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Eugenie Brinkema

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EUGENIE BRINKEMA

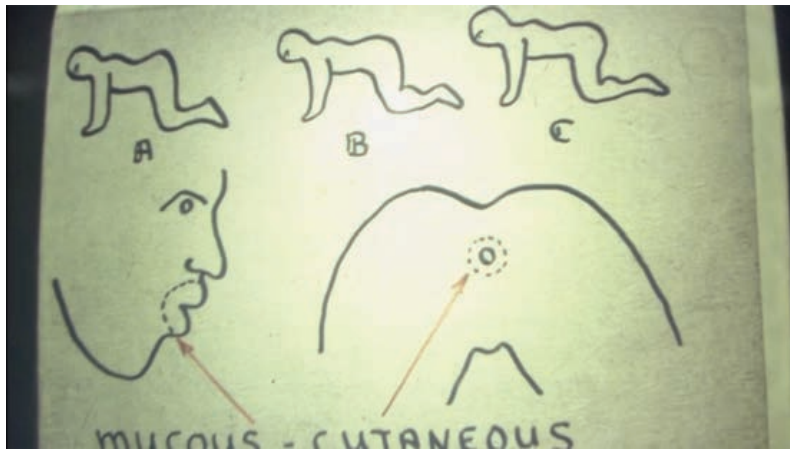
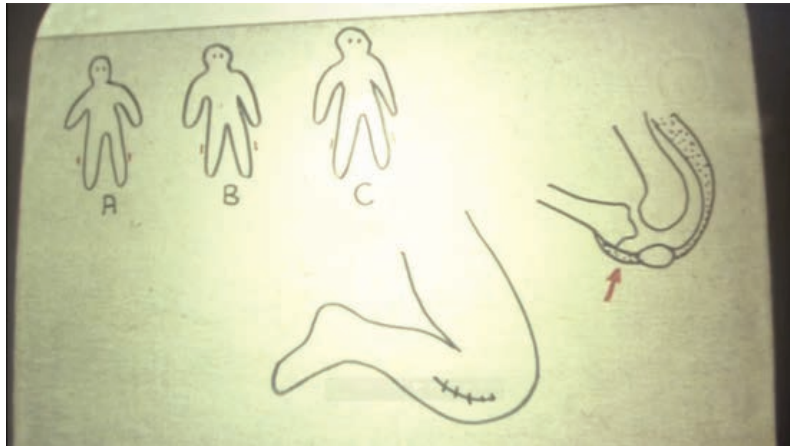
Being or relating, that is the whole question.

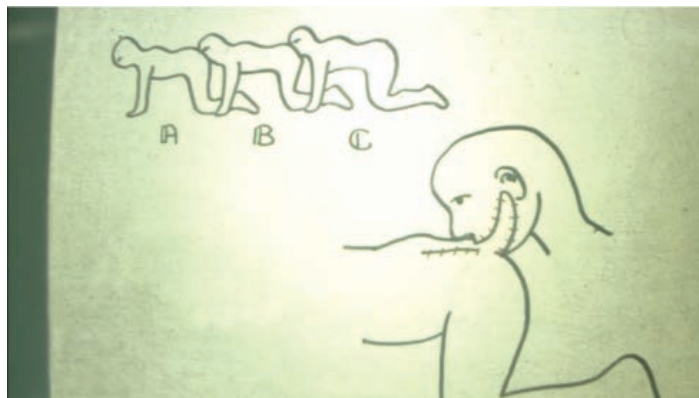
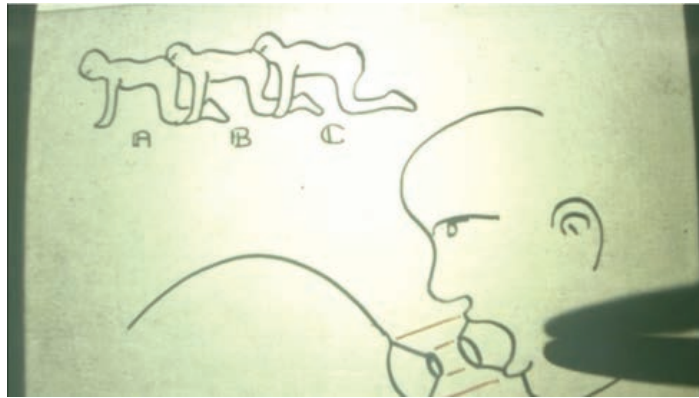
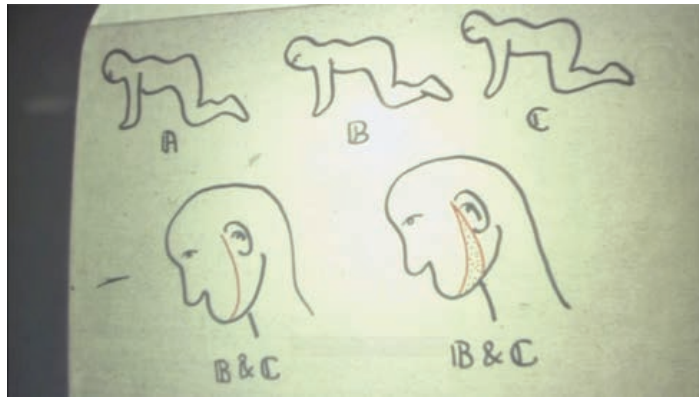
Michel Serres, Le parasite

The *fistula in ano*, an infected tunnel that connects the anal canal and a secondary opening in the skin, that external perianal opening which may be visible, and which usually results from anorectal pustules that produce the hollow damp antrum, the cavity which will have to be evaluated for depth and extent of the tract, and from which built-up debris renders (as in hot oil, tried from the fat; as in presenting for inspection or consideration; as in payment due, as though a tribute) a foul-smelling drainage and thin yellow exudate, a bloody brown percolation from the blocked septic glands, a forced draining in another organ that may allow feces to pass to the skin, & note it can be chronic, and of course, once ruptured, what is suppurating results also in swelling and chills and great pain, usually requires, as abscesses generally do, some form of surgery. And when the fourteenth-century English surgeon John of Arderne details his technique for treat-

ing anal fistulae in his definitive treatise on the subject, his *Practica* the first medieval surgical manuscript to be accompanied by copious illustration of operation in hundreds of colorful marginalia, at the limit of linguistic description, carefully coordinated with the text but aiming to move from the word to show the fistulous holes, the curing needle going in the tender mouth of the “depe wonde,” or, in the most spectacular example, one that replaces procedure with affect, the pain of the *iliaca passio* in a twisted spiral, depicting not the guts but the observer’s speculation of their agony, he writes, as a preliminary to the image, each time carefully writes, the Latin phrase for *as is here shown*.¹

Sicut hic depingitur:





The conceit of Tom Six's *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* (2009) is simple enough to describe, and surely that simplicity accounts for some of the extreme reactions the film has generated: A German doctor named Heiter, an expert in the act of separating Siamese twins, has become obsessed with creation in place of destruction. Having previously sewn together what he calls "mein lieber Dreihund," but having lost the conjoined three-dog creature to death, he acquires new bodies, two American girls and a Japanese man, to fashion a human centipede through the methodology that rendered the film infamous: a surgical procedure that joins multiple bodies into a single alimentary canal—anus to mouth, anus to mouth—in order to make possible the unwilling progression of, as Heiter pronounces: "A Siamese triplet connected via the gastric system. Ingestion by A, passing through B, to the excretion of C."

There is little more to *The Human Centipede* than this technique of brutal sequencing—the text is consumed with the thing that the title names. But the film is invested less in the historicity of the made or its becoming than in the investigation of the *Dingheit* of the thing. Thus, the actual surgery (and its pretext for spectacular specular gore) is largely elided, eager as the film is to indulge a formal fascination with how the novel composite figure will move, act, eat, shit—which is to say how the abstractions of parts A, B, and C will relate to the constructed whole.² This having been accomplished, the film ends perfunctorily. A too-quick resolution brings two police officers into the house only to be killed by Heiter at the same instant they kill him, right before which figure A slits his throat as an act of rebellion and right after which figure C, rigid hand entwined with the friend whose spine is her horizon, dies from an infected wound, the flank-flesh already gunmetal grayed. And so, the film ends on the weeping and hysterical middle-term figure, Lindsay—or, rather, B—alive, attached to death from the front, and to death behind, and in a house with no more living figures, either those who would torture, those who might save, or those desperate others who suffer with her.³

Invested as it is with the facticity of its titular term, the film displays the form of the human centipede twice: once in a presentation of method projected for a diegetic audience of the three gurney-bound victims—these images are drawn, surgery not the only manual oper-

ation in the film (*serurgerie* from *kheirourgos*: what work is done by hand)—and then again in an illuminated representation of the golden realized creation, knees gauze-wrapped and stained red, stitches the fleshy joiners forehead to sacrum. The first presentation of centipedal form occurs twenty-eight minutes in; the second, forty-eight minutes in, at almost the precise halfway point of the film (as though it centered its structure (of course, *iff* the second, light-soaked sight of the thing in itself is the indeed the (affective, generic) ground of the work (—more on that claim, *infra*))).

Violence in the act of creation turns, in *The Human Centipede*, on the mechanics of a digestion engineered to mimic the mechanics of ordinary digestion, despite its extension over three bodies made multiply one. Feeding figure A, Heiter shouts as incitement, “Feed her!” in reference to the inevitable exchange of intake for a waste that will become gavage for figure B that will in turn pass once more to waste as intake for figure C who will finally, in the alimentary logic of the construction, excrete the waste of the waste of others who have been bonded to the self. Digestive form is thus put to the service of violence, not through its perversion but through a strict fidelity to the material law of its course. Unlike certain horror films, which commit to the inversions of vomit (making the mouth the anus within digestive schematics), *The Human Centipede* retains, indeed requires, the correct arrangement of esophageal length and pacing, order and function. And this precise plan of digestion is precisely demonstrated; if there is a monster here, it is not the made thing, but *monstrare* to the letter: a showing, teaching, putting on display. The invisibility of digestive processes is given visible form through a presentation of images before these processes are embodied within blocky illuminated flesh: each demonstration is a staging of a form of light—“light, light,” the poet reminds us, “the visible reminder of invisible light.”⁴ Thus, for all that popular and untheorized reactions to the film’s conceit have emphasized an immediacy of negative affect, whether shock, horror, disgust, contempt, the film’s violences are routed through specific representational schemas. They must, therefore, carefully be read.

In the first scene of showing, having relocated himself and his victims from the glass-paned modernism of aboveground house to the

enclosed fluorescence of basement laboratory, Heiter puts on a stark white lab coat and walks to a podium, faces his audience of three, and in a simple—but metaphysically and representationally resonant—gesture, he turns on a light. The word *heiter*, in addition to suggesting the affectively light (cheerful, amusing, merry, lighthearted), also suggests bright or clear (nuanced like *klar*). *Heiter* is a word that can refer equally to atmospheric and to affective conditions—an entire metaphysics of mood that cuts between the state of the world and the state of a mind. If Heiter is, in fact, too *heiter*—too serene, too genial, too fair and mild in affective disposition while conducting the activities of his horrible research—he is also throughout the film associated with what is *heiter*: what is bright, what is clear and *lucid*, analytically, epistemically, and literally.

There are eight slides in all (of which the second through seventh are shown above), progressing a movement from the abstraction of three notated figures A, B, and C into their joining A to B and B to C, working through an isolation of the conditions of mechanical possibility for the composite form: the ruining of knee extension that brings the figures low, the cutting of the mouths of B and C, the grafting to the anuses of A and B. The first image Heiter places on his *en-abîme* projector contains only three blank shapes, the outlines apart, distinct, individuated in space but devoid of quality, blank of sexual difference, and utterly decontextualized save for their reduction to the minimal shape sufficient to denote the anthropomorphic sketch of an upright form and two eyes. Generic, bare, embodied as a formal operation of line, the figures are particularized solely by the notation assigned to each: A B C. This sequential ordering of the figures—A to B to C—is non-optional, not only because the figure displays a structured sequence with first, middle and last sites, but because the script's directionality conforms to the readerly, a primer for a kind of literacy of the compositional arrangement. Were the centipede to be flipped, turned around such that its diagrammatic presentation were to read C to B to A, its ordering would retain a spatial relativity of first, middle, and last terms and a claim for transitivity, albeit a finite one. But with alphabetic order preserved, C is not an end, nor a term gesturing at the cyclical, but merely the next term in a minimally defined but extensible sequence. All that is required is a third term, an

order neither of the one (the all-alone) nor the two (later in the film, the order of the *One, Two* will suggest a different arrangement altogether, one bonded to failed transformation). Three or ten or twelve (as in *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)*) or the titular hundred or five hundred (as in the final installment of the franchise) (—it matters little): what *three* points to in this ordering is the multiplicity, the opening to the *et alia*, the *and the rest* (i.e., *all the possible others*).

These figures are not only generalized as any A, B, or C, they are not even cleaved from Heiter until he names himself as other: the projector initially throws the three figures onto a hybrid screen, the body of A cast onto the white of Heiter's lab coat. Only at the announcement of name, the break of individuation and entry into socialization, the "I'm Dr. Joseph Heiter," does his face stand aside from the three shapes. (His body functions as screen in the final image of conjunction as well, articulating, blocking, and grounding the final stage of the operation at once.) Heiter's opening pronouncement over this image, "Good news: Your tissues match," is the brute declaration, without history, blank and without provocation (assertive in the strictest sense), that the conjunctive operation is on the order of the possible.⁵ This statement of the pure possibility of joining is articulated over the visual self-evidence of the human form as pure presence: beings figured in the barest outlined difference between the figural and the anti-figural. Violence is possible because of this minimal sense that beings are—the constraint on freedom is declared as an event that requires solely what the visual logic avows: that the human form *is*.

This is to say: *The Human Centipede* is a film that turns on a technique—and it is not a technique of construction or a technique of power so much as a technique of representation. The film presents a delineated figure, marked out by lines, written by hand, attesting to the structure of something unified and self-enclosed, a form to think with, of the joining of A to B and B to C. Elemental human form is thus bonded to an elemental notation for conjunction in a precisely ordered sequence. The film, above all, displays a *diagram*. Which means that it turns on a mode that has essential formal characteristics. Diagrams are reductive, usually drawn images, with limited colors and limited elements and with an internal reduction of each of those elements; this visual reduction produces a marked openness in

the image, typically a field of white space with black marks. They are governed by a unity of image, with parts often “correlated by means of a geometric notation system,” as is the case here.⁶ The designations of the components, even once joined (thus giving form to the joinedness of what is joined), is key: in creating a taxonomy of visual representations in his 1967 *Semiology of Graphics*, Jacques Bertin distinguishes a diagram from a network from a map from a symbol with the crucial notation that a diagram establishes divisions of one component and another; the diagram explicitly turns on the separation of parts, and is always, in some way, about the elemental.⁷ The diagram’s externally imposed formalism and reduction, furthermore, is in the service of describing some action or process through constrained components; they represent, as the *OED* has it, “the course or results of any action or process, or the variations that characterize it.” In *Discipline and Punish*, describing the Panopticon and its polyvalent applications, Foucault dubs the form of the diagram “a functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction.”⁸ Not an archive or repository, the diagram is a cartography of an ideal.⁹

The second slide retains the three outlined figures of A B C in a minor form—one cannot declare them to be in the background, for the image is non-perspectival; rather, they hover, bordering the metonymic violence of the excerpted impersonal knee, stitched crudely in an exterior hatch, red arrow pointing to the ligaments of the patella that will be severed first. Heiter’s pronouncement that “knee extension is no longer possible” brings the figures in the subsequent slides on all fours, the deixis denoting the modifications of the form of the figures presented in order to be destroyed (this is identical to: presented in order to be modified). In the third transparency, local demarcations are made based on positionality in the sequence: from B and C, the teeth will be pulled from the upper and lower jaws. The lips from B and C and the anus of A and B are to be cut to the measure of the dotted red circles “along the border between skin and mucosa.” The dotted lines that indicate cutting move from the descriptive to the creative, more akin to a blueprint or surgical map that does not trace a prior action but plots one that has yet to occur. In the fourth transparency, the grafts are prepared, lifted from the underlying tissue.

This fourth slide, the sole image that does not contain the three lettered forms, is the pure image of joining, the fleshly material mode of sequencing as radically depersonalized and deindividuated as possible: linking, without any reference, even in the barest sense, to those things that will be linked, the image of lifting lifted itself from figures that even so fragilely serve as its representational and surgical ground. Grafting figured as flesh extending from shape is thus dia-grammed as pure operational potential, as the form of body exposed as opened up to joiningness.

The fifth sheet shows the three figures now in profile—all the while retaining their lettered designation, all the while down on their nerve-exposed, oozing knees. Profile form dispossesses each of an eye oval as local suturing is articulated: the red line of the graft between B and C slices the outline of the mouthless head from chin to cheekbone. The graft having been shown, the images follow suit: in the sixth transparency, the three profiled forms share as a singular line the rump-border/face-border, each line of spine leading into the gentle undulation of the head that follows. The seventh clear page offers the cross-section of the redundant flesh, showing the pedicellate grafts of skin from anus to mouth, exhibiting how the nose will rest lightly on the sacrum. At the last piece of cellulose, the titular figure assembled, its letter designations stubbornly adhering, Heiter pronounces this thing: “a Siamese triplet connected via the gastric system.”

When Barthes reads the plates of Diderot’s *Encyclopedia*, he poses the question:

Consider the astonishing image of man reduced to his network of veins; here anatomical boldness unites with the great poetic and philosophic interrogation: *What is it?* What name to give it? How give a name? A thousand names rise up, dislodging each other: a tree, a bear, a monster, a hair shirt, a fabric, everything which overflows the human silhouette, distends it, draws it towards regions remote from itself, makes it overstep the divisions of Nature.¹⁰

And as though answering Barthes’s wonderment, Heiter will likewise conclude this “astonishing image” of his own, of man reduced to conjoined alimentary length, with an answer to the “poetic and phil-

osophic interrogation: *What is it?*” He ends his presentation by giving it a name, declaring the answer ontologically—“A human centipede. First sequence.” Flesh is reduced to letter, knee, chin, mouth, tooth, anus, skin, object—all parts elements in a sequence. In this final diagram of centipedal form, a red tunnel of exteriority shows the logical consistency of the passageway, deploying a chromatic shift to mark as otherwise the telos in the black-and-white rigor of the diagrams: what goes in through A will pass through B to its resting place C, as though figuring major, middle, and minor terms in a coprophagic syllogism.

Being is letter.

(Everything follows from this.)

The centipede, as I wrote above, is displayed twice over, once diagrammatically and notationally and once in depth, flesh, skin, as a field of curve and rounded light. The presentation of the centipede is thus, superficially, given a metaphysical metanarrative: planned and consummated, speculated and lived; letter and flesh; system and functioning; static line and heaving movement; what written, what reality; inked line against feculent taste. (Gustatory version, following Barthes: “when written, shit has no odor.” (He writes this, notably, in relation to the impossibilia defended in Sade in which possibility solely remains discursive, negative to reality, indeed the libertine’s texts note, “in all these paintings a luxury of poses almost impossible in nature, evidencing either a great muscular suppleness in the inhabitants of these lands, or a great disorder of the imagination.”¹¹ (Likewise here.))) The visual alternative to the diagram displays the thing in itself, as promised by the diagrammatic procedure: the undulation of the long line tracing the elegant sloping of conjoined flesh, each hand gently resting on the thigh adjacent.

The fleshy image of accomplished centipede restages and recasts the compositional elements of the scene with the diagram: the white of screen and lab coat is permuted into the white of fabric and gauze; the cold blue light of the projector thrown to the incredibly warm light of the revelation. The fulfilled creation faces to the right, is akin to the reverse of the final slide (the meaty body now, quite literally, the opacity of that transparency)—no longer notated according to the order of alphabetic inscription, for these bodies have lost their let-



ters. The arrangement of limbs in strict parallel, the undulating line thereby formed, the rolling golden light: the image is compositionally classical (oh let it be said: it is *beautiful*). This presentation of the centipede occurs amidst a compounding of meta-representational figures, the scene saturated with aesthetic densities: a painting of symmetrical conjoined bodies on the wall, its upright central mass forming an axis perpendicular to the sprawling horizontal tripartite creation; a series of receding spaces in the back of the tableau, blocks of layered windows, grids of glass providing depth.

Heiter, in general, is associated with an ever-expanding series of mediating figures: the film opens with him studying a photograph;

he deploys the light-lens-mirror structure of the projector and transparencies; his house features numerous large-scale photographs and paintings, of surgeries or conjoined twins; and, in this crucial scene in which the figure of the title is presented to the film's audience, Heiter holds up to the terrible thing he has cruelly created a flashing camera and then an ornate round mirror. This mirror is shown from the side, from the matte back, as it reveals each newly joined, newly destroyed but also newly created face to itself, displaying what Foucault will call in his exegesis on the mirror in *Las Meninas* "that enchantment of the double," what restores the visibility of what had remained invisible. Representationally, a mirror is a confrontation. When Heiter forces it on his victims, the glass gives back what has been taken away: the ability to see the self, one at a time, and it reflects a redoubling of the direct face of terror, made inaccessible through the logic of the new machine. This doubling, crucially, includes the reverse side of representation: spectators are given primarily what Foucault dubs the "lustreless back" of the mirror, the spine of the ornate object.¹² The film is thus aesthetically in collusion with the mode by which seventeenth-century Dutch art, which made an essential study of the mirror, deployed it: for allegorical doubling or reflexive self-considering, what might introduce the presence of the painter to stress the fictional dimension of the scene, or, if canted, might reflect a figure whose back is to the viewer to offer more information or show something otherwise invisible in the outer frame. (Film even seems to deploy mirror in collusion with camera in the manner of a collector's *Wunderkammer*, with its mirrors set between drawers so that a treasured object might be viewed from every angle at once.)¹³ The tableau frames the made thing, stages the centipede in the context of this representational depth (of space, of meaning): it displays the scene of violence as fully realized (as full and fulfilled), shows the centipede as fundamentally an aesthetic object (of contemplation, fascination, or horror, it matters little).

This revelatory moment of the monster, tautology of the generic (what shudders the neck, upheavals the gut), this golden light and these limbs in beautiful sequence, the blood and knees, the several anuses and pulled teeth, *this thisness* is what the diagram called into being. The question then: Is this image here to show the insufficien-

cy of the earlier diagram, to suggest its lack or privation? Does the fleshy monstrosity supersede its bare spare outlined plan? Was the diagram for the sake of this image, a means or mere tool to bring it about—as in the understanding of diagram as preliminary sketch, quickly inked possibility, what is not yet formalized, not yet committed to realization as the actual or transcribed in an archival site? In ordinary criticism, in generic topologies of horror, it seems self-evident that violence is on the side of the made thing in itself—its blood, festering wounds, oral-anal intimacy, the revealed construct where what passes is not a red line marking gastric progress but the stinking juices of that anti-willed process itself. At best, diagrammatic labor is subsumed by the motif of the torturer’s presentation of his tools as a prolegomenon to suffering, as a sign of the pain that itself will destroy signification.

But consider: Is it conceivable that it is *this* image—despite its representational complexity, depth, and referentiality, its rigorous composition and aesthetic pleasures—that is not enough, that lacks some abstract power that belongs to the diagram alone?

The diagram diagrams. And what the diagram of *The Human Centipede* diagrams is an enchainment in a specific sequence. The diagram formalizes the fact of being riveted, stitched and sewn, to an inescapable finitude, one’s own and that of others who precede and come after the self.¹⁴ The film articulates an account of enchainment that is given in the purest relations articulated by Heiter’s diagram: bound up with first, last, middle terms, and involving a not-to-be-outstripped givenness of one’s position in that sequence. The entirety of the question of violence in *The Human Centipede* turns on the violence of an unmodifiable position, a rivetedness to a certain notation: the formality of a written bondedness violent in excess of any order stained with blood, vomit, pus, piss, shit, agony, weeping, terror. The diagram is what poses the formality of the problem of *escape* from the sequence that it is.

In his early essay *De l’évasion*, from 1935, Emmanuel Levinas insists that “The need for escape—whether filled with chimerical hopes or not, no matter!—leads us into the heart of philosophy. It allows us to renew the ancient problem of being qua being.”¹⁵ Levinas is clear, though, that the sense in which he takes *l’évasion* (escape; fleeing;

avoidance; flight) is neither an ordinary language, poetic, nor conventional philosophical sense. Beginning with a negative definition of his key term, Levinas rejects the poetic figure of escape as an evasion of brute or low reality; a true understanding of escape regards it neither as the rejection of social convention or physical laws into the marvelous, nor as a Romantic escape of the material of the body or the spirit's servitude to bare need. These motifs are merely translations of "the horror of a certain *definition* of our being but not that of being as such" (*E*, 53); they concern themselves with "going somewhere" as destination, futurity, elsewhere, and fail to speak at all to a more radical form of escape.

Do not concern me with scatology and disgust, with the juniper-green rot at the edges of the mouth: Most horror is a humanism. It retains a horizon of possible escape from the violence therein depicted (even if, as often is the case, that horizon remains suspended outside the borders of the text—belonging to it as the excised). It is nearly always the case that the possibility of non-violence remains unscathed, indeed gives pathos, terror, *form* to the presence of violence itself. The horror that remains with what Levinas derides as the naive view of escape emphasizes minor departures: what frees the self from the violence of other beings, what cleaves the self from the aggressions of the not-I. So very many things can be a refuge (the Real; Law; Revenge; History; Allegory; Death [the privileged evasive destination for horror: how quickly it loses interest in the dead, renewing it solely in the case of a secondary refuge out of death into un-deadening]—each an escape to *somewhere*, each a form of the transcendence of violence). In this view, the suffering desire for an escape from violence is given renewable hope through its link to possibilities of anti-violence, non-violence, or an end to violence. Violence as such thereby need not ever truly be considered.

By contrast, *The Human Centipede* is not about escape-to-somewhere in this minor sense, but about a different escape altogether: the brutal aspiring only to *get out* (*sortir*) (*E*, 53). Not to elude or flee the house, the doctor, the shit, the terror, but to evade the structure one is itself—not *transcendence*, but what Levinas dubs *excedence*. The violence does not produce a need to go somewhere (else) but rather the radical suffering to-not-be-where-(what)-one-is.

When Levinas considers a true invitation to escape that might actually take the measure of being, this figure turns on the possibility of a break with the self, and thus the “identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment.” In the crystallizing line of the essay, “Escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, *to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I is oneself*” (E, 55). This need to escape is not a result of privation (it is not because I cannot live many lives, nor because it is impossible to say what I mean, nor is it the finitude through which my temporality is given); rather, “In escape the I flees itself, not in opposition to the infinity of what it is not or of what it will not become, but rather due to the very fact that it is” (E, 55). The brutal existence of the I is what is at stake in this radical form of evasion.

In theorizing this notion, Levinas turns to the question of affect, suffering and malaise, anxiety and nausea, and, in a final rotation, the figure of shame. Shame’s intensity is the mark of our “inability not to identify” with the being of I. It is therefore the affective mode most closely bonded to the *impossibility* of this true mode of escape—shame, for him, involves “the fact of being riveted to oneself” (E, 64). It is the confrontation with that need to get out of oneself, and the realization that this desire is unfulfillable. In positing his definition of shame as being annexed to oneself as a pulsating presence, Levinas turns to the cinema, citing the case of Charlie Chaplin’s Tramp figure in *City Lights*, in the scene in which he accidentally swallows a penny whistle whose telltale sound announces him each time he hiccups. The sound discloses his presence: the whistle “works like a recording device, which betrays the discrete manifestations of a presence that Charlie’s legendary tramp costume barely dissimulates” (E, 65). The tramp cannot hide from others, but more importantly he cannot hide from himself or escape the fact of his breathing, hiccupping, bodily existence—which is to say, each continuing effort to persist in a living body announces the inescapable facticity of the present animated material that he *is*.

Accordingly, shame is not linked to a limitation of being (weakness, vulnerability, lack) but rather resides in the inability to break with oneself, a fullness of one’s presence to oneself. This bondedness of I to self, this rivetedness, also, however, involves an inescapable en-

chainment to responsibility: “Shame is founded upon the solidarity of our being, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves” (*E*, 63). Levinas’s account of the affect of shame as severed from its bond to the moral or deviations from the normative, its intensity refigured as a structural condition with a correlate in the structure of being, suggests how we might imagine formal correlates in other spheres, including aesthetic ones. When the philosopher writes, “It is therefore our intimacy, that is, our presence to ourselves, that is shameful. . . . What shame discovers is the being who uncovers himself” (*E*, 65), is there not a sympathetic nakedness to the diagram of the centipede, an uncovering of sequencing in the joining of A to B and B to C? The weight of being, that one is stuck with oneself, that one *is* in a particular impersonal sequence, is the nakedness exposed in crudely drawn line. The impotence of A, B, and C is not in relation to failed transformation or weakened commitments of community; it is the “powerlessness to take leave of that presence,” the exposure of the form of being.

That the suffering of the need to escape expresses “the presence of our being and not its deficiency” (*E*, 60) results in a wholesale revision of the relation of need to lack. There is, ultimately, for Levinas, a plenitude of being: the inability to break with itself, this suffering, this need to escape, is not a privation or lack at the heart of being, but the fullness of a “condemnation to be oneself;” and “there is in need something other than a lack” (*E*, 56). Accordingly, in the most extraordinary figure in the essay, the philosopher calmly notes that suffering does not necessarily expose being as finite: “One heartrending need is the despair over a death that does not come” (*E*, 59).

B

In routing its violence through the representational form of the diagram, *The Human Centipede* gives form to the suffering need to escape and structural inability to escape in the more radical sense by which Levinas theorizes it—the brutality of being’s rivetedness to itself.¹⁶ The film attests to the extremest formality of the violence of this suffering. Violence is not in the sewing and stitching of the thing; violence is in the non-modifiable givenness of the diagrammatic attestation, the notational impossibility of any pure getting out.

The diagram diagrams.

Its form does not admit exception. Abstracted from all obstacle, its reductive, radical formalism is an idealism and a plenitude. The idealism of arrangement that the film's diagram displays is an assemblage that does not admit difference, modification, or undoing; the value of the abstraction of Heiter's diagram is that it presents the formality of a model of bondedness in a three-part structure that is stronger than the threads of surgical sutures. Any violence against Lindsay may compel a (minor) desire to transcend the brutality (to live to tomorrow, go back to school, bear children someday); *but there is no extra-diagrammatic possibility for B admissible within the assertions of the text*. To escape the diagrammatic inevitability named by the structural position of B can be articulated solely as the unfulfillable need *not to be B*. The violence of ontology, the violence of the diagram, is beyond any violence of force, disgust, torture, humiliation—those are the violences of the light, of representational depth and perspective. The film both represents violence and notates it, and the notation contains a horror utterly other than that of representation.

For a body's vitalism might strain against the corpus to which it is joined—this is precisely where blood leaks in the stained wound-cloths of the realized golden-light image of the centipede—a red not of idealized passage, but of the *failure* of that perfection in the fragile joining of material forms, a red that signals a fleshly joining that might become otherwise—that was made and therefore retains its bond to what might be unmade, the possibility of un-joining that belongs and gives form to joining itself. Indeed, one of the most striking visual elements of the revelation of the centipede is the carefully composed graphic match between the black tattoo marking the lead's skin and its repeated shape in the stain of blood at the gauze on the knees, calling attention to the artificiality of that blood, marking it as, above all else, a compositional element that points to the constructedness of the centipede, a madeness that contains within it the possibility of being made otherwise. This same blood of failed violence stains the film's narrativization of the transcendent form of escape. Stabbing Heiter, biting him, rendering him unconscious, A orchestrates evasion as generic adventure: "We have to get out of here," he cries in Japanese, addressing an imaginary plural first-person

in a language that only he can comprehend. He holds up his right hand and says to the American girls *ichi* (one), holds up his left hand, says *ni* (two). Ichi. Ni. The three-made-one awkwardly coordinate their knees and hands on the measure of the simple pattern, which signifies not in itself but in relation to the alternating meaningfulness of the body's bifurcation. At the curved staircase the collective pauses, *Ichi. Ni*. The alternation slows, the bodies strain to coordinate over the duration of the climbing; the sutures pull the white gauze stains and Heiter awakens. The attempt at escape fails, the One, Two of collective action only reddens the struggling creature. The stairs, scene of their attempted transformation within the givenness of their formed structure, drip with oily black blood. The *One, Two* attempts to transcend structure: make it work; accept its properties of joinedness and *nevertheless, despite violence, which is to say within violence, without evading violence*, strive toward futurity. The attempt at ongoingness involves the feint of becoming a new actor, one predicated on the transformative potential of community. The attempt to climb out (of the basement) is a literal attempt to climb out of (*trans-scandere*) the violence of the structure. But the One, Two *fails*, it does not transform the sequence, nor does it transcend the brutality of the ordering. The film displays the uselessness of action, the nothing-more-to-be-done that is inscribed in advance as the diagram.

The diagram is not posited in relation to exteriority, freedom, history: instead, the film's grounding attestation is that *the diagram is all there is*. This is why attempts to co-opt the diagram for historical allegory are so problematic (despite the fact that the mass of criticism on the film glimpses the twentieth century *in toto* from opposing alliances of World War II up through the dynamics of global late capitalism): these approaches lend the film a horizon that denies the necessity of the diagrammatic arrangement, return to it a discursive escape from the brutal attestation that the film exhausts: A to B to C. That is all. One can speak ceaselessly of the allegorical resonance, the promise of an intelligibility to the diagram (and its denial), a field of realizations that makes another figure appear in the stead of the diagram. Content with conceiving the diagram in relation to an infinite number of outsides, such a move cannot broach the question of the diagram as such, for its pure form leaves no space for the positing of

variation, and the condition of possibility for its inscription is the non-admissibility of variation.

The diagram is. Nothing prior, nothing after, nothing outside: It attests solely to its arrangement of elements. It does not refer, allude, resist, suggest, does not free or seek or condemn or announce, does not name, produce, consume, digest, let alone function, work, should not be put to work (critically; for an outside). The brutality and self-sufficiency of centipedal form—which is to say the joinedness of A to B and B to C—is given as the self-asserted form of the diagram, that which admits no exception to the form that it forms. A, B, and C are subject to violence not as constraints on their freedom or in the form of force external to and against the self, but as the positive constraint of the givenness of the diagrammatic arrangement. But it does not *give* this as property, nor does it represent it *a posteriori*: the diagrammatic possibility of sequencing A to B and B to C is givable solely as the necessary notation of alphabetic order. The diagram is the nonspontaneity of a claim that posits itself as a given: diagrammatic form de-monstrates what it *is*. The diagram does not admit variation without invalidation. It cannot be modified without its form being destroyed (that is to say: without it becoming a different form, another diagram). The diagram of enchainment cannot—itself—be interrupted. Its radical formalism is thus an idealism. There is no overcoming its form without a modification of that form, which is to say: the diagram does not admit difference from within itself. Its violence is its irrevocability. This formalism thus enables the presencing of a violent structure that is not generic, but general. The diagram does not represent or suggest, allude or depict, but attests, presents itself *as* the maximum generality of the structure that it *is*. The diagram is the privileged *eidos* of ineluctability: non-remittable, inalterable, abstract, and fundamental. And to the extent that violence here is in the enchainment to an inescapable position in a sequence, the diagram is coextensive with the wrecking work of violence itself. Unserious, preposterous, absurd: all the same, the *seriousness* of the centipedal form exists solely on its diagrammatic level. Violence is in the letters, and has nothing at all to do with surgical thread.

Josef Heiter, you see, is not Josef Mengele. Contrary to a naive allegorism, which remains only with the cuts, the stitching, the play-

thing skin—eye color experiments; twins measured and wounded and sewn together—he is no angel of death. Nor, however, is Heiter Heidegger, despite seeming to function as the mouthpiece for ontologism. Heiter is *heiter*, merely the whiteness of light, he is that brightness through which the diagrammatical is illumined, given to presence, made visible. He is the necessity of violence, its clarity, its genial diagrammatic self-evidence.

The broader stakes of this claim are that if horror formalizes the violence of ontology and the violence of ethical enchainment, then only a radical formalism—one utterly indifferent to context, allegory, all provocations of putting the representational depths of the centipede to work—can take the measure of the ethics of finitude in such a text. Enchainment is not a theme; the centipedal form, despite its cultural cache, is not an open allegory machine. To reduce the diagram to a theme is to utterly miss its relation to violence, to treat it as something that the text itself can *get out of or evade*. The joined A to B to C cannot both be the diagram it is and admit a space in which B escapes the notational logic by which it follows A and precedes C in a sequence that runs: A then B then C. The diagram, in other words, is the definitive dimension of violence. To allegorize the diagram is to fail to hold the film responsible for what it directly presents.

One consequence of the formal strategy that makes the diagram coextensive with the violent project of the film is that *The Human Centipede* does not exaggerate how finitude and debt in relation to the other works: rather, it displays what is in sequence about beings. This failing to fall to exaggeration is another mode of the film's stark, even diagrammatic simplicity, its reductive formalism of which the diagram is the privileged representational mode. For, as in the formulation given by Alexander Düttmann, "Every justified exaggeration is no longer an exaggeration. Once justified, exaggeration is either an external device or a necessary limitation of thought. In both cases, it ceases to be an exaggeration *constitutive* of thought and its claim to truth; indeed it ceases to be an *exaggeration* that could be regarded as constitutive of thought and its claim to truth."¹⁷ This film makes the seemingly exaggerated qualities of the centipedal conjoining a necessary, non-exaggerating dimension of finitude—the inscription of alphabetic order not only justifies but domesticates this structure;

thus, the diagram non-exaggerates the correlation of bodies to each other in sequence by displaying it as the absolute condition for form to take shape at all. The film is not an exaggeration of finitude and the other, but nor is it a representation of relation (which would require a position of exteriority from which this structure would be thinkable without being subject to it: would require, in other words, a reverse side of a mirror). *The Human Centipede*, rather, is more akin to an attestation, an attestation that addresses philosophy itself.

Horror humiliates metaphysics: brings it down to the rotted ground (lit. *humilis*, lowly, from *humus*, earth). As though a lost girl with kneecaps broken, horror brings that lofty light down, down from extension to make it crawl sad-bellied and aching in moist sad muck. Neither expressing philosophy (to thematize it) nor literalizing it (as science fiction literalizes Romanticism: the twin senses of, I saw you and my head exploded), horror uneffaces the pretty metaphoricity of philosophical claim.¹⁸ The *autrui* are unknowable? Perhaps they will speak different languages, Japanese, English, all the while muffled by a tongue's permanent pressure against the open sphincter of the other. You will regard the other die? Here is the friend you must watch tremble give in expire. He had a mother. You are responsible for the other? *Very well*, you will be the hostage of the other. There is shit and vomit and pus, there is violence in this insistence of unremitting debt. —Quite right, and you shall eat the shit of the other, taste his sickness; you are saddled to this heavy life and shall remain sewn to the other even after their death, will feel the pulsation of the body softening into rot, will smell their body old. Horror mortifies the philosophy described by Derrida as consisting of its metaphors, in which the first meaning and first displacement are effaced and forgotten: but in rubbing and wearing its metaphors away, un-effacing not to restore or illuminate, there is only a lowering with neither recourse nor alibi.¹⁹ Un-effacing, which is to say drawing anew, supplementing in place of removing, un-obliterating by creating, *positing*, forming, writing instead of rubbing, making in place of destroying the bondedness of enchainment and intertwinement, horror humiliates as creative praxis. Horror humiliates philosophy by reminding it of its own bondedness to the diagram. Thinking, we know, is condemned to representation, and philosophy, we might say, is condemned to nota-

tion. Wittgenstein will write in his *Notebooks*, “We keep on needing a comparative arrangement of propositions standing in internal relations. This book might well be equipped with diagrams.”²⁰ Levinas’s critique of sameness in *Totality and Infinity* turns on the formalism “A is A.”²¹ (It is no coincidence that Richard Rorty’s constant charge against Levinas is that of an empty formalism.)²² Horror: what puts metaphysics in the mud, and thereby gives it certainties—“the mud the dark I recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude nothing else for the moment.”²³

Except, one thing else.

There is a creeping violence within Levinas’s philosophical account of being consigned to being. One is riveted, not only to being, but to an unremittable obligation one did not elect to accept. The weight of being, what Levinas dubs the “condemnation to be oneself, can also be seen in the dialectical impossibility of conceiving the beginning of being—that is, of grasping the moment where being takes up this weight—and of being nevertheless driven back to the problem of one’s origin” (*E*, 70). The weight of being is not merely the inability to break with the self; it is also the responsibility to which being is committed.

The Human Centipede attests to the tensions in Levinas’s account of rivetedness—not as in contradictions, but as in stresses, the bright pain of what pulls. For this ineluctable inescapability is not just about the betraying of being in the sense of materiality and vitality (as in the Chaplin anecdote); it is also bound up with what Levinas calls “guiltless responsibility,” in other words a certain obligation that our presence commands in the ethics of alterity for which his work is best known: That our presence arrives in a world in which incomprehensible others precede us commits us to a responsibility that is absolute, but also an indebtedness that we can never completely fulfill—the dissymmetry of *I* and *other* exposes my finitude as *respondent* to the infinite demands the other makes on me. Being as being-for-the-other is both ethic and condemnation; it is a demand I can neither avoid or flee, nor fully meet.²⁴

It is perhaps the great project of philosophy to find the violence in philosophy itself, a project that always arrives discomfortingly at the present—so, for his part, Levinas will call Kierkegaard’s notion of

non-continuity, the *dépassant* or passing-beyond of the leap, the surging ground for “Kierkegaardian violence.”²⁵ And likewise, we see this creeping figuration of violence in the shift from early to late Levinas in his figuration of the other: the early work, culminating in *Totality and Infinity* (1969), turns on the generous language of welcoming the other or being open to the alterity of the other. But the latent hostilities grounding the notion of infinite responsibility derived from the plenitude of being start to seep out, to leak between the sutures of ego to *autrui* as it were—and by the time of *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), Levinas declares that responsibility as a being-for-the-other arrives at the point of being more akin to the ensnarement of a prisoner. While in *Totality and Infinity* “the subject is a host” (II, 299), by *Otherwise Than Being* “the subject is a hostage”—one who is discursively spatialized, by saying “après vous, monsieur.”²⁶ *Ou après A . . .*

Thus, “In responsibility for another,” Levinas instructs, “subjectivity is only this unlimited passivity of an accusative which does not issue out of a declension it would have undergone starting with the nominative” (OB, II2). This radical passivity is reducible “to the passivity of a self only as a persecution, but a persecution turns into an expiation. . . . The self of this passivity . . . is a hostage” (OB, II2, II4). (Derrida in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* will play quite a bit on this “host as hostage” relation in Levinas.) Being “held by the other” pulls then on a triple sense: at once, rivetedness and enchainedness (being stuck to, held by the other as *debt*); but also, being held by the other as fascination (the other entrances, we might say blinds, me); and also, finally, being *held* by the other—being held up; being detained; being not only captivated but also being captive. This responsibility for the other is also, for Levinas, “the substitution of one for the other” (OB, 6), and “It provokes this responsibility against my will, that is, by substituting me for the other as a hostage. All my inwardness is invested in the form of a despite-me, for-another” (OB, II). These responsibilities did not arise from decision or free consideration (they did not wait for the commitment to be made); they merely *are*; they are thrown back on oneself: “This means concretely: accused of what the others do or suffer, or responsible for what they do or suffer” (OB, II2). The analogue for this in the logic of Heiter’s presentation is the brute, declarative assertion, “Your tissues match.” It is a declaration of

the intolerable rivetedness to the self as tissue (as code, as information, as material by which sequential joining is correlatable because it is). The rivetedness of A to B and B to C is what is orderable about alphabetic ordering: arbitrary but absolute. Alphabetic order does not desert itself. It is the opposite of contingency, and it is not willed.

Horror is this formal realization (by which I mean idealization, diagrammatization, and presentation) of this total structure. The cold logic of the diagram—by which B follows A, but precedes C—deploys formality *for* enchainment. The final reckoning that leaves only figure B alive in the house displays, on the one hand, the sheer presence of being, its living continuation, its inescapable facticity and persistent vitality that is sutured to dead others. The diagram both declares without debate and yet is indifferent to the fact that this body is present, that it is there. On the other hand, however, this is a self who persists not as the one alone, but *in sequence*, enchained and riveted not only to her own presence but also to figures A and C: in other words, this is an impossible-to-flee self who persists as the B term in a diagrammatic relation by which an A necessarily comes before and a C necessarily comes after. One is heteronomously obliged to the other, after the other, before the other, responsible for the other, and this precedes any autonomy: to be B in diagrammatic notation is to be B after A before C. We are given in the world only as and in a state in which the other precedes us, to never to be either A (the fantasmatic first) or C (the fantasmatic last). B is anteceded: this is the opening of the ethical. To be the middle term in the sequence—so let us be clear that *to be* is to be this middle term—is to be sutured to the inescapability of our own presence unavoidably bound up with the certain witnessing of other terms who suffer and who die.

Before he makes the centipede, Heiter promises figure B (at that point, Lindsay) that her suffering will be the worst in this middle term position (as retribution for her earlier attempted escape)—and indeed her suffering is the worst, not only for the obvious reason that she must ingest the shit of figure A but because, simultaneously, through the sheer labors of her gut system she does violence to figure C, to the other, enchained to *her*, who comes after her. Figure B can neither escape the pure fact of having a body that persists nor can she evade the way in which that self is sutured to finite others. She is in

the position of unavoidably being done violence to, and unavoidably doing violence to others. And yet, despite the fact that A (apologizing, all the while) does his unavoidable violence (i.e., has to shit), Heiter notes during an exam that B is constipated; he prescribes a laxative that he never gets around to administering. We might rephrase this as: *Something gets stuck at the level of being*. There is a blockage in this position; B's violence against the other remains suspended but possible: the fact that the fact of her being imposes on the other, indebts her to the other, takes the place of another, is purely notated on the level of a supposition of her being: not due to any violence her body actually does. In other words, B's imposition on C is a pure correlate of being B. Her violence against the other, that is, exists solely on the diagrammatic level. What the diagram displays is the logic of notation by which Lindsay cannot be turned into B and yet fail to be in the sequence that gives formal urgency and seriousness to the totality of the ethical. This is why the diagram is not the mere medium or privileged representational form of Heiter's violence: the diagram, in giving the relation of components to each other, in positing the sequential dimension of sequence—what could not be outstripped from sequence without destroying sequentiality—is coextensive with the very violence of the ethical.

The Human Centipede is representationally clear on its ethical attestation: that at the moment Lindsay returns for her friend during an attempted escape at which she alone had already made progress toward freedom, she is already bound up in the structure of the sequence. This escape, the cause of later being placed in the position of figure B, displays as a lived embodied form the joinedness of the diagram: the arrangement of limbs as Lindsay stands behind the unconscious Jenny, the figure they make containing too many extensions for one trunk, the framing of the setting of one body behind the other, is given visually in the structure of joining. Friendship (which is to say regard for the other and a responsibility for their vulnerability) already discovers Lindsay in a centipedal form. Lindsay is the hostage of Jenny—the vulnerable other who may be the beloved friend is still just so much dead weight. Yet one must drag it along. Ethics, that is to say, makes one already *many-footed*.

The Human Centipede plays the structure of this structure out

in the cruel formality of relation; and the dimension of being unmodifiably enchained to that sequence is what the diagram displays, and what cannot be otherwise in the reductive shape that it gives. Horror (what bristles the hairs, what is said to wreck through fear and disgust) is not there, in this film, in images of the dying, the suffering, the excreting; it is in a black line on a white plane revealed via a slide through which light passes. What the film ultimately cannot digest—indeed, the very essence of what is indigestible, and here I mean for thought itself—is the dimension that the diagram flatly formalizes: a simple ordering of elements that goes *A, then B, then C*. This attestation through the reductive formalism of the diagram is thus not graspable by a criticism that presumes it already knows the object it seeks to capture (for symptomatic, historical, generic, or affective analytical purposes), or having decided that the conceit of the film is but a paraphrasable theme and that the critical task is reduced to articulating how that theme has connections to predetermined affects or strong sensations (as in the limited criticism to date, all of which focuses on scatology as either politically allegorical or spectatorially provocative). Take horror past the imperialism of bad affect. To remain with disgust at the forced tasting of shit is to miss the violence altogether. It is ever in the joining of abstract irrevocability in diagrammatic notation, in drawn line and light. If one watches *The Human Centipede* and remains on the side of affective shock at the illuminated relation of mouth to anus, one has in fact *avoided* a confrontation with horror.

For what a close reading of the specific forms of the horror film reveals is that this is *not* a film about contingency (being in the wrong place at the wrong time), but one of givenness and necessity; that it is not offering a model of violence as a force external to a system that wrecks it, but one that is constitutive of systems and structures to which one is inescapably riveted; that violence itself is not given over in the opened explicit graphic body, but in the reductive formalism of a spare graphic diagram. And, finally, in place of the shallow and idle clichés of horror criticism—terms like brutality, sadism, cruelty, torture, extremity, excess, obscenity, disgust—the problem the diagram makes unavoidable is the opening up to violence that in other genres we might call *care*. Horror, in this sense, attested solely at the

formalized level of diagrammatic enchainment, available to thought via the grand humiliation of philosophy, is what the structure of the ethical exposes you to.

(*sicut hic depingitur*)

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EUGENIE BRINKEMA is associate professor of contemporary literature and media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research focuses on violence, affect, sexuality, aesthetics, and ethics in texts ranging from the horror film to gonzo pornography, from structuralist film to the visual and temporal forms of terrorism. Her articles have appeared in *Angelaki*, *Camera Obscura*, *Criticism*, *differences*, *Discourse*, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, and *World Picture*. Her first book, *The Forms of the Affects*, was published with Duke University Press in 2014.

Notes

1. We have hardly begun and already are adrift, but the curious would be well rewarded to consider the history of surgical illustration more broadly, and, more narrowly, the role of the anal fistula, aperture, and cavity as a representational mode within that history. Michael McVaugh argues that the Middle Ages saw a shift in surgical conceptions of space, moving from the “two-dimensional” anatomy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in which the body was viewed as “a collection of systems that are not merely functionally discrete but spatially unintegrated,” to a fifteenth- and sixteenth-century “three-dimensional” anatomy that took notice of spatial relationships independent of systematic interaction. McVaugh glimpses the beginning of the later anatomy in Arderne and gives pride of place to the fistula’s channels as the conceptual, historical opening into the spaces of the body that radically changed a medical understanding of interiority, anatomy, and spatial integration. See Michael McVaugh, “Fistulas, the Knee, and the ‘Three-dimensional’ Body,” in *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Patricia A. Baker, Han Nijdam, and Karine van’t Land (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21–36.

Quoted here is the Middle English translation of the *Practica*, ed. D’Arcy Power, *Treatises of Fistula in Ano, Haemorrhoids, and Clysters*, by John Arderne, Early English Text Society, 139 (London, 1910), 47–49.

On Arderne’s use of illustrations, see Peter Murray Jones, “Sicut hic depingitur . . . : John of Arderne and English Medical Illustration in the

14th and 15th Centuries,” in *Die Kunst und das Studium der Natur vom 14. zum 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfram Prinz and Andreas Beyer (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora/VCH, 1987), 103–26.

2. Watching *The Human Centipede*, it becomes almost impossible to shake the sense that it is restaging one of Freud’s most famous footnotes from *Civilization and Its Discontents*. This note is the oft-cited one about humans and dogs in reference to a structure of upwardness versus downwardness as it relates to smell and taste, shit and sex, shame and disgust. There, Freud wonders why “man should use the name of his most faithful friend in the animal world—the dog—as a term of abuse.” The answer is that the dog is “an animal whose dominant sense is that of smell and [yet] one which has no horror of excrement.” To behave like a dog is thus to have no shame for having overcome the cultural prohibitions bound up with disgust encircling bad smells and tastes. The speculations of this note are that once man raised himself up from the ground, this “assumption of an upright gait” made the genitals, once concealed, now visible and in need of protection, “and so provoked feelings of shame in him,” and that the centrality of the intermittent olfactory stimuli is taken over by the permanent possibilities of visual excitation in sexual response. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 54–55n1.

As if telling Freud’s story in reverse, the declension back down from an upright gait to the ground (through the ruining of knee extension) re-conceals the genitals, and the intermittency of digestive processes takes over where visual processes have been supplanted. What *The Human Centipede* figures is the physical organization of the dog-form that Freud describes—dog-lowness, dog-movement, dog-smells—with the residual disgust and shame of the upright human, a figure that retains the horror of excrement, which is to say a figure that does not want to get too close to its own digestive teleology. And in fact Heiter will feed this new thing on the ground, will try to train the creature he has made, and will complain at night that it whimpers so loudly he cannot get adequate sleep.

It is not surprising that the film would make this three-part creature a stage for the confrontation between human and nonhuman; Heiter’s research participates in a tradition dating back to Enlightenment experiments that focused on creating novel mechanical figures for the sake of posing questions about whether mimicking human activities made an automaton equivalent to a man. These experiments, like Heiter’s research, turned on the mechanics of *digestion* as the testing ground for

the essentially human. Jacques de Vaucanson's duck is the most famous of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century experiments: an invention that, when displayed on a pedestal, imitated very specific actions of man and suggested the thesis, proposed earlier by Descartes, that because the body moves in many ways not guided by will, the human body is essentially an animal that is a machine (albeit, one "incomparably better ordered" than machines made by men). Vaucanson's ingenious invention, the mechanical duck, did many things (its hundreds of moving parts allowed it to flap its wings, raise its body), but most of all, above all, it ate, and it shat, its food.

Vaucanson described his 1738 creation thusly, and note how even the presentational rhetoric of Heiter's slides seems to echo the language of the inventor:

It extends its neck to take grain from the hand, swallows it, digests it, and voids it, completely digested, by the usual passages. All the gestures of a duck that eats hastily, and that redoubles this quickness in the movement of its throat in order to make its meal pass into the stomach, are copied after nature. The food is digested there as it is in real animals, by being dissolved, and not by trituration as some physicians claim. . . . The digested matter in the stomach is conducted by pipes, as by the bowels of the animal, to the anus, where there is a sphincter that allows it to exit. (Quoted in Daniel Cottom, *Cannibals and Philosophers* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001], 81)

3. This is a fate inextricably bound up with the cultural imaginary of the conjoined body, most famously in the case of Chang and Eng Bunker, the nineteenth-century brothers who were the source of the term "Siamese twins," after their exhibition on a global curiosity tour. One morning in 1874, when they were in their sixties, Chang suffered a stroke and died in his sleep, and Eng woke to find his dead brother attached to him (he died a few—one cannot imagine how long how lonely how quiet how lonely how long—hours later).

A generic point of emphasis: from the point of view of conventional horror tropology, Lindsay, though the last figure, is not quite the Final Girl of the slasher narrative, for she merely *persists* in the end, as opposed to functioning as the locus of audience sympathy battling out the force of violence to *survive*. Indeed, any critical turn that would put gender at all to work in considering the centipede would remain with a violence bonded to the made form; from the diagrammatic perspective, the figures are given as notated elements in an inescapable sequence in

a realm utterly indifferent to sexual difference. For all that *The Human Centipede* is complexly in dialogue with the history of horror—from its relation to the mad scientist motif, the sequel’s overt mother-son citations to *Psycho*, its indebtedness to the intertwined histories of Bataille-citing surrealist horror and the extremity of postmodern body horror—the *generic* approach misses the more radical scene of violence: that of the *generality* of the diagram.

4. Consider, fully, from T. S. Eliot, *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934):

Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man;
 Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple;
 You must not deny the body.
 Now you shall see the Temple completed:
 After much striving, after many obstacles;
 For the work of creation is never without travail;
 The formed stone, the visible crucifix,
 The dressed altar, the lifting light,
 Light
 Light
 The visible reminder of Invisible Light.

5. There is initially another A, an anonymous man Heiter already possesses when the two girls unwisely seek refuge in the house of this bad host. The impersonality of horror, that its work seeks form and not meaning, is given as Heiter quietly whispers to him, “My friend, you don’t match. I have to kill you.” Injecting the agent of elimination into the iv drip, he softly says, “Don’t take it personally.” And then he buries him—cares, in other words, for the disposal of the tissue that does not work here.
6. John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 7.
7. Jacques Bertin, *Semiology of Graphics: Diagrams, Networks, Maps*, trans. William Berg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
8. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 205.
9. Deleuze likewise writes a great deal on the diagram, though in a sense apart from how I am deploying the figure here; in particular, for Deleuze, the diagram does not exhibit structure but involves a non-structuring map of the relations of forces. He does write of the form’s abstractions—and on this we partially concur, that the diagrammatic machine does not represent something real but “constructs a real that is yet to come, a new

type of reality”; it is the case that we share the bondedness of the diagram to the word “abstract,” and I would likewise resist the notion that the diagram *represents* something prior, but my critique hinges on the figure of representation in that case. In short, Deleuze’s diagrams are generative (a reason they have been taken up so enthusiastically in architectural theory) and constructive in a manner that I find problematic to think with here, given their insistence on the non-formed, the informal, and on continuums of intensities and affects—the Deleuzian diagram does not have a conceptual space to address the rigorously formed, that which works through the violence of structure as such. This is, perhaps, a broader problem of the role of formalism, informalism, and anti-formalism in Deleuze, one I will leave for another day.

The quotation above is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), 157. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), which is in many ways a book about the diagram, and Jakub Zdebik, *Deleuze and the Diagram: Aesthetic Threads in Visual Organization* (London: Continuum, 2012).

10. Roland Barthes, “The Plates of the *Encyclopedia*,” in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 230.
11. Quoted in Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 136, 137.
12. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970), 6.
13. See Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 126.
14. The diagram is so insistent that it haunts its own franchise in ways I will only gloss below.

The crucial image of figure B is the hinge or joint between the meta-components that, in sequence, comprise the first two *Human Centipede* films (of three: *First Sequence*, *Full Sequence*, *Final Sequence*—and note that the middle term is given as a fullness within firstness and finality). The premise of the 2011 sequel is a meta-cinematic one, in which Tom Six’s film *The Human Centipede* is treated as a fictional object that has become the obsession of a vile, mute, developmentally-stunted man named Martin. In its representational shift, the film opens with the last few minutes of *The Human Centipede* filling the screen only to zoom out at the credits to reveal that it is being played on a video monitor—in the great aesthetic deception, the window thus becomes a frame, and the films form a sequence, with the status of the ontologically indeter-

minate scene of B alone at the end functioning as the bridge or graft between the two films. Martin, the ultimate fanboy, attempts to exceed his model by creating a twelve-person centipede, but in one of the darkly comic dimensions of the film, because he is not a surgeon like Heiter—whose conceit is required for the verisimilitude of the seriously taken surgery of the first film—Martin’s initial efforts at grafting kill his first victims, as we might expect, and once down to ten, stymied by the reality of anatomy, he ineffectually just staples and tapes them together. In the meta-cinematic climax, representation is inverted, as one of the actresses from the first film (C, now playing herself)—and who dies at the end of the first film—comes to audition for a “Quentin Tarantino film”; mistaking Martin for her driver, she ends up as the head of the sequence this time, not its culmination, though were the *en-abîme* centipede to meet its fictional avatar from the first in a trans-ontological realm, she would literally function as *its* hinge, having been the last and now constituting the first term.

The climax of the sequel involves Martin’s attempt to prove the ontology of the constructed centipede, which is a digestive proof: if the expanded alimentary system works, he has made the thing of the diagram, the newness that it names. Feeding the first figure, nothing happens, so he injects each with a laxative that eventually leads to a hyper-ecstatic explosion of shit from the final term but also in between the sutures of the creature. But this explosive, graphic instant is a decoy for what truly takes diarrheal form in the film. Literally, from the Greek *diarrhoia*, a *flowing through* (the German *Durchfall* is literally a falling-through), this mode of intensity, a fluidity, a groaning out of the body, is not, in the sequel, what is in the image; rather, what flows through is the diagram itself.

For the key feature of the first film to which the second returns with obsessive attention is the diagrammatic presentation, and not just in explicit visual citations to the first film, or Martin’s resketching of the images as he prepares to make a twelve-person centipede. Rather, one of the remarkable formal details of the sequel is that it is shot entirely in black and white, with one exception: at that climax of the film, the test of the ontology of the centipede rendered very graphically through the injection of laxatives into the series, there is a chromatic departure from the film’s system—at the instant of the explosive diarrhea, a sudden shock of brown fills the frame (intercut chromatics classically fulfilling this violent function, as in Sam Fuller’s *Shock Corridor*). The chromatic exception to the black line/white wall system of Heiter’s diagrams was the tube of red running through the schematic mapping the course of

digestive progression through the expanded alimentary canal. In some ways, then, the singular chromatic instant in both films is aligned with digestion's progress or passage (the equation would read something like: color = movement or color functions as deixis: pointing to the progress of movement). *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)*, then, with its black-and-white rigor and metatextual replication of the diagrammatic logic of the slides does *not* take apart, digest, deconstruct, or process the diagrams of the first film—it, in a manner, with its black-white-chromatic-exception world, becomes coextensive with the visual logic of the diagram. It realizes the diagram, which is to say it cannot think or analyze the diagram. It is equivalent to yet another slide presenting the form of the diagram's reductive graphic notation.

15. Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, intro. Jacques Rolland, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 56. Hereafter cited as *E*.
16. As Levinas puts it, "Being is: there is nothing to add to this assertion as long as we envision in a being only its existence" (*E*, 51)—note, however, that he will criticize this view, the privileged stance of philosophy, locating in being a need that is not privation, a fullness of responsibility and not existence.
17. Alexander Düttmann, *Philosophy of Exaggeration*, trans. James Phillips (London: Continuum, 2007), 15.
18. See the excellent treatment of the literal and its relation to Romantic poetry in Seo-Young Chu, *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sheep?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
19. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207–71. Derrida's argument involves the circulation of the philosophical concept as doubly de-faced, in which "such effacement itself effaces itself" (8); a figure "becomes metaphor when put in circulation in philosophical discourse. At that point, the first meaning and the first displacement are simultaneously forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning. . . . On this view, philosophy would be a self-eliminating process of generating metaphor" (9). The metaphysician, Derrida writes, is economical: choosing the most abraded, worn, polished words. When horror does this as well, it is dubbed: cliché.
20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks, 1914–16*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 12e.
21. There is more to write of the formalism of Levinas's account of the I and the world, the I and the other, but remain, at least initially, with this declaration on the back of *letter*: "The identification of the same in the

I is not produced as a monotonous tautology: 'I am I.' The originality of identification, irreducible to the A is A formalism, would thus escape attention." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 37. Hereafter cited as *TI*.

The *I am I* is not an *A is A*, a pure tautology, a pure self-presence in which relations to the not-I are derived or secondary—there to be known by *me*, there threatening violence against *me*—because of the world.

Not *A is A*, but perhaps, perhaps: *A, B, C*.

22. Rorty mounts this cranky charge in several places, sometimes explicitly engaging with Levinas, sometimes attacking him through commentary on Derrida and/or deconstruction more broadly. On "infinite responsibility," he writes, "the infinite and the unrepresentable are merely nuisances" to the public responsibilities of political organization. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 97.
23. Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove, 1964), 8.
24. See Derrida's critique of this form of dissymmetry in Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 79–153.
25. Levinas writes: "Kierkegaardian violence begins when existence is forced to abandon the ethical stage in order to embark on the religious stage, the domain of belief. But belief no longer sought external justification. Even internally, it combined communication and isolation, and hence violence and passion. That is the origin of the relegation of ethical phenomena to secondary status and the contempt of the ethical foundation of being which has led, through Nietzsche, to the amorality of recent philosophies." Emmanuel Levinas, "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics," *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 72.
26. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 117. Hereafter cited as *OB*.