AMERICAN FILM,
TECHNOLOGY, AND
THE END OF LIFE

DEATHWATCH

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FILM AND CULTURE

JOHN BELTON, EDITOR

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INTRODUCTION

AN ELUSIVE PASSAGE

> The train comes to a stop, and grey figures silently emerge from the cars, soundlessly greet their friends, laugh, walk, run, bustle, and … are gone.
>
> —MAXIM GORKY

JUST A few years after Oscar Wilde observed that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life," the cinema was born, promising an unprecedented mimetic accuracy. The names of the early cameras—cinematograph, kinetoscope, bioscope—hailed the instrument's creation of life through believable vital images. Cinema was "watching life" and "writing movement." But not all early spectators felt so confident about the realism of the moving image. In a now well-known response, Russian literary figure Maxim Gorky bemoaned the cinematic image as a sad modicum of the world he inhabited. Viewing moving images projected by the Lumières' cinematograph, Gorky described these images as reflecting something less than the reality of flesh and bone. The screen offered merely life's "shadow," motion's "soundless spectre." He watched as the figures that were mobilized before him passed by and out of sight: the moving scene "teams with life and, upon approaching the edge of the screen, vanishes somewhere beyond it."[1] The marvelous new medium struck him as evanescent and unstable, prone to passing into darkness and absence. Cinema, it seemed, could hardly sustain the life it promised.

We could take this opportunity to define the deathly nature of the cinematic image as the offscreen space to Gorky's frame, the place "beyond" the border where life flows. What can be seen can be unseen. But there is more to consider in this anecdote. In Gorky's eyes cinema produces not only life's phantom trace but also the *potential* for death. The fact is that cinema has been "dying" ever since Gorky's encounter in at least three obvious ways: by representing evanescence in much the way Gorky describes; by subtending itself to the next new screen technology and thereby dating itself; and by staging scenes in which living figures (humans, animals, aliens) and even "living" ones (robots and computers) can be seen in the act of dying. In some specific cases dying has packed in the crowds at movie theaters. (It is ironic that the second form of passing away has bolstered the medium from possible extinction.) What moves and entertains audiences in these spectacular instances—say, *Psycho's* protagonist's being slain midway through the film, *Saving Private Ryan's* smorgasbord of combat horrors, *Kill Bill 2's* joyful staging of the Bride's execution of the Crazy 88 members, for example—seizes on the cinema as an apparatus uniquely capable of unfolding the process of dying before our eyes.

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Movie technology has remained linked to dying since at least the 1895 Edison Company reenactment of a death by beheading (*The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*). We watch protagonists, secondary characters, unnamed groups, and digitized hordes perish in movies and on television. David Thomson muses that "the American 18-year-old has seen 20,000 acts of killing in movies and on tv." According to Thomson, actors achieve legendary status for the way they wilt—James Cagney's footwork, Edward G. Robinson's "cadenzas" and "whirling expirations," and Lillian Gish's self-induced sicknesses.[2] Some genres, we know, are especially concerned with death, so we pick them when we are looking for it: slow and pathetically attended in the weepie, sudden and with painful explicitness in horror. We find websites devoted to amassing "greatest" movie death scenes, such as Tim Dirks's Filmsite, where a skull and crossbones icon references a scene's ranking on other lists (*Total Film Magazine*'s "50 greatest") and files it into generic categories (i.e., "melodramatic," "horror," etc.).[3] Not every filmed death is so frivolous. Other websites specialize in the "caught on camera" and "faces of death" variety, storing and selling actual footage, recorded, in most cases, by film and video cameras, not to mention the countless "snuff" or "mondo" films and videos still available for purchase and rental.[4] The archival potential of the web to categorize fatal footage is nowhere clearer than on YouTube, where one can play and replay a variety of human and animal clips, featuring accidents and executions by chair, rope, and gun. And what the camera captures is not always a rote shorthand: despite the tendency to think of special-effects violence as the norm, the dying we see on film is often not over in the blink of an eye but enjoys an endurable tenure. It is quite often nonviolent in nature. Slow or static "dyings" indicate a more watchful capability of the camera than do spectacular killings that show spilled blood and lost limbs. Cinema's ability to stage, time, and dilate the process of dying underwrites more generally its propensity to do so suddenly and violently.

Films routinely visualize the transformation of human bodies from "alive" to "dead" in both fictional and real sequences. Not much competes regarding our access to mortality; movies have all but replaced actual experience. Thomson guesses "we have witnessed a lot of killings … I wouldn't doubt 100,000" to conclude "I have seen just two dead bodies. From what I can gather, asking around, two is on the high side— enough to be thought a little morbid."[5] We know, for instance, that the percentage of Americans who die in hospitals or nursing homes steadily increased last century, from 20 percent in 1900 to 50 percent in 1949, 75 percent in 1980, to about 80 percent in 1997 (about a quarter of these inside nursing homes).[6] If it is placed outside the home, Philippe Ariès suggests, death becomes "forbidden"; it is "effaced," made "shameful" as an interruption of social life.[7] The trend to move it out of sight coincides with efforts to render and monitor death with machines that promise to indicate precisely when it occurs, like the EKG and EEG monitor, or devices that promise to inflict it tractably and instantaneously, as in electrical forms of capital punishment. The cinema camera has played an influential but unacknowledged role in this history. The same technology that has been used for entertainment has also been used in medical practice. From biopsies and body imaging tests to posthumous autopsies, both analog and digital imagery have gained evidentiary and indexical status, ushering the analytical gaze back into the past or deeper beyond the barrier of skin. Medical doctor Robert Artwohl revisited the footage taken by Abraham Zapruder of President John F.

Kennedy's assassination, wanting to disprove Oliver Stone's use of that footage in his 1991 film *JFK* as evidence for a multiple gunmen theory. Artwohl published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* a kind of "autopsy" performed on the Zapruder movie, arguing through frame-by-frame analysis that Kennedy's reaction to the bullets evinces continuity.[8]

Perhaps most instructively, the use of video and digital screens to monitor critical condition is customary in the hospital room, pointing to an interdigitation between "screen" and "real" death. The moving image, understood in an expanded sense (analog, video, digital), has supplied both amateurs and professionals with a reference point. Mr. Wilde may well have appreciated the fact that death has become imitative of art as well. It is difficult to tell where "real" ends and "movie" begins.[9] The very fact of the "snuff" film—a genre of enacted deaths purported to be real—indicates that a perceptual ambiguity between the real and the staged thrives in screen culture.

The overlap between dying and moving images knows a formal dimension. Still image traditions of painting and photography can intimate moments before or just after, leaving something quite fundamental to the imagination. But with cinema comes the lure of capturing a fuller transformation. Indeed, the moving image itself *transforms*. Like the body, it moves.[10] Even so, this elongated visual form does not illuminate the secrets of the death moment. The excess of motion makes difficult any attempt to ascertain such a moment. As Vivian Sobchack writes of the Zapruder film: "Played again and again, slowed down, stopped frame by frame, the momentum of death escapes each static moment of its representation and frustrates our vision and thus our insight."[11] Looking for a "moment" belongs to an earlier conception of death as a single commutative interruption of life, a notion that still persists though it has been updated by science. It is also a notion that has found its visual illustration in the photograph. Writing of photography's essential temporal qualities, Roland Barthes suggests that the materiality and stillness of the image reinforces its marking of the past as present in the form of a visible instant. This instant is mirrored by the click of the camera's button: "Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into the literal Death. *Life/Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print."[12] Though motion pictures produce instantaneous effects, they do not produce instant death, undoing the switch-like break between two states of being, or what Barthes, invoking the click of the photographic camera's button, writes as "Life/Death." Film strives to maintain that slash but blends two separate states. The slash blurs out of focus. If we assess film's ontological connection to death by way of photography, we realize a very different quality confronts us in the moving photograph. For Barthes, photography's stillness, its rigidity as an object and temporal document, denotes the exsanguination of the corpse itself. Cinema, however, cannot achieve such a suspension of time (or, for that matter, a pure arrest of motion) even in its approximation of photographic stillness we call the "freeze-frame." Cinematic death-as-stillness cannot be thought, or at least, it cannot be thought photographically. So where does death belong in the moving image if not in visible corpselike stasis or time's frozen halt?

Cinema death takes place somewhere between a precise moment and a complex progression in time. The camera is connected to other machines—gadgets ranging from toys to medical instruments—that have been thought to bring death closer to the

doctor, the scientist, or the viewer but that raise new concerns or cast new doubts. "Our technology has not illuminated death; it has only expanded the breadth of our ignorance," writes Dick Teresi in his study of brain death.[13] For centuries machines have been used to supplement touch and sight in various ways: to determine a person dead, to specify the death moment, or to give the beholder a sense of temporal mastery. A full history is not tenable here, but a sampling of some of the earlier moments in medical history and popular culture when experimentation and doubt converged around machines will help place cinema along a specific technological trajectory, one that allows us to understand its death sign as both precise and fluctuating.

Two different but related ambiguities stand out in this history: one, the overlap and confusion between machine and human mobility (and vitality); two, the understanding of electricity as both a vital and lethal force. Distinguishing between animate (or "living") and inanimate (or "dead") objects, as we will see, becomes part of the question of determining when living bodies transition from one state to another. An important place to begin is the seemingly self-moving automata of the eighteenth century, those human- or animal-like clockworks that imitated gestures ranging from writing to defecating, playfully complicating the line between human and machine. In 1737 French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson created a doll that played the flute more quickly than any human could, performing not lack but superiority. The public display of these toys was often accompanied by an opening of the cabinet or doll to reveal the machinery inside, proving that the machines were not running on souls and that movement could be understood mechanistically.[14] There were other jovial dolls, including a tambourine player, a poem writer, and a chess enthusiast, but as Gaby Wood argues, these androids also questioned what makes a human body a *human* body. In a (possibly fictional) story told about Descartes, the philosopher carried with him on a sea trip to Sweden an animate doll named after his daughter Francine, who had died seven years earlier. The story—whether or not true—clinches the point that machines were perceived to imitate and outlive us. Wood argues that the automaton induces the uncanny because it mimics human movement but lacks an understanding or experience of time: "Men are mortals, clocks are not."[15] In this line of thinking it is the beholder that links machines to mortality: androids embody death because they present movement that seems everlasting, a privilege the viewer cannot enjoy. As Wood points out, the word *replicant*—the modern android found in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982)—combines into an uncanny mixture both the terms *replica* and *revenant*.[16]

Anxiety about mechanical embodiment—the revenant side of the equation—can be found harboring cinema's invention, in both fact and fiction. Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's fantastical account of Thomas Edison in *L'Ève future* (1886) expresses both a desire for and fear of artificial life. In this science fiction tale, the scientist invents for his friend Lord Ewald an android with the faculty of speech to replace Ewald's attractive but docile and intellectually vapid fiancée. In E.T.A. Hoffmann's earlier story "The Sandman" (1816) a young student, Nathanael, falls for a girl he sees in a window, only to find later that she is a doll cocreated by older men. In such stories males fall in love with female dolls and die before consummating the relationship. If, following Annette Michelson, we look to the android in *L'Ève future* as a proleptic

glimpse at the representational structure of the cinema, we must acknowledge that it is an incomplete, even optimistic, one.[17] Those who think about films *as films*, as material objects, are accustomed to regarding them as fragile and impermanent. Reels deteriorate and fade; they can be destroyed. Machines do die, even mechanical dolls. (In fact, they often "die" more than once, a point to which I will return.) The viewer can also be reminded of death by the machine's breakdown, by a dying that it projects. Eighteenth-century mechanists such as John Fothergill believed that suspended animation was a death that might be cured by restarting—that is, resuscitating—the body, like rewinding a stopped clock.[18] Scientists in the competing vitalist camp argued that death had not really occurred in suspended animation, that the vital principle was still present as a potential for life.

Eighteenth-century gadgets (human dolls, birds, and shitting ducks) blurred the line between the mobile body and machines, but the line was further eroded in the nineteenth century with electricity, a technology that would be used both to resuscitate and to kill. Along with mechanistic conceptions of life and death, new thoughts circulated about what vital forces animate us. Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, chronicled doll makers in *Lives of the Necromancers*, but Shelley's 1818 horror story *Frankenstein* was equally inspired by the use of electricity to animate apparently lifeless bodies. Some uncertainty about determining death has always existed, warded off by an enduring belief that breath and pulse were surefire indicators of life.[19] But for physiologists and physicians in the eighteenth century, these old criteria were suspect. In 1740, Danish anatomist Jacques Bénigne Winslow warned about the dangers of premature determination of death, insisting that putrefaction, not even rigor mortis, was the only reliable indicator. Such a claim was echoed throughout the following century by the likes of Bruhier (himself obsessed with verifying death) and Diderot.[20]

A number of medical discoveries yielded this suspicion. William Harvey's description in 1728 of the heart's pumping and circulation of blood led some to question the absent pulse as a death sign. According to medical historian Martin Pernick, eighteenth-century medicine experimented with mechanical and technical discoveries on the apparently lifeless body to regain certainty in the face of resuscitation methods.[21] Victims of drowning were successfully resuscitated; the first treatise for artificial respiration appeared in 1740. But electric shock (a technique more directly related to this study) soon dominated research on restoring heart and nerve functions. The first human case of resuscitation came in 1755. Giovanni Aldini—nephew of Luigi Galvani and one inspiration for Mary Shelley's Doctor Frankenstein —publicly displayed electricity's powers to cause twitching and apparent movement on an executed corpse in 1803.

Deathlike states were suspicious because of electricity's demonstrated power of animating the inanimate and resuscitation's efforts in restoring life when it looked like it had been lost. Physicians studied and speculated on suspended animation, catalepsy, and coma in order to detect vitality's lack. Both technical and invasive, nineteenth-century death tests introduced such distressing items as a steel needle stuck deep into muscle tissue, a heated cautery deeply inserted into the throat, and a nipple pincher.[22] The nineteenth-century fear of premature burial helped legitimize the medical profession in the public imagination. As Pernick argues, new and milder instruments of detection (the stethoscope was introduced in 1819 by René Laennec), as well as

new methods of resuscitation (not just electroresuscitation but also open-chest massage), helped allay premature burial panic. This is not a story of Foucauldian shift, of one paradigm's replacing entirely an older one. Previously favored methods were, and are, still valued—discoloration, rigor mortis, breathlessness. But technical expertise bolstered the profession when dealing with intangible and invisible signs. The medical gaze turned inward, too, with the later inventions of the electrocardiograph (1903) and the electroencephalograph (1924), both of which pictured external information about the body's hidden vital activity. By the time the EEG was introduced, failure to respond to electrical stimulation was considered an infallible indicator, and by 1930 one physician defined life as the ability to generate electrical current.[23]

There is, of course, a flip side to the use of electrical machines to supplement old methods of determination. In the 1880s electricity was also used to induce death, first experimentally by amateurs and scientists, later by American law as an accepted means of capital punishment. Whereas Aldini electrified corpses to promote his uncle's galvanic fluid, Harold Brown electrocuted animals in Edison's lab to promote the lethal effects of George Westinghouse's alternating current. (We will meet Mr. Brown later.) This current was later used to execute William Kemmler on August 6, 1890, and despite eyewitness reports alleging a terribly bungled incident, electrocution quickly became the law of the land. Six states still have recourse to the electric chair. With the chair, a machine thought to deliver a spectacle of instantaneous vital cessation produced a horrifically imprecise and gradual process.

Cinema—born of electricity—comes to play in this medical history of staging animation, studying vitality, and watching it end with the aid of technical instruments. What distinguishes cinema from these earlier devices is visual and temporal—it projects an image removed from the spectator by the screen, and it produces a more sustained temporality. We should not look to movies, however, to fix by magic the problems of modern medicine, to do it "better." Despite new technologies, public confidence in the medical institution has waned since the rise in the 1960s of brain death as a criterion for removing patients from life support and the concomitant increase in organ transplantation. Debates over whole-brain vs. higher-brain criteria continue, and, given the 2008 white paper report of the President's Bioethics Committee arguing in effect that higher-brain death need not be established in order to meet the criteria for whole-brain death, the debates seem likely to continue.[24] Though technology has been used to measure vitality and monitor its absence, it has also contributed to an understanding of death as a process of multiple deaths, a staggered trajectory. To quote the narrator of Science Channel's *Back from the Dead*, who describes a flatline—that most common moving medical image in the popular imagination—on a hospital monitor: "This is not the time of death, but it is the time of dying."

Let us return, then, to cinema, where we watch the transformation from alive to dead unfold, or the "time of dying." Looking closely, we see death happen here both cleanly and turbulently, precisely and momentously. A combination of instantaneity and flux situates film within this modern trajectory of monitoring and visualizing cessation more precisely with supplemental devices. The first and last chapters of this book bring to bear on film two such devices—the electric chair and the heart monitor.

These two devices have their differences, clearly (the chair is lethal and inflicts its vital cessation), but both are thought to be capable of immediately visualizing death as occurring in time. The other chapters take up film-specific technologies—narrative editing, synchronized sound, postsynchronization—as related instances of a machinelike precision. The link between the movie and the medical screens is particularly enlightening because of their mutual projection of *moving* images. Just as films visualize a mobile death sign for spectators, so, too, the monitors in intensive-care units register the flowing waves of the heart's vitality and their gradual weakening and slide to "flatline." Both these moving images "confirm." The EKG has become so user-friendly, so self-evident, that it competes with the dying body for our attention during a deathwatch. The screen has become an uninvited guest within the final tableau. At an interdisciplinary conference on death and dying at the University of California at Berkeley, Dr. Guy Micco described his need to turn off the still-bleeping machine after declaring dead his patient "Mr. Reggie":

> … something unusual then happened at his bedside. Mr. Reggie's heart's EKG, electrocardiogram monitor … was on, just above and to the left of his head. And we all stood there transfixed by this electronic representation of his life, watching the ever-slowing tracing of the electrical activity of this man's dying, or what we thought was this man's dying, but not dead yet heart, and listening to its soft beeping accompaniment. Mr. Reggie was in some strange liminal state, as were we, for what felt like a very long time. Then somehow … something broke the spell, and I turned off the monitor, announcing at that time, as doctors are want [*sic*] to do, that the patient had died. The family then turned their gaze and attention to their beloved … [25]

Micco's anecdote is corroborated by another story from Dr. John Murray, a medical doctor in San Francisco, who recounts monitoring vitals in the final hours of his patient "Mr. Guzman." Here we can see the difference between a lay and a professional encounter with the monitor screen. Though the head nurse turns off the "television screen" beside Mr. Guzman's bed, she keeps it on in the nurse's station because, as Murray explains, "We must know what is going on at all times." He offers an explanation of this difference: "She turns the bedside monitor off because we have learned that relatives and friends tend to pay more attention to it than to their loved one. People become obsessed watching the electrocardiographic squiggles that announce each heartbeat marching across the screen. Although the physiological nuances are undoubtedly overlooked, the deeper meaning of the electrical signals of life is hard to miss when they slow in frequency, gradually widen in appearance, and then finally stop altogether."[26]

We will return to this narrative of slow, widen, and stop. Suffice it to say that the "deeper meaning" is indeed difficult to miss, for though dying is gradual rather than instantaneous, the monitor tracks its narrative with marked changes—from wavy to linear. That is, it translates, or rather reduces, a gradual and uneven unfolding into a sequence of clearly marked stages, like points on a line. But in both anecdotes the monitor must be turned off because it replaces the body and the drama that customarily surrounds it. Though it is delivered on a "television," the electrical output of the heart is tracked cinematically, that is, as an indexical sign that moves over time, one that is connected to its referent through physical contiguity. These anecdotes complicate our faith in the monitor by reminding us that it can give mixed messages— an image of fatality that does not match the present knowledge of the body, or the

familiar bleeping of vitality set against the visible inactivity of the deceased. Both hospital monitor and movie screen are thought to be able to visualize death precisely, and both come up short.

The uncanny occurrence of life's end amid ongoing bleeps and visible waves ("squiggles") has a rich prehistory in the cinema. Decades before the hospital monitor, films approached the flatline's out-of-body precision, and they were often confounding rather than clarifying. The conflict between precision and flux, between finality and flow, characterizes electrical productions of the death moment—electrocution, electrocardiography, and cinematography. Again, I list these technologies together because they are understood to produce a visible instant. In movies much occurs after apparent death that extends the focus of the camera's and the spectator's visual attention; some vital stirrings on the screen, such as a still-moving body or a pan shot, seem to upend the primacy of the corpse. *When has death really happened?* Like the executioner and like the EKG monitor, the camera compensates for an alleged moment of internal precision by looking outside the body—to another figure's gesture, to a face, a landscape, out the window, up to the sky, at earlier images. (Presumably these are some of the places we are meant to look when the monitor is unplugged bedside, as in Dr. Murray's account. Perhaps they are where it is thought we used to look.) These compensatory movements trace a search for finality's sign beyond the body in question. As I look for death in the moving photograph, I cannot find it in either the body onscreen or the fixity of the image. Instead, I can trace its reverberations outside the body, in external space, related faces, in other figures, and in the spectator's own body. Projected against film's momentous flux, death becomes an instance of temporal unfixity by inviting repetition, acceleration and deceleration, and reversal. What emerges in my analysis is a certain persistent tendency in the cinema to represent death as always occurring more than once and in more than one place.

THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REDYING

Those who have tried to locate an essential connection between cinema and death divide into two camps—one searching for a visible quality within the filmic image, the other questioning what death might "be" before assuming what it might look like. In the first group we find important works by Garrett Stewart and, more recently, Laura Mulvey, who read cinema death in relation to photography. For both scholars static images in film, like the irruptions of the freeze-frame, conjure up an immobility that is always deferred by the medium in its essential flow forward; if the movie "pauses," it will unpause.[27] Though he sustains an interest in medium specificity, studying "the visual phenomenon of death as only cinema, never photography, can capture it," Stewart does proceed with confidence about when death occurs, or rather, that it occurs *as an event*. He conceptualizes death *photographically*. It is "the *moment* of the character's conversion from subject to object" (154), for instance. Whether or not it occurs as a moment is not a question he seriously probes because film is not expected to reflect somatic death, much less teach us how to think about it. When there are corpses onscreen, death is abundantly evident, like a concept depicted (i.e., written, painted). The visible corpse inserts into narrative cinema a before-and-after; this

insertion naturally requires the corpse be immediately apprehended.

Mulvey, too, reads cinema death as narrative stillness: "Of all the means of achieving narrative stasis, death has a particular tautological appeal, a doubling of structure and content."[28] Thus her reading of Marion Crane's death in *Psycho* privileges the stillness of the corpse—simulated by a close-up of her still-open eye—as a marker of narrative paralysis. Mulvey's language imparts to the camera an act of objective reportage: she writes of the "momentary pause to register [Marion's] transition from living human being, in whose story the audience has been deeply involved, to corpse."[29] For Kaja Silverman this shot marks a pivot away from our identification with the victim Marion Crane, which is "sustained up until the moment when Marion is definitively dead, an inanimate eye now closed to all visual exchanges." At this point "we find ourselves in the equally appalling position of the gaze which has negotiated Marion's murder."[30] Begun in photography, the search for nonbeing ends in the symbolic confirmation of corpses. But looking at film's ability to "depict" death as an object misses the extent to which those in front of and behind the camera have tried to figure out whether it has a moment, if there is a way to visualize it as one instant or many, and, if many, how to prioritize one over others, and if so, which one to privilege—in short, it misses the point that the act of dying is an object, too, with no certain culmination or boundary. Nor is there much room left to wonder if the onscreen corpse is "definitively dead," an anxiety that movies tirelessly exploit.

In the other camp we find a diverse variety of commentators who share a mutual interest in dying as a unit, or expression, of time. Film commits images to a time-based form, making repetition possible. The act of replay would seem to thwart an analysis of death as a temporal event, indicating more deferral. (If death can be repeated, it is not death; it is something else.) But two essays that have recently inspired critical work on screen violence show us that death's temporal relationship to film yields significant insights into the medium. Though not written at the same time, André Bazin's "Death Every Afternoon" (1949) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Observations on the Sequence Shot" (1967) were each inspired by the act of watching a recording of an actual death.[31] Other scholars have discussed these essays but have not emphasized their working through film form to understand a transformative process we might call dying. For Bazin, watching the footage of a bull's gorging in Pierre Braunberger's *The Bullfight* (1951) brings photography to mind, but as a contrast rather than a correlate. Working from the idea that we experience our deaths as unrepeatable, Bazin remarks: "We do not die twice. In this respect, a photograph does not have the power of a film; it can only represent someone dying or a corpse, not the elusive passage from one state to another" (30). Film's capacity to make a repeatable viewing experience out of that "elusive passage" amounts to an "obscenity" on par with the depiction of a sexual act. Like sex, death brings forth a subjective time, "the absolute negation of objective time" (30). It cannot be experienced publicly. Influenced by Henri Bergson's notion of *durée*, Bazin sees objective time as unfolding irreversibly. Activity can be reversed and repeated in cinema; however, death is the ultimate irreversible experience, so it is understood as a supreme occasion for film to demonstrate its ability to reverse time. Death marks cinematic temporality.

Pasolini's film inspiration is the Zapruder footage I mentioned earlier. Repetition is not the crux of his argument.[32] But looking closely, we find correspondences between

Bazin's essay and Pasolini's. What concerns Pasolini is editing—specifically, the ability to arrange different views of an unfolding event from individual shots after they are taken.[33] Edited sequences might give us a privileged glimpse of death because they are constructed in postproduction. Unmitigated real footage, like that of Kennedy's death, affords the recorder a chance to make legible the actions that constituted the event. It all *happens* too fast to compute exactly what *happened*. Pasolini envisions multiple cameras at different angles recording the assassination, all the "other visual angles" that could capture unique slices of the event. These angles are understood as the embodied perspectives of other witnesses, so the subjective shot is personified as a partial gaze. In this hypothetical scenario "subjective sequence shots" could be assembled by a "clever analytical mind" into one final, newly edited, sequence (234, 235). By "choosing the truly meaningful moments of the various subjective sequence shots and consequently finding their real ordering," the editor would create "objectivity" through the partial views, a "montage" (235). Life's final gesture does not bequeath meaning—it is not completed—until the isolated perspective is joined with multiple others. The editor becomes a "narrator," a storyteller that confers past tense to real actions otherwise stuck in the present. With help Zapruder could turn the film of Kennedy's dying into a montage of Kennedy's having died. If all human gestures are understood ultimately after the end of lived experience, it follows that editing performs a unique deathwork on uninterrupted footage. Kennedy's final gesture—the act of dying—poses a metonymic problem that editing solves.

Though Pasolini discusses here an actual death recorded on film, his montage of reality remains hypothetical. It does not pertain to unedited footage that precludes hindsight or rearrangement; in fact, it seems to favor the fiction film, that hypostatic collection of present pieces assembled into a newly configured past. This is miles from Bazin's recoil at repeated viewings of actual executions. Replay becomes obscene when it induces repeated fatal incidents, like the shooting of a gun: "In the spring of 1949, you may have seen a haunting documentary about the anti-Communist crackdown in Shanghai in which Red 'spies' were executed with a revolver on the public square. At each screening, at the flick of a switch, these men came to life again and then the jerk of the same bullet jolted their necks. The film did not even leave out the gesture of the policeman who had to make two attempts with his jammed revolver, an intolerable sight not so much for its objective horror as for its ontological obscenity" (30). The filmmaker's missing intervention into the murder is thematized by the onscreen jamming of the revolver. The delay becomes a sadistic indication of deferral's failure. This brings Stewart's aphorisms to mind: cinema is "death in serial abeyance," and elsewhere, "photography is death in replica, cinema is dying away in progress."[34] But cinema in Bazin's anecdote demonstrates there is really no such thing as an abeyant death. Reading Bazin and Pasolini together, we learn something else about both edited and unedited footage: the former can control the unassailable disorganized present tense in which we live, whereas the latter can change forever the present's status as unrepeatable. (One might also assume that it can slow it down and speed it up, and that slow motion and fast motion would similarly challenge the inalienable temporal flux upon which *durée* rests.)

The larger point is that these two theorists who look at death to understand film's temporal logic move quickly to replay. For Pasolini film can make the present past, not

by whimsically blending subjective shots into one another so that they melt into *durée* but by breaking them up and putting them back together. The goal of the sequence shot is not to destroy the present but "to render the present past." For Bazin it is a cinematic specialty to repeat *durée*. His essays make clear elsewhere the asymptotic relation of unedited long takes to lived time, but he takes a strange turn with the bull's fall.[35] At essay's end he suggests that screen death does not replace the real event offscreen. Both gain powerful significance exactly because the cinematic does *not* replace the real: "This is why the representation on screen of a bull being put to death (which presupposed that the man has risked death) is in principle as moving as the spectacle of the real instant that it reproduces. In a certain sense, it is even more moving because it magnifies the quality of the original moment through the contrast of its repetition. It confers on it an additional solemnity" (31). Film moves the spectator closer to death: it is *more* moving because it cannot actually touch lived time's privileged interruption despite its unique ability to harness death's temporal process. This is not death in perpetual abeyance but in gradual approach. In fact, Bazin speculates cinematic representation elegizes its failure to bring death to the viewer. Punning off the French word for remorse (*remords*) with his term *re-morts*, he hails the "eternal dead-again" of the cinema, reminding us that lived time, as opposed to cinematic time, ends. The essay's title phrase plays on this difference as well. Cinema can never arrive at death just once (which is to say it can never arrive). This is the reason cinema becomes "death every afternoon"—it moves us toward, but does not reach, its goal. In the place of direct experience, it magnifies, retimes, and repeats the spectacle object. In a move that reinforces Dziga Vertov's kino-eye, we might say simply that the movie camera "sees" death differently than we can unassisted. Behind his language of resurrection, Bazin suggests that film cannot capture death—not because it cannot show the loss of life but because it cannot do so only once.

Frequently in such discussions, and in my own close readings that follow in this book, there appears a friction between human experience and a technology-assisted perception that runs, very often, on electricity. That contrast is obvious in electrocution and hospital accounts, but it is equally common in movies. Death's evasion of the unassisted gaze compels that gaze to look toward machines for precision and authority. Pasolini points out one mechanical surplus of the camera when he mentions hindsight. The process of single-take dying can only be finalized by editing—the editor/narrator finishes the process by looking back from beyond the position of any one embodied spectator. Only the camera can provide the illusion of being in two places at once. Replaying death for Bazin is likewise beyond embodied human perception: the result is an eternal dying (*remorts*, or we might say as *remoriens*), not resistance to fatality. Simply put, the spectator cannot do anything eternally; thus film creates a time beyond human occupancy. The technique of the photographic camera earlier accompanied Barthes's impression of the image's fatality, as if the shudder occurring in the spectator were triggered by the revelation of a mechanical nature beneath the human.[36] But the moving image invokes the mechanical differently, committing an unwieldy process to a separately observable strip that sets up the spectator to search for a real occurrence that may not have existed before.

While Pasolini and Bazin both refer to actual footage, we can discover the deathwork of editing and what I will call "posthumous motion" (replay, repetition) in

fiction films as well. If the single shot is linked to dying, it wants to terminate, to come to a close and empty out the signifiers of life. Editing is Pasolini's solution; repetition is Bazin's. But we might also see life's absence in other figures and images. What I see in movie death scenes—from the goriest to the weepiest—is a mixture of the techniques of repetition and retrospective arrangement. Sobchack claims the fiction film tames the perceptual excess of death by clarifying the moment through careful staging or special effects prepared for the camera. Made up of iconic and symbolic signs, "representations of death in fiction film tend to satisfy us—indeed, in some instances, to sate us or overwhelm us so that we cover our eyes rather than, as with the Zapruder film, strain to see."[37] This seems true. But just because fictive death "is experienced as visible within representation" does not mean that it *is* anymore visible. (It is often experienced as visible only by other observers in the scene, in fact, who screen the body for us.) One needs others to die, at least cinematically. The final moment is not clearer in the fiction film. There, too, death occurs but stays hidden by the body. No external fold can show the inner lining. In those cases in which movies stage the end from "inside" the consciousness of a dying person, we often get an externalized object or image—a reverse shot, a fade-to-black—that indicates a something or somewhere "else." The fiction film pressures the image to harness the death moment because such a moment is visibly present while not directly visible—it can be seen on other surfaces, and as a consequence of its projection there, it is repeated to compensate for a lagging precision. These new moments must inculcate the impression of an actual occurrence, though that occasion is spurious. The screen body dies several times and in several places.

To take an apotheosized example of a violent death by way of contrast, consider the various images of finality that conclude *Bonnie and Clyde*. Here the camera pauses to show Bonnie's slow-motion hand buoyantly resisting stillness, juxtaposed to the car. Now the camera reiterates the ricocheted bodies by shooting them through a cracked windshield. A long shot takes us out of the compressed scene of violence to bystanders who slowly approach the bodies for a closer look. Now the camera focuses on the face of a single beholder—Ivan Moss, the man responsible for arranging the gangsters' ambush. The camera shows little interest in confirming the fact that either Bonnie or Clyde is dead by privileging a moment or examining their bodies. Rather, the variegated process under way is one in which the camera searches for multiple and powerful ways to embed their deaths in the world, to produce meaningful recognitions, to follow the reverberations of the aftermath. The film slows down, speeds back up, magnifies, cuts up, rearranges, repeats, and moves away—all of the techniques flagged as cinematic specialties by our two earlier theorists. Whether real, fictional, or somewhere ambiguously in between, death in film is not conclusively over without further supplemental gestures performed on the outside of the human body.

This book is an examination of these supplemental but requisite gestures, the force and form they have, and the reasons for their effect. Without these we would not have death on the screen. They are only officially external, or supplemental, to the scene, and the scene comes to include them. I refer to the process of confirmation performed outside the body—by, say, a pan away, or a cut to a medium close-up of a witness—as "registration." And when that acknowledgment is embodied (gestured, vocalized) by another screen figure, I call that figure a "registrant." This figure need not always be a