film not to achieve one complete work but to expose the irreducible and essential tension among the arts, the essential and irreducible contestation of one art or sense by another, as well as to bring about their touching communication with each other over an abyss.⁹²

The Bridge and the Abyss

Jack Terry, the man in charge of bringing the scream that will fit the film-within-the-film, is thus a man, as this scene elucidates, caught in the split (between the senses, the sexes, and frames of interpretation), exposed to the horror opening in between fragments. He is also the man desiring the closure of this horror and the covering over, the bridging of, the abyss of the split. Terry's next scene, the scene on the bridge where he goes to record the wind and ends up witnessing an accident, expands the thematic and conceptual problematic opened in the sound lab scene, but also constitutes its repetition.⁹³

Immediately following Terry's exit from the sound lab, the next scene opens with a view of a forest at night; it is almost completely dark and strong winds are blowing. Into this natural environment, free from human traces (with the possible exception of some flickering electric lights in the background, although it isn't clear whether there are indeed lights there), a strange, metallic, elongated object, unrecognized and out of focus, enters from the bottom of the screen. Slowly penetrating the “virginal” natural setting (the only such setting in *Blow Out* and one of very few in De Palma's work) from outside the frame, in a gesture echoing the famous pen-

etration of the spaceship into the frame in Kubrick's *2001*, this metallic and elongated object, which finally traverses the whole screen and comes into focus, appears to be a microphone. After a brief moment, the microphone exits the screen, leaving it completely dark for a few seconds until the next human intervention. Slowly entering from the bottom right of the screen, a human face appears, at first unrecognizable and slowly, and then because of the eyes that enter the frame we start seeing Terry, whose face finally occupies most of the screen. As the face turns a bit, we notice the ears covered with headphones. Looking a bit to the left and right, Terry lowers his head, and as the camera moves down, we see his hand laid over a large recording machine now occupying most of the screen. A first cut, from the close-up of the recorder to a medium shot of Terry standing with one hand in the air holding the microphone (which we don't see). He looks up and then, in a series of three more violent and noticeable editing cuts, each giving us a long shot of Terry from vantage points of greater distance whose justification isn't clear (for we don't know who is looking, but we know that he is exposed to some view), we see a tinier and tinier Terry (and the camera watches him from behind, not from the side of his face) standing on a bridge with his recording machine and microphone—a fragile human exposed to a menacing gaze standing on a bridge and recording.

Yet when we see Terry's face again, occupied as he is in recording, manipulating the microphone that again occupies much of the screen, he seems to be secure, master of his environment, standing firmly on the bridge and surveying the scene like an owner, with the ruling scepter that is his microphone, the property at his disposal. Suddenly we hear voices (articulating recognizable words) whose source is unseen: a couple (a man and woman) are talking. In a repeated series of cuts, now four of them, we once again are placed farther and farther away from Terry, whose fragility seems to grow. In the first two cuts, we see Terry without seeing the source of the voices. In the next two cuts, we do see the source of the voices, the last cut bringing us to a close-up of the couple, as the woman (repeating the gesture of the woman in the opening scene complaining about somebody out there) notices Terry looking at them and is troubled while the man calms her down, saying, “Who cares.” As if finally mastering the source of the voice, visually conveyed by the close-up we have of the couple, the film cuts back to Terry, smiling condescendingly, once more the master, superior again to his environment, looking amused at the helpless

62. This quality of the emissary—the one responsible for giving us that which we don't know that we want—dictates a logic governing many of De Palma's movies (most fully developed perhaps in his *Raising Cain*), the logic of the double, a logic which in *Blow Out* dictates, beyond the viewer's relationship to Travolta's character, a relationship we will examine later, the one between Jack Terry and the murderer. That is, the double in De Palma's films (from his *Sisters*—a film about Siamese twins—onward) is always thought of as that figure occupying, or standing in for, this horrifying, blank non-place that opens at the heart of the de-framed and haunted subject, and occupies it as the phantasmic figure that can both get for the subject that which he or she unknowingly wants, do it in a way that the figure will not be willing to acknowledge as her or his own, because of the destruction it always demands, and also function as a rival for the desired object, that is, the one who, when they get the object, possesses precisely what the un-acknowledging subject desires most of all. And the paradigmatic case of the double (although this is not always the case) is the identical, mirrored double, the one who looks and seems to be exactly like the haunted subject, with the small difference that he or she possesses what the subject, unconsciously, desires, the object that will exorcise his or her phantom. We might say that doubling is the mechanism that tries to reduce and eliminate the horrifying discovery of the phantom at the heart of the experience of the mirror and, thus, tries to create a perfect mirror with no gaps, by creating a figure, the double that incorporates the phantom into the mirrored image as a possession. The double is thus the mirrored image but possesses as an object the unreflected phantom (scream) that opens between one and one's mirrored image. (For a helpful discussion of the question of the double that elaborates some of these issues see Malden Dolar's "At First Sight" in Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek editors, *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996]). Terry in *Blow Out* thus occupies precisely this position in relation to the viewers, and we will see that the murderer occupies precisely this position in relation to Terry.

63. For this reason the phone becomes such a major device to introduce the haunting outside in this film in particular as well as in all De Palma's films. For what is the phone if not this bizarre apparatus that manages to technologically separate the ear, to fragment it, from the other senses and expose the listener to the dimension of the Other discovered in the disjunction between the senses?

64. The concept of the focus, and the activity of focusing, is one of the major questions of *Blow Out*—invoked in many of its scenes in which a character has to shift his or her gaze (either actual gaze, or metaphorical gaze, the gaze of interpreting meanings) between two centers, one of which necessarily remains blurred—and plays an essential role in De Palma's interrogation of the categories of framing. We will return to the question of focus later, but for now, I can say that the category of focus is one of the main concepts, in *Blow Out*, with which to articulate the activity of framing.

The frame, in its attempts to constitute a unified field of meaning, demands a center of focus and constitutes itself by relegating to an external position, even repressing, that which does not fit this demand for unity. The interesting question, of course, when confronting the tension between two centers of focus, is to examine what it is that passes between the two centers, rather than attempting to look for a third center that will incorporate the previous two, as Terry is in the habit of doing. That is, it is a question of understanding the focus not simply as a limitation that can be resolved if one finds a different, more inclusive, perspective but, rather, as a constitutive category of meaning and of framing that is inescapable, and the attempt to think another logic to the frame/focus will thus involve thinking the blank gap in-between various centers. The murder, in *Blow Out*, passes between the centers, caused by a desire for the ultimate focus.

65. And it is the only cinematic gesture (alongside his use of slow motion perhaps) through which he seems to want to distinguish in interviews his own use and understanding of cinematic grammar from that of Hitchcock's. A small difference perhaps, but one that makes all the difference.

66. A device used by De Palma as early as 1969 in his documentation of an avant-garde theatrical production of Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Dionysus in 69*, a film that marks from very early on De Palma's Nietzschean heritage. And De Palma is, I suggest, alongside Orson Welles perhaps, the most Nietzschean of (at least American) directors.

67. It is the act of fragmentation of a unity, as well as the essential relations and tension between the multiplicity of frames, or of framing effects, and the *one screen/frame* remaining as a desire, that distinguishes this De Palmian device of the split screen both from its painterly precursors, the diptych and the triptych, and from its cinematic precursor, the simultaneous use of multiple screens, as famously used by Abel Gance in his *Napoleon*. De Palma is not the inventor of the device of the split screen, nor its only significant practitioner, but he is undoubtedly, at least in mainstream cinema, its most profound and philosophical interpreter, the one who understands the very existence of the art of film as tied to it.

68. And Terry himself is editing sounds at the moment of the split.

69. I don't want to anthropomorphize the frame but, rather, to show how it enacts a certain event of subjectivity that stands as well for the event of the viewers themselves who, by first identifying with the frame and then undergoing its difference from itself, repeat this discovery of the haunting.

70. More precisely, we can say that there are two kinds of loss: (1) an absolute loss, an originary mourning, which has to do with the nature of the phantasmal Other as a potentiality that always exceeds its actualization, and which causes the fragment to be haunted, to have at it heart, an originary loss, of that which was never actualized but exists only as a ghost; (2) a second loss, the loss of an imagined wholeness that the fragment, discovering its fragmentary nature, projects

backward as having been there at its origin before its having become a fragment, and is a loss projected backwards with the function of covering the originary loss discovered in the phantomal heart.

71. We can see that this complex adventure and logic of the split screen—where the fragments discover their own fragmentarity that they transmit to each other but that they also want to resolve—is the exact parallel, the cinematic formalization, of the scene on the staircase I examined in the last chapter where Gillian, touching the doctor's bleeding hand, becomes the instrument of the horrifying discovery of this painful originary fragmentation, and of the type of communication that exists between two fragments, a communication of and through the abyss of the blank Other that they share in not having. What *The Fury* thus called touch, the communication between fragments of the blankness that both connects and separates them, is precisely what happens in the split screen, in the gap separating and connecting the two frames, which thus touch each other.

72. I would like to stress that the concept of attention is not introduced here arbitrarily and is not imposed by me on the film. The question of attention is constantly present, on many different levels, during the movie, usually with regard to Terry's way of relating to the reality surrounding him as he pays attention to certain frameworks of interpretation while, tragically, he ignores others: from his not paying attention to much of what Sally tells him to his neglect of the news reports about the serial murders, which he does not regard as integral to the conspiracy he is following at the moment. The question of attention is closely related in the movie to the question of focusing; again, mainly through Terry's frequent confrontation with simultaneous centers of focus between which he needs to choose.

73. But the question is, obviously, how is one to understand multiplicity? We can say that there are two main ways to understand it: the one we may call organic, the other nonorganic. According to the organic conception, the multiplicity is multiplicity of parts in an ordered whole in which the parts share a unified purpose and thus relate to a center (the head, for example, in the classical organic conception of the body) that gives them their significance. The nonorganic conception has precisely to do with the collapse of this organic conception, thus with a decapitation (see the end of *The Fury*), and with the discovery of a multiplicity of fragments that do not cooperate to form a whole but that rather signify the impossibility of the idea of the whole. It is an essential multiplicity in that it has precisely to do with the loss of power of the one through the discovery, made through the haunting of the Other and the discovery of an essential fragmentation I discussed earlier in relation to the split screen, that there are essentially more than one fragment in between which there is a haunting, a haunting signifying that they can never complete each other and form a unity. Thus, the desire of what I call metaphysical attention has to do with the attempt to turn the discovery of an essential fragmentary multiplicity into an organic one that can reinstate unity.

74. We are talking about a frame that attempts to erase its haunting by the absolute outside by trying to become itself the power deciding upon a—now relative, not absolute-outside, thus exorcising an originary haunting.

75. For a succinct formulation of the problematics of the center, see Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play, in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001).

76. Why is the center the most powerful locus in the whole frame? Precisely because, geometrically, it is the most distant point from the margins, thus from the irrelevant outside. A whole classification can be made between the way various directors use this power of the frame to decide on a center, between directors who are more interested in examining what it means to hold the center of a frame (for example, Welles, the director most interested in examining the powers of sovereignty) and directors interested in examining the powers of the frame to present marginal and abandoned characters, always on the border of the image (for example, Yasujiro Ozu), or directors interested in an even distribution of characters having them move between center and margins so as to eliminate any permanent hierarchy (Robert Altman). There are many ways to occupy the center, even by supposedly marginal characters who stand close to the limit of the frame but actually manipulate the center, going behind its back and occupying its place while pretending not to occupy it. Of course, this whole configuration between the center and the margins changes when a character, for example (and this happens in many of De Palma's films), is presented in one of the margins of the frame but is actually partly outside the frame, only fragmentarily inside. Such a character immediately changes the name of the game because all of a sudden this place seems to hold a stronger power even than that of the frame's center, and this is the power of the haunting, absolute outside, that suddenly penetrates the reality of the framed world—through this character neither completely inside nor totally outside—and annihilates the power of the center to control the division (a device used in many paranoid film noirs, such as John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate*).

77. The other great contemporary American director who most rigorously, though with very different methods, attempts to undermine, through the means of cinema, the domination of the thought of the center is Robert Altman, with his bringing into film the discovery of a nonhierarchical, improvisational multiplicity of voices, of worlds, and of stories, where one doesn't know who to listen to among all the simultaneously speaking characters in his films, the various storylines, and the various worlds they bring into contact with each other. It is always in-between these multiplicities, in the very inability to centralize, that a horror is discovered in his films, usually as a murder. This decentralizing proliferation of voices and perspectives happens not only within each of his films, but also between his films, which all seem to constitute a vast, polyphonic world or worlds without center or

peripheries, almost indistinguishable from each other as separated works, but constituting a vast human comedy of cinematic fragmentation.

78. For a helpful articulation of the various conceptual implications of the subject of representation see Martin Heidegger "The Age of the World Picture" (in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977]).

79. And pain *is* the splitting of the one, or more correctly, it is the discovery of an originary multiplicity without a one at its origin, a discovery in relation to which the desire for unity arises as the desire to repress the pain. Why pain, we might ask? For pain, we can say, is the relation to an excess, the excess of the Other, that cannot be contained, and thus haunts the frame marking its point of suffering, of passivity and of passion toward the Other that exceeds it and haunts its inside. It is also more specifically a question of pain because, as I tried to show in the previous chapter, this discovery of an originary multiplicity is also the discovery of the opening of relation in the transmission of a wound. The body, the body of touch and sense that is, opens as a wounding relation to another, and the demand for unity attempts to overcome this originary pain.

80. De Palma's main interrogation of this figure of the split as an invisible linguistic border where the demand of translation is forcefully felt is worked out in his Vietnam War movie, *Casualties of War*.

81. To some extent to say that they are passive to an excess is redundant, excess meaning, to begin with, in that we are dealing with a dimension not originating with the center, external to it, and which is thus felt as excessive from the center's point of view and in relation to which the center is destroyed to a certain extent, has to open itself, to subject itself, to that which originates from an enigmatic nowhere.

82. In relation to this thinking of excess as the thinking that announces the collapse of the thought of the center and thus also the collapse of what I called metaphysical attention, we can briefly examine an influential, and problematic, recent treatment of the concept of attention. Jonathan Crary, in his well-known book *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), has quite exhaustively and helpfully elaborated the significance of the problem of attention for modernity, mainly from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, in various fields of investigation, from experimental psychology to philosophy to painting. Arguing for the centrality of the interest in the concept of attention arising against the background of increasing distractiveness and the "sensory impact" of modern life, Crary convincingly shows the emphasis on attention as often implying a growing need to develop disciplinary strategies of domination in resistance to the lack of control modern distractiveness brings with it. A dream of modernity is to establish a rigid fixity of focus freed from change and difference implied in this distract-

edness, in which the past is nostalgically and erroneously viewed as containing some kind of pure attentiveness without distraction. He also argues for a need to rethink the concept of attention not simply in opposition to growing distraction, often understood as some sort of contamination of an originary purity of attention, but more subtly in an immanent manner to distraction itself, which has always haunted attentiveness as part of its very constitution, as blindness haunts vision, as he suggests in one of his quotations from Émile Durkheim. Crary thus sees attention and distraction not as opposing or as essentially different but rather as existing, in his words, on a single continuum. "I argue," he writes, "that attention and distraction *cannot be thought outside of a continuum* in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other" (p. 51 [my italics]). He thus also sees attention as always "haunted by the possibility of its own excess" and as containing "within itself the conditions for its own disintegration" (p. 47). Though willingly accepting Crary's call for a new thinking of attention, haunted by the possibility of its own excess, which integrates a positive thought of distraction and "sensory excess," I think that his project nevertheless involves an essential conceptual misdirection having to do, precisely, with his lack of conceptualization of excess and his insistence on thinking attention and its excess on a continuum. For excess, as we saw, being a concept of the absolute outside in the inside, has to do precisely with the discovery of a dimension of absolute discontinuity between the inside and the outside. If excess or distraction is the absolute outside of attention (frame), the pairing cannot be viewed as a continuity but precisely as the collapse of the thinking of continuity belonging to the metaphysical thinking of the continuous frame, a thinking of the line. This misconception of excess allows Crary to talk about so-called sensory excess and growing sensory impact, both still completely metaphysical or empirical notions implying some sort of quantitative overload that is simply too much to grasp for the poor empirical subject of modern life. But, as we saw, the relation of the concept of sense to the concept of excess is not to be understood quantitatively but as a change of logic from the metaphysical division between empirical senses, or the senses of the immanent world versus the intelligible world, to new thinking. It is thus not a question of too much sense (which, in principal, could be received by some superior subject or center with greater sensory-motor capacities), but of the collapse of the concept of empirical sense and the discovery within the senses of a haunting external or internal to them, which makes the senses discover both their excess beyond themselves, their difference from themselves, as well as an essential plurality of the senses. Thus, the discovery of modern distraction is not to be empirically understood as simply the growing amount of stimuli that becomes too much for the subject but, rather, as the discovery of this essential dimension of haunting of the senses and the loss of the possibility of center that

results from this new discovery, or growing experience, in modernity of the outside in the inside.

83. Deleuze, in his book on Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon, The Logic of Sensation*, analyzes the significance of Bacon's use of the triptych, and argues, "The triptych is undoubtedly the form in which the following demand is posed most precisely: there must be a relationship between the separate parts, but this relationship must be neither narrative nor logical. The triptych does not imply a progression, and it does not tell a story" (Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon, The Logic of Sensation* [University of Minnesota Press, 2005], p. 58). Without elaborating on Deleuze's discussion of Bacon's triptychs, which nevertheless seems to me highly relevant to De Palma's use of the split screen (and I suggest more generally that Bacon, another great artist of the scream and of pain, is an artistic kinsman to De Palma), we can say that in *Blow Out* as well the split screen uncovers a logic of momentary non-narration, where the two frames, by suspending the domination of the single frame, release the tense mechanism of competing interpretations, of address by the gap in between the frames, and of a nonnarrative relation between the frames, or what I call the secret and bleeding communication between fragments with no whole. However, this suspension of narrativization effected by the split is always thought, in *Blow Out* as well as in many other De Palma films, in relation to the *painful* act of separation itself. Thus he thinks, probably as Bacon did as well, about the question of the split screen in relation to an economy of pain, as well as in relation to a fantasmatic attempt to cover over the splitting pain. As such, the return to narrative in De Palma's films, as, for example, the ensuing narrative in *Blow Out*, is already thought of in relation to a logic of fantasy, a logic that attempts to reconstitute the one, meaning also one frame/center/focus/meaning. As such, narrative is one of the main devices of restoration of the one frame/center, of exorcising the phantom of the Other because it hierarchically distributes the multiple parts through a causal logic. Because De Palma's narratives are thus never simply and naively narratives, but always have to do with a fantasmatic attempt to smooth over the gap opening in between the frames, they always leave strange traces where the act of smoothing over somehow fails, traces appearing as illogical and unreasonable gaps in the narratives itself, thus always having the quality of a dream, or nightmare, which tries to arrange something coherently, yet never really does so successfully. Freud, in his investigations of dream logic, named this mechanism of smoothing over "secondary revision." We can therefore say that De Palma's films almost always investigate a mechanism, the mechanism of myth, famously analyzed by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (2nd edition, London: Hogarth Press, 1939), whereby a culture, the Jews, tries to construct a smooth and coherent narrative of its history precisely to cover over a gap, the gap of the murder of a father figure, that is, in our terms, the gap revealed by the collapse of the frame/father. Thus, when crit-

ics denigrate De Palma's films as incoherent and ridiculous, they are missing precisely the most important aspect of these films—their being guided by a complex investigation of the fantasmatic logic of attempting to restore the split frame. As a general rule, De Palma's films are *always to be read according to a logic of fantasy rather than according to a logic of narrative and causality*. That is, every scene is always to be examined from the point of view of psychic economy—involved as it is in the struggle between the haunting of the Other and the attempt to exorcise it—rather than from the point of view of a "realistic," that is, framing, justification. What is unique about the logic of fantasy governing his films (a uniqueness that greatly contributes to his critics' misapprehensions) is that in distinction from a director such as David Lynch, for example, where it is usually clear when we are caught in a dimension of fantasy, is that it is almost never clear in De Palma that we are not viewing a realistic film, or at least a narrative one (thus, even in fantastic films like *Carrie* or *The Fury*, most other directors would accept the fantastic conventions and try to build fully "coherent" films around them, obeying the laws of the genre). Only the strange disruptions in logic or in narrative, in what we might call a haunting of the genre, where the gaps behind the smoothing over show slightly, indicate that something beyond the realistic logic of narrative is at work.

Thus, De Palma's critics, like the outraged critics of Freud, can be viewed as trying to hold to the frame of the father, horrified by the yawning gaps, by which they are nevertheless addressed. These critics thus become figures similar to Terry, escaping from the horrifying gaps in search of a coherent narrative. In *Blow Out*, a film thematically dealing with several strategies of covering over a murder (of the governor, of Sally, of the other girls murdered to smooth over the murder of the governor and make it cohere as a narrative), there are many instances where the narrative seems to slip and a strange incoherency is uncovered. One especially interesting instance happens when Terry, following a slight accident toward the end of the film, falls unconscious in broad daylight for a period that according to narrative logic cannot last more than a few minutes, yet when he wakes up, it is already night and everything in the streets has changed.

84. And the dimension of fantasy has to do, precisely, with a projection over the blank split that will *bridge* the destabilizing fragments (the two parts of the fragmented screen), make them cohere through framing, and smooth over the horror of its opening abyss. It is thus no accident that the next scene, the scene of Terry's witnessing of the accident that triggers his conspiratorial adventure, takes place, precisely, on a *bridge over water* where Terry heads directly from his lab—the dimension of accident having to do with a falling from the bridge to the water—and signals the fantasmatic nature of the upcoming *narrative*. The bridge over water, also having a connection with the question of the technological stabilization of an exposure to movement, with the ability to pass over smoothly,

without falling, above the abyss of change, is one of the main figures of De Palma, and appears in all, or almost all, his films.

85. We might actually say that another name for this gap or split is “the news,” that is, the coming of the new as unanticipated, and it is thus not by chance that Terry’s defensive adventure begins with his exposure to the news.

86. It must be said, though, that the accumulation of senses for the same situation does give us a fuller sense of reality of the situation, yet it is precisely the meaning of what a fuller sense of reality is that changes. We feel reality to be fuller, paradoxically, precisely when a dimension of an irreconcilable heterogeneity is introduced into it, thus precisely when an unbridgeable gap, or an unsutured hole opens up at its heart and we are thus exposed, or open ourselves, to that which does not originate in us. We might even say that film somehow seems to give us a fuller sense of reality than the other arts because it opens up the most devastatingly the gaps between them.

87. And touch, we might say, if it is that which designates the communication in between fragments that do not constitute a whole, might not itself be only one sense among others (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting) but, rather, might also be the general name for that which communicates among the other senses, and whose logic is thus different.

88. And we can extend this thought of the gap in between the senses to a general logic of the senses. We might thus say the senses do not have the parallel or complimentary nature they seem to have, for example, for a philosopher such as Jean-Paul Sartre, in an analysis such as his description of sensory qualities of a lemon: “The lemon is extended throughout its qualities, and each of its qualities is extended throughout each of the others. It is the sourness of the lemon which is yellow, it is the lemon of the yellow which is sour. We eat the color of a cake, and the taste of this cake, and the taste of this cake is the instrument which reveals its shape and its color to what may be called the alimentary intuition” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* [New York: Washington Square Press, 1992], p. 186). We might rather say that if the lemon is extended throughout its qualities, it is not because the yellow is sour and the sourness yellow but, rather, because the yellow incompletes the sourness and vice versa and that they thus transmit between them their incompleteness, which is that which makes them (and the other qualities) communicate, a communication that in its disjunctive structure creates the “unity” or the “heterogenous, disjunctive community” that is the lemon. (We need another move in this unifying communicative operation that will turn indeed the lemon into one).

89. An internal limitation that means an internal blindness of the eye, deafness of the ear, etc., which are manifestations of the outside in the inside.

90. To carry this thought to its logical conclusion would mean that there is no such thing even as one sense, say hearing or seeing, that hearing is already mul-

tiples because it is different from itself, and so is seeing, etc. Although it might be that when not contested by the other senses, each sense will have the tendency to gather itself into a unity.

91. There is a third main category of the excess (of sense?) in the use of the split screen in our scene, with which I do not want to deal at length but simply to point to, and this is the category of the excess of sex, of the suggestion raised by the splitting that if there is to be sex at all, there has to be more than one. The logic of sexuality is discovered to be the very same logic of internal difference, the immanent haunting of the Other, and essential fragmentation operating in the logic of the senses and the logic of meaning, where it makes sense neither to speak of one sex (man, for example, as metaphysical thinking would have it) as the model that is supposed to unify the human, nor does it make sense to speak of some coming together of the two to form some unity or completion. The human, as a fragmentation of sense, is essentially more than one, and this more than oneness is what we call sexuality, and in this fragmentation that is sexuality, the two frames/sexes/fragment cannot come together to complete each other, for they incomplete each other, each signifying an abyss in the other, an abyss over which their bleeding communication as touch opens. Thus in our scene, in a very beautiful and evocative manner, repeating subtly the story of creation, the split screen implies the loss of the domination of one voice, the anchorman, and the sudden appearance, as if out of or over the abyss of the gap, of another voice, the anchorwoman, the opening of communication between them being the opening of communication between two fragments over the abyss of the split, the originary fall.

92. I would like to mention in this context, unfortunately in too brief and cursory manner, two further major uses of the De Palmian split screen, taking in different directions the essential discovery of a blank gap or split at the origin of meaning and sense. The first one comes in *Blow Out* itself and is the second major use of the split screen in the film. It occurs while Terry and Sally are talking on the phone with each other, and when all of a sudden Terry’s attention is drawn to a sound from the street, whose source he attempts to see, moving away from the phone. At the moment of his return, having missed some of Sally’s (as it turns out later, crucial) words because of his distraction, the screen is split—the blank gap in between the senses, which turns out here to be also the blank gap in between the sexes, is traced at the heart of the screen, marking an essential wound. Precisely at this point, we also realize that someone is listening to their conversation—the evil murderer (Butke). The blank gap in attention thus becomes a principle of evil to which they are exposed, the very source of their (narratively speaking) eventual woundedness. The blank gap also becomes the locus where the possibility of a technology of surveillance is introduced because they are being recorded, and it is a gap brought about by the strange technology that is the telephone, a technology separating the senses (isolating the sense of hearing), instituting itself at the place

of the (constitutive) possibility of their disjunction. (For a discussion of the telephone and its relation to surveillance see Avital Ronell's important *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989].) Another major dimension discovered in the split, implied in *Blow Out*, but more complexly worked out in *Dressed to Kill*, is that of the opening of an essential dimension of forgetfulness, a dimension at the origin of memory as the (impossible) attempt to catch up with this constitutive forgetfulness. This dimension of forgetfulness is worked out in two great split screens in *Dressed to Kill*, the first in the famous museum scene and the second after Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson's character) leaves the apartment of her afternoon fling. In the first, Miller, distracted by the presence of a man with whom she wants to have an affair, remembers after the fact that she has dropped a glove (an artifact protecting the hand from touch), and by the way that the split screen is activated, a gap is created between her present attempt to recollect and the image that her memory brings of where she dropped the glove, a gap splitting the past from the present and indicating a dimension irrecoverable by either: an essential blank hole to which she is exposed. This blank hole also here indicates, in a second major split screen, the infiltration of evil, for having left the apartment of her lover, Miller suddenly remembers that she has forgotten her ring. And because she then returns to get it that she meets her doom in the shape of the murderer, himself/herself already a split personality, a man/woman trying to cover up the split in himself/herself through murder.

93. And the whole film, we might say—and this is part of its horror—to some extent doesn't move, is completely frozen in its opening moment between a horrifying discovery of the haunting of the Other and the attempt to exorcise it, each scene acting as a repetition of this problem with no solution, with no way out.

94. For a more detailed discussion of this editing fragmentation, see my discussion of the staircase scene in *The Fury* in the previous chapter.

95. Perhaps more precisely it is a question of a struggle between two relations to this nonobjective, phantom eye, one exposed to it as a menacing gaze from elsewhere, the other assuming this gaze from elsewhere as one's own vision. I will come back to this presently.

96. Although there does seem to be a privilege here given to hearing as an interruption of the objective eye.

97. I am thus trying to invoke in this context the transformation in the Kantian understanding of the concept of sensation between the first and the third critique. In Lyotard's succinct elucidation, "Kant insists that the term 'sensation' that is a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure . . . is given quite a different meaning (*etwas ganz anderes*) from the sensation that is 'the representative of a thing' . . . In the analytic of taste, sensation no longer has any cognitive finality; it no longer gives any information about an object but only about the 'subject'

itself" (Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994], p. 9). Without necessarily adopting for the present context all the Kantian distinctions involved in this transformation of the concept of sensation (the introduction of the question of pleasure and displeasure, of the subject, and so on), it is crucial to note that Kant pointed to a split within the understanding of sensation that I am here, within a slightly different conceptual framework, trying to point to as operating in the scene on the bridge.

98. For a very helpful and illuminating discussion of the gaze and of the way that objective vision depends on an unlocatable Other, an Other that is precisely an anti-transcendental concept, see Joan Copjec's "What Zapruder Saw" in her *Imagine There's No Woman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

99. The dimension that was never actual memory is also the dimension of the future, in the sense of that which keeps the frame open to transformation. Not any future this or that, but the fact that there is a future or a transformative opening of the frame. Memory is thus always also a memory of the future, the reminder that there is a future. We will see in the book's conclusion how De Palma, in his *Femme Fatale*, elaborates most intensely this idea of the memory of the future.

100. A suffocation that is another method to trap the scream, this most haunting of sounds, by way of eliminating it, not letting it happen, completely closing the dangerous opening that is the mouth.

101. For more elaborate remarks on the question of the accident, see the discussion of the volleyball scene in *Carrie* in Chapter 1.

102. The accident is often referred to, by the police and reporters, as a freak accident, a term that constantly enrages Terry, and it enrages him in the same way that Peter Sandza's son in *The Fury* enrages his father by describing himself as a freak, the one who doesn't fit in the father's frame.

103. The most thematically explicit raising of the question of this haunting traumatic memory in the film has to do with Terry's primal trauma, the one he needs so desperately to exorcise, an exorcism actually leading to the repetition of his wound and guilt, for he will be responsible for Sally's death and will be denied absolution from the trauma of having been responsible, through his wiring of an undercover cop when working for the police, for this cop's death.

104. It seems to me that *Blow Out* is one of the films to have thought about the question of technology and its relation to film the most profoundly, and a separate, very lengthy treatment, going far beyond the scope of this essay, is called for to interrogate the highly complex and ambivalent thinking of technology activated in the film. De Palma started out in his adolescence as a whiz kid developing computers, and in almost all his films, he continues to meditate on this early obsession with modern technology.

105. For an essential discussion of the relations between technology and memory, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).