

The Eruptive Power of Tears: Disorganization, Expressivity and the Experience of Horror

By Adam Lovasz

Abstract

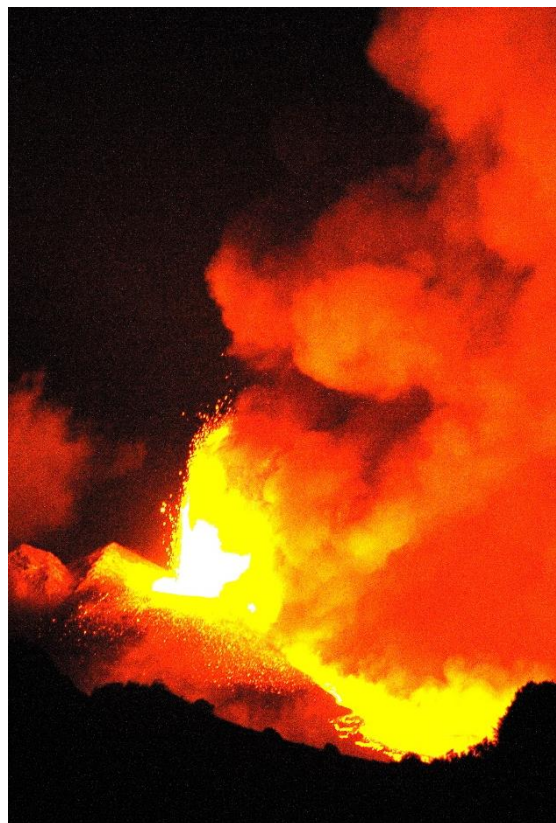
Through a close reading of Helmuth Plessner's classic work, *Laughter and Tears*, I seek to shed new light upon human nature as conceived of as a fluid collection of affects. The psychological theory of thin slices, when combined with Plessner's insights, can contribute to the construction of a non-essentialist viewpoint. Using the 2014 horror film *Unfriended* as a convenient metaphor, I attempt to construct a philosophical anthropology informed by horrific experiences of social media.

Biography

Adam Lovasz is an Australian-born philosopher and doctoral student in philosophy based in Hungary. His interests include embodiment, phenomenology and speculative realism, as well as non-anthropomorphic modes of thinking. He is the author of numerous books, and his work has appeared in a number of journals.

Introduction

According to German philosopher Helmuth Plessner, both laughter and crying give expression to the essential finitude of human existence. In their own ways, both of these corporeal modalities take us to the limit. Laughter and crying give expression to a “disorganization” of the human element. In Plessner’s philosophical anthropology, there is no such thing as a definable, delineable human essence. Rather, to be human means to be expressive and ambiguously embodied. The source of the ambiguity is that humans are capable of relating to their own bodies. We are lived bodies situated within physical bodies. Hence, not only are we equal to the body, as it manifests itself through lived experience, but we also find a place of hospitality within the body conceived of as an ecology. The human situation is characterized above all by a strange in-betweenness. Irreducible to relations of exteriority or interiority, the human lies midway between outside and inside. At times, the body is capable of reasserting its own agency. For Plessner, in laughter and crying, we experience a self-surrender to our own embodiment. Whereas laughter is usually elicited by comic situations whose import compels us to lose ourselves while nevertheless avoiding endangerment, crying is provoked by unanswerable situations that injure us. At its zenith, crying is a state of complete surrender to Fate. In this article, I focus in



particular on the latter aspect, while highlighting the aspects of Plessner’s anthropology relevant to the broader issue of bodily disorganization and self-surrender. Of particular relevance here will be the notion of expressivity. According to my view, horror is an inner experience that displays similar hallmarks to crying. As a matter of fact, terror is capable of eliciting the most intensive form of crying, namely tears that result from a realization of one’s own existential predicament. Using the 2014 social media horror film *Unfriended*, I hope to deepen the Plessnerian notion of expressivity, while adding newer notions. The method of “thin-slicing”,

introduced in 1992 by psychologists Nalini Ambady and Robert Rosenthal, will be helpful in this regard. As a consequence of pervasive connectivity, the human face's expressivity comes to be sliced into every smaller pixels. In the digital age, organic expressivity gives way to the communication of haunted networks. But this by

no means implies the complete erasure of the human element. If social media is posthuman, this is a posthumanism that strangely preserves expressivity, although in a highly transformed manner. Slices of human faces remain as glitches in cyberspace.

Disorganized Affectivity: The Place of the Traumatic in Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

In limit situations, existence necessarily slips away. When the body fails, and the experience of trauma sets in, we are confronted with a truth inseparable from embodiment: disorganization is an unavoidable modality of bodily belonging. The possibility of disorganization, culminating in the complete extinction of the self, is something most would prefer to ignore. Following a certain thread of abstraction, we may identify several corporeal configurations that contain meanings while progressively separating these aspects from any and all particular, individual bodies. In this regard, social media as an agent of horror will be of particular importance in the second half of our investigation. Images are carriers of affect, but such meanings cannot be reduced to mere semantic communications. When the body fails, when we find ourselves in a state of extreme lassitude, we discover that corporeality is an independent, even sovereign force, an energy we

must reckon with. Disorganization is belonging. To understand what happens when the body fails, it is not enough to rely upon everyday expressions. Semantics can only get us so far when dealing with experiences and bodily movements outside of language. A paralytic attack can rob us of our speech, rendering us mute, insensitive even to our own suffering. Unable to move, the subject is then thrust into a state of immobile lassitude. Verbal expressions become unintelligible animal noises, our hands become frozen, and all emotions subside, with the exception of a sense of doom. Under normal circumstances, most people can give others some rendition of what, for want of a better word, we may call inner states. But involuntary bodily states preclude any direct communicability. Involuntary jerks, spasms and attacks are unanswerable, yet this certainly by no means implies that the philosophy of the body should ignore these

modalities.

Helmuth Plessner's 1961 book, *Lachen und Weinen* [*Laughter and Crying*], is dedicated to the exploration of precisely such conditions. The subtitle of the book is particularly telling: *Eine Untersuchung nach den Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, or *A Study of the Limits of Human of Human Behavior*. The focus of the entire book is precisely the abnormal, the strange, the incomprehensible, conceived of the outer limit of the human being. Laughter and crying are, for Plessner, indicative of human nature. The latter is not something fixed once and for all, an objective reality that may be exhaustively uncovered by modern positivist natural science. Corporeality is infinitely more complex than pure materiality, for the former is characterised by responsivity. Human nature is none other than "the possibility of expression as a unity of intellectual, affective, and physical components" (Plessner 17). Whereas former anthropological theories have layed too great an emphasis on either the mental or physical aspects of human being, what all theoretical treatments lacked is a concept of the human as a whole, a composite of the three registers mentioned above (Plessner 21). We are composites of intellectual, affective and physical world-slices. Rejecting both Cartesianism and Darwinism as two sides of the same reductionist coin, Plessner seeks to unpack an investigation that would incorporate many different aspects of our lives, without unduly privileging one or another register. Humanity, conceived of as an

almost infinitely malleable expressivity, is inherently emotional too. Without the ability to feel one's self, it is exceedingly difficult indeed to even speak of anything remotely resembling a living personality. Neighboring gestures have the potential to sidestep verbal channels. Expressivity simply cannot be reduced to language. We see a friend break down in tears, we see a movement, or we feel something within ourselves, something that is wrong. Something is the matter, but what is amiss?

Becoming is closely bound to various pulsations, intensities and thresholds. An extremely permeable line separates the state of impersonality from that of individuated, self-consciousness. Involuntary bodily states such as laughing and crying transport us to a distant realm, making us strangers to ourselves, strangers somehow, inscrutably, impossibly, outlandishly trapped within a foreign body. In the depths of our lives, we find a dark ocean of emotion. Laughter and crying alike simply do not belong to the same stratum as language. As Plessner writes enchantingly, "closer to the inarticulate cry than to disciplined, articulate speech, laughing and crying surge up from the depths of life bound to feeling" (Plessner 23). The tears stream down our face, for we have learned of a loved one's intention to leave us. We should have known better, for all is ephemeral. Even eternal love dies: with the exception of eternity itself, nothing lasts forever. But here we are nonetheless, wounded, prostrate, and the tears continue to stream

without end. Corporeality, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, is never unmediated. The body too is a medium. In endangerment and lassitude, we discover the “mediated” and “instrumental” character of physical existence (Plessner 38). It is when the tool exposes itself in its brokenness that we come to realize our extreme dependence upon our all-too-human, all too frail equipment. We see a sign, we hear some unusually sharp words from somebody who used to love us (did anybody ever love anybody?—the inner child within us asks naively), and even this is enough to provoke a torrent of tears. But then we realize that brokenness is always already a fundamental aspect of human being. “The brokenness of man’s relation to his body,” Plessner reminds us, “is rather the basis of his existence, the source, but also the limit, of his power” (Plessner 32). Brokenness here denotes the paradoxical entwinement of the lived body with the physical body. To be human means to be situated in an ambiguous state of embodiment: from birth onwards, we are compelled to live “as living body in a physical body” (32).

Limit experiences are of paramount importance, for it is precisely such circumstances that afford an opportunity to rediscover what we always were to begin with. Brokenness, the experience of extreme lassitude turns the gap between lived and physical body into a veritable chasm. When we feel our body momentarily subside into the cold ocean of paralysis, it is as if we were torn apart. Violently sundered, the

person who experiences a paralytic attack or a sudden onset of crying is thrust into homelessness. Familiarity with what is supposedly “our” body then gives way to a disturbing suspicion that this morphology in some way differs from our true self. True, after reaching a certain threshold, say unconsciousness, personality gives way to impersonal anonymity. The coma destroys the persona, leaving nothing apart from a vague, albeit living impersonality, whereas death leaves not even impersonality intact. In laughter and crying, however, as well as involuntary bodily reactions in between these two extremes, something different occurs. According to Plessner, “with laughing and crying the person does indeed lose control, but he remains a person, while the body, so to speak, takes over the answer for him” (Plessner 33). Put differently, involuntary bodily modalities signal the presence of an impersonal personality. The human is eccentric, in the sense that it is inherently foreign to itself. Awareness, even in normal conditions, is at once personal and impersonal, individuated yet anonymous. Of key importance to our own investigation is the conceptual duality of instrumentality and expressivity. In everyday life, we use our bodies for a variety of purposes. Usually, the body is utilized to give expression to wants, desires and needs. It is one tool among many, and indeed often comes into connection with a range of other implements, gadgets and instruments. But Plessner emphasizes that

instrumentality by no means exhausts expressivity. The body is capable of expressing itself in an impersonal, non-instrumental manner. We may restate this ontological perspective by saying that expressivity is the general economy of corporeality, whereas instrumentality corresponds to a restricted economy predicated upon rationality and self-control (Plessner 43). During involuntary episodes, expressivity asserts its primacy *vis-a-vis* instrumentality. The body is more than any single usage of it may imply.

Expressive movement makes the invisible visible. Expression brings affect to the surface. Inseparable from expression is the occasion of the movement, the momentum that compels us to either burst into tears, burst out laughing, or burst into tears while laughing. In excitation, agitation “runs its course, radiating, as it were, into a range of expressive movements” (Plessner 65). When we reach the threshold, we thrash our arms wildly, only to collapse in paroxysm. As emotional discharge, expressivity holds our body hostage. Involuntary states, provoked by suitable occasions, force themselves upon the lived body, while traumatically cutting it off the physical body. The distance between the two becomes a chasm when “bodily reactions emancipate themselves” from instrumentality (Plessner 66). When the paroxysm sets in, when our body starts to go numb and jerk uncontrollably; we scream

for help but somehow nothing seems to come out from between our lips, knowing that our ever so fragile inner equilibrium is at an end. Nothing is the same again after such an inner experience, so traumatic is the state of inner withdrawal. Withdrawal, in the ontological sense of the word, is nothing, if not a prelude to the infinite coldness of death as perpetual anorganic Outside. With the disappearance of any intelligible, communicable or manageable order, disorganization makes its advent. Order absconds, and various forms of disorganization take its place, be it the feeling of vertigo, aroused by “situations which are both unanswerable and threatening”, or laughter and crying, provoked by “unanswerable, non-threatening” situations respectively (Plessner 67). In the former case, the unanswerable places us in a state of endangerment and lassitude so intensive as to preclude the mere possibility of any thought or emotion aside from a sense of impending doom. Vertigo means abdication, the abandonment of the personal mode: in vertigo, “man capitulates as a person, he loses his head”—states Plessner suggestively (67) Does not the complaint, “my head is swimming” already contain, in a way, the idea of losing one’s head completely? This metaphor is suggestive of an actual, decapitated head swimming upon the waves of a sinister, black ocean. An ocean of tears, perhaps...

The Power of Trauma

The description of disorganization as a “penetrating depth” is indicative of the oceanic nature of traumatic embodiment. There is something traumatic in every involuntary muscle spasm, however pleasant a sensation it results in. Meaninglessness always resides in corporeality as a latent possibility, or a truism waiting to emerge from interiority. While Plessner does not address the issue of horror directly, we may nevertheless fully reconstruct such a definition by mirroring his concept of humor. The definition he gives runs as follows: “things surprise us by their appearance, they take an unforeseen turn, they create situations to which we no longer find a serious response. If such surprises and limiting conditions of our orientation to the world entail on the whole no peril for us, or if we have the power to answer such peril by keeping the freedom of distance, then . . . we find these surprises and situations funny” (Plessner 92). Paraphrasing Plessner, the experience of horror may be summarized as the presence of “limiting conditions” that “entail peril for us.” In such circumstances, we lack the power to answer such peril, for we prove incapable of maintaining our distance from that which threatens to break our boundaries completely. Death would be the shattering of corporeal boundaries. Death is openness. Death is the abandonment of any and all self-sustaining filtration mechanisms. Anything can be either laughable or horrific,

provided that “we can’t cope with it” (Plessner 90). Explanation, when confronted by comic and terrifying elements, fails. There is no room for discourse in horror. Rather, it is the shivering, crying body of the victim-to-be that becomes the medium of haunting. As we shall see, the 2014 horror film *Unfriended* confronts us with such a paradigmatic transformation. The protagonists become subsumed by the various social media they consume, to the point wherein they are transfigured into monstrous remnants, shattered, incoherent glitches upon the incandescent surface of mediation. Their haunting transformations testify to the power of pervasive communication. But it must not be forgotten that corporeality is always already mediated to begin with. There may be no question of some pure human essence: if we accept the ramifications of Plessner’s anthropology, we must understand that human nature is the in-betweenness of expressive plasticity.

Sometimes, we weep for ourselves or, more rarely, for a range of others. We weep because of a perceived injury to our collective social ego or our small, pitiful self. We weep because of pain, of suffering, or because of the suffering of others that elicits such emotional intensities. On occasion, weeping entails a complete collapse into an unanswerable situation. Crying, at the peak of its expressive intensity, is expressive of sheer, vertiginous inertia. “Helplessness”, writes

Plessner, “appears as an absence of distance” (Plessner 143). Those who find themselves in a hopeless situation, bereft of guidance or meaning, are thrown back upon their own finitude. In hopelessness, we have no other option but to scream and cry, in anger or sheer fright. Following the psychologist Baldwin V. Schwarz, Plessner describes emotions as “resonant appeals” (Plessner 128–9). In the case of crying induced by existential hopelessness, however, to what exactly does the crier appeal? Such a semantics would entail the presence of a listener, somebody who cares about what is happening to us. But it is entirely possible to be overtaken by tears in a state of solitude. Involuntary bodily states need not occur only in the presence of others. Indeed, solitude illustrates the irredeemability of death in no uncertain terms. One who weeps because of the absence of meaning, one who weeps for everything and nothing, such a weeper is the epitome of both “immediacy and eruptivity”, two characteristics

whose inseparability permeates impersonal modes of personality (Plessner 146). Boundary situations show that the human element is a plasticity typified by both indirectness and mediacy (Plessner 152). Humanity is the ceaseless fluctuation between being and having. Humans lack any clearly delineable ecology. Naturally, it would be absurd to presuppose that, lacking the relative hospitability of a suitable terrain, any human could survive. Most of Earth is uninhabitable, let alone the cosmos. Our lives are nevertheless fundamentally and primordially affected by the circumstance of innate homelessness. At any moment, the physical body can fail, destroying the lived body’s experiential integrity. Those who weep when confronted by existential terror shed their tears because the threat of displacement threatens to bereave Being of human presence. Endangerment is an everpresent possibility, a potentiality one cannot recoil from when trapped within a horrific situation.

Affect and Mediation

How may we deepen our understanding of mediated affectivity? Specifically, how do 21st century systems of pervasive communication modify the human element as an affective complex of embodied, indirect mediations? It is our contention that new forms of mediation, while modifying experience, have not

fundamentally changed the characteristics of human experience. Rather, they have resulted in a dynamic shift in the contents of reflection, an accentuation of tendencies and inner tensions already present within the human organism. Jeffrey Barnett and Jenny Huberman have, for instance, identified a change in the way

Americans memorialize their dead. As opposed to the expensive funerary monuments of the past, in the early 21st century consumers are ever more likely to choose minimalist physical monuments, while uploading memories of deceased loved ones onto sites such as World Wide Cemetery. The flip side of this development is that human plasticity, including the plasticity of human memories held in reserve, comes to depend ever more upon a nonhuman technological apparatus. It is not a case of some pure, nonchanging human essence being rendered subservient to technology. Instead, it is a case of expressivity finding in cyberspace new channels, new ways of surfacing. The body as medium, however, is threatened by the sudden disappearance of connections, epitomized by the unavailability of death. Heightened connectivity is concomitant with “a heightened fear of disconnection” (Bennett and Huberman 347). We may speak, in the context of digitalized memory, of a rechanneling of desires, needs and memories into a new format. The human always was a synthesis of affect, intellect and corporeality to begin with. Naturalness is communicative, a mediation, a surface open to a multitude of flows. Cybernetically integrated memorialization highlights the ever more collective enactment of personal memories. Users typically upload certain choice photographs of the deceased, as well as positive summarizations of their lives. In this manner, as José Van Dijk notes, the “commemorative function” of personal

“memory objects” comes to be progressively displaced by the “communicative function” (Van Dijk 99). More intensive communicability also entails, of necessity, an elevated risk of infection. Memories can potentially become detached from their carriers. In the digital age, new media give greater opportunities for the mobility of affects. The human never was immobile of course. What changes is the carrier of infectious affectivity. Transmission costs decline, and agitation is easier to access. Essential characteristics of a person can be reintegrated in unforeseen ways, while privacy is ever more an object of nostalgia, the artifact of a bygone era.

An interesting aspect of online memorialization is the selection of certain traits and features. Users may only upload a small subset of information connected with their loved ones. Connectivity, as effectuated through virtual monuments, comes at the cost of a radically enhanced selectivity. Naturally, one does not want any information to disappear. As evinced by user reactions to deceased Facebook friends, “for many today the internet has become the primary means for securing a sense of attachment to a flow of life that transcends the self” (Bennett and Huberman 348). Deletion of one’s account after death would seem to imply that one never existed to begin with. But even the most detailed of Facebook accounts surely does not exhaust the richness and complexity of an individual’s life? Or does it? The question is, can sparse information convey a sense of who or what one is? This

dilemma is a far from trivial one. Radical selectivity would appear to imply a reduced perspective, one that cannot convey the fullness of somebody's personality. Yet a strand of psychology has argued precisely for such a transversability between small selections of observed behavior and more complex, temporally extensive periods of behavior on the part of subjects. In an influential 1992 article, psychologists Nalini Ambady and Robert Rosenthal strove to conduct a meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of brief observations of behavior in identifying personality traits. Ambady and Rosenthal's premise was that brief observations, "thin slices" typically lasting 30 seconds, can give an accurate, intersubjectively accessible image of another human's intentional states (Ambady and Rosenthal 257). The studies reviewed by the authors included three communicative channels: "nonverbal" (primarily bodily gestures), "verbal channels" and "audiovisual channels" (i.e. combinations of the previous two, Ambady and Rosenthal 258). What Ambady and Rosenthal found in their analysis was that the accuracy of trait identification was not diminished by the length of observations. In other words, humans are remarkably adept at identifying the traits of fellow subjects. Intriguingly, "judgments from very brief segments of behavior (under half a minute in length) may be as accurate as judgments from longer segments (up to 5 min long). Longer exposures do not seem to increase accuracy

significantly" (Ambady and Rosenthal 263).

Of course, it could be argued that a laboratory setting is artificial. Surely, the laboratory or even the only slightly less formal setting of the job interview generally are not conducive to the exhibition of spontaneous behaviors. A more recent study on "nonverbal thin slices," for example, included an actual job interview, which was utilized to observe bodily gestures such as gaze and self-touch. Incidentally, this latter study found that the thin slices approach is most reliable for the detection of gaze orientation (Frauendorfer, Mast, Nguyen and Roter 210). In formal circumstances, humans tend to exhibit fairly scripted performances. But research on "leaky channels" has shown that nonverbal behaviors are, to a large extent, involuntary. Humans continuously leak information out of themselves (Noller 28-47). We are more predictable than it would seem. The human, as leaky animal, oozes data. How do the results of experimental psychology relate to the boundary experiences outlined above? Plessner was highly dismissive of empirical science and philosophical idealism alike. Indeed, he begins his book on laughter and tears with a summary rejection of Darwinism and positivist modern science (Plessner 13). How may we nevertheless extract content of philosophical relevance from the thin slices approach? More specifically, what does knowledge of thin slices have to do with extreme affective phenomena all but unobservable in an experimental setting? The present day normative

limits on empirical science make the observation of extreme privation and distress impossible, without career-ending violations of privacy and human rights at least. One cannot create a theater of cruelty anymore, at least within the psychological paradigm. Philosophical anthropology therefore must turn to other registers, in the form of fictional observations. The eruptive, transgressive power of tears precludes direct access, not to mention states of bodily laceration and suffering. If the penultimate stage of weeping coincides with a serious, endangering “helplessness” that “results from a curious immediacy in the exposure to pain”, as

Plessner asserts (Plessner 143), then this leaves us with little choice other than to rely upon fictional registers. In this context, theory-fiction would entail the treatment of fictional datums as if they were empirical observations. The ultimate stage of weeping is the point wherein we lose hope, when we collapse into unanswerability. This collapse, this crisis of the human, results from the traumatic encounter with immediacy, a lack of mediation unopen to anything beyond unintelligible howling. When subjected to horror, the level of anxiety on the part of the subject reaches a pitch that destroys any possibility of transcendence or accomplishment.

Horror as Immediacy

Horror, as outlined previously, would be a lacerating, unredeemable lack of distance from something injurious, a thing that threatens our integrity. One can, in the manner of a psychologist, conceive of the 2014 film *Unfriended* as a motley collection of various thin slices. We see before us a group of typical middle class white American teenagers speaking with one another through Skype. Fairly early on, the typical characteristics of each protagonist become evident. Each individual appears to be a parody of some stock character. Instead of diminishing the realism of the film, this actually serves to heighten a sense of immediacy. Mediation increases realism. This consideration would

appear at first somewhat counterintuitive. Every single scene, with the notable exception of the final, sickening denouement, is filmed through digital technologies. Our gaze molds with the artificial lens of the camera. As Dmitry Uzlaner suggests, the lens of the camera, as in the case of a selfie, “is always bifurcated: it is the gaze of the Big Other, inscribing the subject in a symbolic order . . . but at the same time [the gaze] is also something incomprehensible and frightening. This incomprehensible and frightening thing is the Real dimension of the gaze, its unsymbolized core, always threatening to invade our reality and to reduce it to chaos” (Uzlaner 9). Through social media communication, we all present one

In the end, nothing remains but the face of a sobbing teenage girl, wiped away into obscurity by the hypertrophy of representation.

another with thin slices of ourselves. But if a few leaky thin slices really are enough to transmit information about one's self, it may be surmized that the human element never was anything more than a collection of such brief segments. Conceived of as leaky plasticity, the human always was disarticulated, disorganized and disjointed, even prior to the advent of digital modes of self-representation that have accentuated these features. Uzlaner is correct in his assertion that "the subject uses new technologies not for the transformation of his nature, but for a more explicit revelation of it" (Uzlaner 11). Social media and digital technologies of subjectivity reveal us as primordially artificial beings. The protagonists of *Unfriended*, similarly, far from being transformed by the experience of glitchy haunting, actually unveil their true, psychotic, egoistic, self-hating and insecure selves. Technology makes possible a haunting immediacy that exposes the human as a glitch-prone set of unstable affects, illusions and unspeakable desires.

Whilst chatting with one another, the group of supposed friends is interrupted by what, at first, appears to be a minor error: another, anonymous user enters their flow of communication, and proceeds to chat with them.

"Well the glitch just typed!", exclaims Val. Is this a prelude to something sinister, or merely an unserious prank? We cannot know at this stage. As the film progresses, the glitch-ghost proceeds to possess and murder the participants in an ever more one-sided ruthless game of revenge. Cruelty begets cruelty, evil creates the karmic preconditions for its further, infectious proliferation. Could our perspective be that of the dead soul of Laura Barns, a student driven to suicide by internet comments? The gaze itself may be conceptualized as a monstrous, undomesticatable malignant force. From familiarity and homeliness, we are transported to scenes of lacerating cruelty and unspeakable terror. "The gaze is like a werewolf: from something sweet, cute, and domesticated that the subject holds in its hands during the selfie, choosing the most advantageous angle for itself, it turns into a pitiless, bloodthirsty beast"—reads Uzlaner's apt description (Uzlaner 10). An initial narcissism gives way to the state of complete self-surrender. Before the power of the overwhelming, self-surrender is the only adequate reaction. Tears are the prelude to complete and utter unresponsivity. Communication in general is reconceptualized as ever more scatological in nature. Repeatedly, the viewer is treated to the

video that resulted in Laura's suicide: the girl lies inebriated and prostrate on the ground, her underwear soiled by excrement. Gripped by curiosity, one almost wishes to smell the contents of this unfortunate misadventure. The hunger of the gaze can be appeased only by complete audiovisual and tactile immersion. Every single sense demands gratification, so demands of us the sinful desire for immediacy. But the absence of distance also entails an opportunity for complete disappearance. Interestingly, during the course of the film the character's web cameras become plagued by increasingly pervasive glitches. Self-revelation correlates with the disappearance of any essential identity. Human-as-glitch meshes with the historical error of horrifyingly autonomous pervasive technology. The human itself, sliced into ever smaller portions, falls victim to the imperative of narcissistic self-representation through the effacement of its own corporeality. In the end, nothing remains but the face of a sobbing teenage girl, wiped away into obscurity by the hypertrophy of representation. Steaming hot tears stream, and in turn are streamed communicatively, attaching themselves to the perverse, voyeuristic gaze of the Other who views this cruel spectacle.

In an almost unbearably, terrifyingly realistic scene, a soon to be deceased Val has ceased moving. Nobody, the viewer included, can discern whether the image has frozen or the girl herself has fallen victim to some involuntary

bodily state. As it turns out, her mobile is still capable of movement. The vibration of the smartphone coincides with the paralysis of the human, a truly sickening juxtaposition. Far from ensuring the continuation of vital flow, the technologically mediated gaze is reconceptualised as the organ of disappearance. Thin slicing shows that disorganization is an affective possibility inherent within the human element. Far from composing an integral whole, the human is an uncertain, ambiguous and explosive mixture of bodily, emotional and mental components hopelessly entwined with one another. Tears and other involuntary corporeal eruptions bring the primordial artificiality of the human to the fore. Technological mediation, as evinced by the distortion and destruction of identity through the hauntingly effective power of social media, merely accentuates the process of the subject's explosion into a myriad of disaggregated pieces. Thin slices give just as much information on subjective interiority as longer, more complex observations. We were abstractable, simplifiable and reducible all along. All that remains is the literal integration of all our utilizable components into a technological infrastructure whose productivity could very well result in the replacement of all carbon-based lifeforms by new substrates. Such an evolutionary change in the history of life would undoubtedly constitute a catastrophe for previous life forms, but it must not be forgotten that all natural organisms too are syntheses of various biosocial processes. For all

its apparent complexity, even the human personality can be collapsed into minute, momentary affects. Communication is perfectly

capable of surviving transference between substrates.

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